

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 21

NUMBER 53.....Southend United.....oops, here we go, please give us a good'un, OK anything but Carlisle away.....will play.....Number 61.....damn, that's the cruddy end of the draw.....Kingstonian*****! I hope Matthew Pinsent sinks at the next Olympics. Still, look on the bright side. We're at home, there will be plenty of big guns left in the fourth round and, as long as we don't do a Brentford, that is where we should end up. I am not sure about a full house this time, though. Not like Canvey.....but more of that later.

First up, it's tickets. They can come in a variety of shapes, sizes and colours and produce all manner of unforeseen consequences. Some are good, some are bad, some lucky, some unlucky, some are even free. And as we work through SUSCT NEWSLETTER NUMBER 21, we can have a truly fascinating gander at all those different categories of the genre.

The good goes almost without saying – the tickets for the SUSCT Christmas Draw. I hear from event overlady Donna Fillary that sales are going encouragingly, with always that bit of room for improvement. The key thing now is to return the stubs from your issued tickets PLUS the cash/cheques involved. It may take five minutes of your time, yet, hey, that is hardly long in the scheme of things. And remember that once we have covered our prize fund, the extra sum raised can then be used on future Trust projects. Donna would appreciate it if all the necessary could be sent back to her at 39 Coniston, Southend-on-Sea, Essex. SS2 6SL by DECEMBER 18th. That will give her time to make the required arrangements for the draw on the pitch against Leyton Orient on Boxing Day, when our 500th member – 19-year-old Nicola Stott from Eastwood – will be doing the honours and handing out those £1,000, £500 and £100 Christmas bonuses. In addition there will be McDonald's vouchers, Safeway vouchers and other assorted bits and pieces in the overall prize pot. So please do not let us down. Sell those tickets you have – or buy them yourself – and then get the cash or unsold tickets back to Donna. If it is handier, any committee member will get the goods in question into her hands for you. There will certainly be some in the Shrimpers Bar before the Chesterfield match. Let's make this a real winner – and thanks a lot for your efforts.

NOW on to the bad. Again, this does not take a lot of imagination. I remember my reaction when I turned to the football club's website and discovered that as a bounty for switching the game to Roots Hall, Canvey Island's power brokers were looking for £20 a head for the FA Cup, second round clash. As I was quoted in the Bun, this would have added up to the biggest rip-off ever perpetrated on Blues fans in my 38-plus years of watching United. To me, the ferocity of the backlash from supporters of both clubs was totally understandable. £20 to sit in the South Lower? You're 'avin a larf! Here was an example of attempted football profiteering at its very worst. And the sad thing is that much of the good will that emanated towards Canvey for what was an outstanding win at Port Vale was blown sky-high by the naked greed of their chairman Ray Cross and his hefty cohort Jeff King, who revealed themselves in all their tawdry colours. When Cross proclaimed "We are not ripping off the fans. We could have put the prices a lot higher," you could almost see his ego inflating as he wallowed in his five minutes of reflected glory. You would have thought Canvey Island ranked alongside M***** U***** or Real Madrid, rather than being a bunch of part-timers from the Ryman Premier League normally more than grateful to welcome a few hundred loyalists paying seven quid tops. It is to Ron Martin's 'credit' that he finally ensured some semblance of sense on admission costs was arrived at. But even then, £16, £12 for OAPs and £8 for children was hardly bargain basement. And surely Ron would have had to have OK'd the initial prices in the first place? Only the generosity of spirit of the very punters who stood to be fleeced ensured the encounter remained a carnival day for South-East Essex football rather than one of festering resentment. Rest assured we shall be asking our liaison officer, Jeff Allen, to get the full background from United on the attempted £20 heist.

Joining the tickets queue in pouring rain in the Roots Hall car park on December 4 at 9.07am, you could only stand and admire the fortitude of the genuine followers of the game. Umbrellas raised, chit-chat about the

Cheltenham were simply better than us, despite not having won for five games. We lacked the guile to break them down and, sitting high and right behind Neil Grayson as I was, I can tell you his shot was a goal from the moment it left his boot. OK, we got them back in the LDV Vans. But in the scheme of things, errrrrrrr.....so what.

Missing a second-minute penalty in Martin Carruthers-fashion at Hartlepool is never recommended. It was the first one, too, I can ever remember him putting to the keeper's left. Martin seems the player being singled out for most criticism at present. All I would say in his defence is that 98 per cent of the service he has had this season has been woeful and if he has finally got fed up with chasing some of the lost causes it is difficult to blame him. Webby questioned the players' commitment, the majority of players did not clap our fanatics' exhortations on the final whistle and the realism of our plight seems to be settling in again. Phil Whelan also did himself no favours by apparently 'gesturing' at the Blue Army. The committee noted that behaviour and considered it reprehensible, but on this occasion will take no further action. All in all, though, current Div Three spec is a tad worrying, with seemingly unstoppable Chesterfield and the East Enders next on the Hall menu. Orient had their biggest gate of the season a couple of weeks ago – 7,012 to watch England's women beat Ukraine 2-0. I hear most went to watch the post-match shirt swapping rather than the football.

ONLY the eventual Cup triumph over Torquay lightened the recent load (until last Sunday). The trip to Devon saw our five-coach convoy hit the road, subsidised by Ron and with prices pegged at £8 a head. Sadly, but typically, poor behaviour marred the trip on those coaches NOT filled by SUSCT members. Trevor declared the day 'the biggest debacle I have ever been involved with' and, regrettably, in future all SUSCT trips will be members and Junior Blues only. Chris Berry is currently taking Shrewsbury bookings (01702-558978 or 07703-898698). Remember that any member who journeys in fancy dress, and who has travelled with us before this season 'full price', can go FREE. One other little reminder so no one is left in any doubt. Alcohol is BANNED by law from all coaches. It is illegal to attempt to take drink on board and anyone so doing so can expect instant trouble. One or two of our members who seem incapable of enjoying a game without over-indulging on the pre-match sauce are starting to become a pain as well and can expect words of 'advice' in their shell-like.

The Torquay replay brought a sweat and Orient 'spy' Paul Clark was so impressed he went at half-time. It was left to Leo to see us through, though not before those few half-wits in the South Lower who decided to keep the ball ensured that sufficient extra time was added on during which Leo copped yet another daft booking. Intelligent work all round.

Talking of intelligence, the combined brains of the committee met at The Railway on November 15 and then again on December 6. The key issue under discussion at the first gathering saw our secretary, Derek Murr, confirmed in his post in the wake of a period of uncertainty. This matter, and a variety of underlying topics, did not see the Trust portrayed in a good light – particularly when various 'discussions' were being held, and assorted rumours and counter-rumours floated, publicly via the supporters' mailing list and other ports of call. This, it was agreed, should never happen again. It has all been a distraction we could have done without and, rest assured, our focus is back on the ball and on the issues truly pertinent to the Trust and its membership. It was decided, in a spirit of universal openness, that future committee meeting minutes should be posted on the Trust website (www.susc.co.uk) and that Richard Coxell would answer, where he could, any queries members care to send him on Trust matters. Richard, as ever, is on Coxell@btinternet.com The Trust committee is there to represent all our now 500-plus host, with the proviso that anyone unhappy with how any appointee is doing their job or addressing Trust business is perfectly at liberty to put themselves forward for office. No need to be shy. Otherwise, we feel currently that support for the Trust in general has never been stronger, our fund-raising has never been better and our away travel backing has never been more avid.

TREASURER Craig Fillary reported a solid financial footing, though we did have one traveller to Mansfield hit us with a rubber cheque. Meanwhile, it was reported Carlisle's stewards excelled themselves with their officiousness for the third year running. They had two of our number out through the door in the first four minutes. We have written to the club complaining, with a copy to the Football League, but are not holding our breath over any improvement in attitude – or welcome. The Brighton ticket allocation is causing concern

among our regular travellers, who feel they may miss out by not being season ticket holders (served first) or programme voucher holders (served second). We resolved to see if we could get 50 tickets set aside for our away regulars, though hardly with optimism. The away faithful were also hardly bucked up to hear that Ron has allegedly been promising Brighton tickets to those who buy a season ticket for Christmas. As well as the FA Cup tickets price probe, we shall also ask Jeff to mull over that particular festive topic – along with the catering problems in the South Upper. Ron, it seems, wants to meet the committee in January. We look forward to it. Trevor revealed at last that his M***** U*****-supporting nephew came both first and second in last season's prediction competition – and, of course, we believed him.

The rumour mill is running overtime again concerning United's finances and whether Fossetts Farm is viable or a pipedream. I see we have just announced a £2.3million loss for the year ending April 1999, though, raise the roof, this should be down to £1.86m for the 12 months to April 2000. Ron predicts a 'brighter future' too. Sounds to me like it would be impossible for it to get more grim. Those figures are frightening. A trusted source, to be known in future as 'Deepest Throat', also informs me that we have gone from No3 to No1 in the Football League monitoring group's hit parade of clubs likely to evolve into a financial supernova, with Alan Little now chasing us Whelan-style for his 'thanks for being a failure' sack of cash. So let's enjoy life while we can, dream that in 2004-5 we shall kick off at our new ground and make sure we get as many signatures on our petition as possible to combat the one organised by the 'KARERS' opposition to the Eastern Avenue venue. We shall be doing the rounds again against Chesterfield. Ron insists he remains optimistic about getting planning permission and, presumably, will have outlined his reasons at the public meeting on the issue on December 12. I will look at that in Number 22 and you can take it for granted that committee pressure on the subject will remain unceasing.

BY now you are probably asking if I have forgotten something. What about those lucky and unlucky tickets? Well, for that you had to have been at the SUSCT curry night at the Maharajah restaurant in Benfleet on November 30. And, disappointingly, only 10 of us were. What's the matter with you lot? For £12 this was cracking value. Excellent food, convivial company and our very own treacle-tonsilled Jeff in charge of sounds. Anyway, there was a charity raffle during the evening and I bought a strip of tickets at the very same moment as fellow SUSCT member Peter Cowell. Yup, you guessed it. One of his five numbers landed a free meal for two, while all mine went down the plughole with a few hundred others. Mr Coxell slipped away pre-disco, rightly suspecting that there would be no Incredible String Band material hitting the turntable. Dave Scriven also kept getting distracted by the charms of his young lady, who insisted on pecking him at every available opportunity. Ahhh, young love – and we are only jealous! Congratulations to that lovely mover Theresa Wellham for knowing the words of every song that Jeff played and as for Jeff.....a sensational mix of Fat Boy Slim and Goldie - with a hint of Smashy and Nicey for good measure when he donned the headphones for a session with mission control. My only criticism was of being encouraged to sing along to lyrics including 'It's raining men, hallelujah' and 'I need a man'. I am happy to make it clear that, for my part, neither statement is true.

An enjoyable evening, yet really a wasted mega fund-raising opportunity. Not so the parachute jump, which should put £2,000-plus in our coffers thanks to the courageous efforts of Craig Fillary, Martin Penton, Theresa Wellham, Paul McKenzie, Mathew Harris, Kathy Nicel and Viki Brown. They were a credit to United, the Trust and themselves with their magnificent dives into the sky over Oxfordshire last month after just a day's training and with no previous experience. I think Ali G would say 'Respect'. Plus, of course, please let us have your sponsorship money as quickly as you can.

As for the free tickets, Donna bid for two United seats of her choice in an on-line auction and has very generously agreed to donate them to the Trust. So we will be looking for a reason to hand those over to some worthy recipient in the near future.

Other half Craig's 5-A-Sides seem to be going well and anyone wishing to participate can contact him on CraigandDonna@supanet.com Good way to shed that Xmas surplus.

I see Stan has just had another smacking. Some Birmingham bother boys set on him in a Midlands club because he used to play for Villa. He'd be much safer at TOTS – or would he?

JIMMY Greaves reckons Chelsea should put Webby in charge, because his forceful personality would soon sort out the whiners like simpering slaphead Frank Leboeuf. All Greavsie seems to have ignored is that Webby is already in a job – sorting out any whiners at Blues.

Nice to see Roycey getting his chance at Leicester in place of injured Tim Flowers and, apparently, doing rather well. Old Roots favourite Barry Silkman – who regularly went from the ridiculous to the sublime and back again during most of his matches with us in the 80s – was also in the news for making a cameo FA Cup first round appearance for Harrow Borough. Aged 48. He is now an agent for the likes of Mark Schwarzer and Silvinho. Well, anyone has to be better than the repulsive Eric Hall.

Looks like we can forget about catching Cardiff. Coming back from 2-1 down in the last minute to win one game is rare enough, but to do it at home in two on the trot – Lincoln and Hartlepool - suggests outside help. Shame really, because new owner Sam Hammam is apparently starting to get right up the noses of even the City regulars with his constant Celtic (that's a hard 'c') claptrap.

Can anyone enlighten me on who exactly the people are involved in the adverts that revolve around Roots Hall on Sky TV? They are often shown during live Nationwide League games and feature a woman going on about her family's ties to Blues etc. I would be interested.

Having given you the lowdown on my sad Barnet-loving colleague in Number 20, I can now reveal details of an even worse case. The Bun's football fixed-odds 'expert' on a Saturday is Andy Totham, a notorious resident of the Barside at Layabout Road. Needless to say he was crowing when our unbeaten record went, but strangely subdued after Col U-seless were drubbed by Yeovil. Mistakenly, I had told him not to tip us to win at Carlisle, as everyone said we should, as that was bound to ensure we lost. Sure enough, he tipped us to win – and we lost. Amused in a childlike way by this, he then tipped us to beat Cheltenham – and we lost. Watch out for this saddo's next tip in our favour – and start praying for the curse to be lifted. Talking of the U-seless, did you see Barry Conlon scored for them in their 2-0 win over Notts County? He had a big clash of heads first half and came out for the second sporting a large bandage round his bonce. It must have been concussion, because had he known what he was doing he would never have hit the target!

That will do I think. Bit too much included this month probably, but we don't normally have quite so much happen. Hope you are still awake. Next issue early in 2001. Any reaction, comment, praise, brickbats etc to, as usual, nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk I would be especially keen to hear from those of you who, like me, back the efforts of fans of M***** U*****, Manchester City, Charlton etc to get the return of designated terracing at grounds. There is none in the design for Fossetts Farm. What do you think? If you have anything you want to moan about by letter to the Nationwide League - ticket policy, stewards etc - their new 'customer charter' gives a guarantee that you will get a reply to your letter. Suck it and see.

NR (11/12)

P.S.

1. Happy Christmas and a promotion-packed New Year to all our members.
2. Congratulation to Richard for winning £3 off the Dundee Sunday Post for a letter to them about David Jack. Is there nothing the Coxell family won't do to land a prize?
3. Phil Laflin – thanks for the envelopes.
4. The man at No.22, he say “Where are the Pulse Cheerleaders?”

5. Get those encyclopaedias out. The next Quiz Night is on Saturday, February 17.

6. Elvis is alive – as you will shortly discover.....