

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 23

HE lingering wounds, fortunately, were survivable. On the left shin a bloody graze about the size of a 5p, on the right calf a bruise of red, green and mauve hue with the circumference of a small orange. Yet, as the Marquis De Sade might have said, the pain and its memory will always be somehow exquisite. The fruits of battle, perhaps? Well, not quite. Simply the result of me leaping from seat S42 at Brisbane Road straight into the solid plastic back of R42 as Ben Abbey's second goal rattled into the Orient onion bag to produce a roaring, jumping, air-punching sea of Blue delirium in the East Stand South at 4.23pm on January 20.

What an afternoon that was. Estimates of a Blue Army of up to 2,800 in attendance and an electric atmosphere throughout the 90 minute that is an almost forgotten experience at the Hall these days. You knew something special was afoot as the queue looking for tickets ran into the hundreds well over an hour before kick-off. Almost as impressive as the way Richard Coxell survived his pre-match scoffing of the most repulsive-looking mustard and tomato sauce-topped burger imaginable. Worse still, it was made at a kiosk where the sole job of one of the employees seemed to be sweeping a tide of saturated fat towards the back of the grill.

Orient were caught completely on the hop by the level of our support and more of that shambles later. The game itself was not exactly a classic, but so what. This was payback time for Boxing Day and revenge was oh so sweet – as Scotty was made only too aware on being substituted. Belly enjoyable. Abbey took his goals superbly and the team, hardly weakened by the absence of Leo and Martin Carruthers, gave their all. Os fans scuttling home early were not spared as roars of 'Cheerio, cheerio, cheerio' rang out, accompanied by the usual varied assortment of sign language to help them on their way. The final whistle was greeted by a boiling explosion of unrestrained joy and the players clearly revelled in the acclaim they were given. Referee David Elleray must also surely have rated it higher than Chelsea v M***** U*****. Then it was a quick trip back by SUSCT coach and a jaunt down to Old Leigh to fill in those doubting non-travellers now wishing they could also say: "I was there."

Alvin was on Sky's Soccer AM next morning analysing the Third Division games. He described Abbey's strikes as 'instinctive' and then claimed 'It is nice to see Southend have some money to spend'. Wrong, mate. You blew it all. Meanwhile Bazza, a lunchtime guest, said he had expected the Os to win, so it was an extra bonus proving him wrong.

THE Brisbane Road tickets fiasco was a major topic at the last Trust committee meeting on January 29. Martin Penton followed up his justifiably angry blast in the Echo by describing the arrangements as a 'complete cock-up'. The sending of 800 tickets to be sold pre-match and then having 1,000 for sale on the day did not work. The home turnstiles opened at 1pm and ours for some reason not until 2pm, with hordes looking like they would be left roaming outside the ground until Barry Hearn and the police saw sense and handed us half a terrace behind one goal for the overspill. But those people, some of whom had seat tickets but could not gain access, had no proper food or toilet facilities. If this had been the likes of Cardiff (as Stoke can testify) or Brighton involved, the potential for mayhem was immense. Some of our number were even issued with stand tickets for seats that did not exist. And we estimate about 100 supporters with seat tickets ended up having to stand because their places were under netting and unusable. These poor folk are entitled to a refund of at least £4 each. The problem is getting it and proving you merit it. We will be contacting Orient for their comments and suggesting that if they decide refunds are impossible then they should consider making a donation to a special needs charity instead. It is the least they can do to try to rectify a farce of poor organisation, even if they did not expect our numbers to be as great as they were.

Nice to see Trevor back on the 29th, by the way. He was forced to miss the gathering on January 8 when someone decided to lob themselves under a train on his line.

Fossetts Farm is looming very large again as it becomes ever more clear that the confusion over what is happening with the plans should be swiftly resolved. We expected a review by the Development Control Committee on February 7. According to Ron Martin, this will now – fingers crossed – take place on March 14. The council appear to have been claiming lack of requested information, but Ron insisted in his Lincoln programme planning update that that issue has now been resolved. Let's hope so. Time is getting tighter all the while. On the football club's website (looking up at last on www.southendunited.co.uk) Ron also lays out some of his correspondence with the council. And anyone who can wade their way through that mountain of bumph is a better man than me. Why do the CAA need to be consulted? In case a stray Jumbo needs to land in the car park? The sooner some tangible progress is made, though, the less likely the big-money backers are to suffer pangs of cold feet. Overall, there presently appears to be a sense of tense frustration on all sides and this has to be a worry. The Trust's interest centres solely on Southend United's continued existence wherever it may be and we feel it is time for an urgent review of where all the parties stand. To this end, Jeff 'Mighty Shrimpers' Allen has arranged a meeting between Ron Martin and the Trust committee for February 21. Trevor is attempting to arrange a similar meeting with Colin Wagman of Delancey, while Paul FitzGerald is hunting out the latest council line and also keeping in close contact with Trust president Sir Teddy Taylor MP. Fossetts is starting to come to a head. Hang on to your hats.

Our position is made even more galling when you see Blackpool have just been given the go-ahead for the completion of their new £10.7million, 15,000-seat stadium on the Bloomfield Road site.

JEFF'S efforts again showed his value to the Trust as our liaison officer with United. There have been questions asked about his impartiality because of the work he does for the football club both on match days and at other times. But we believe it is important to have an official line of communication and Jeff is currently our chosen representative. However, there is nothing to stop members approaching the club to make any points they wish to *as individuals* and, as we have stressed before, any matters of conflict between ourselves and SUFC will be followed through resolutely by *everyone*. That may mean the involvement of other Trust committee members with various degrees of expertise in different areas. With luck, though, strife will continue to remain off the agenda.

The purchase of United shares is causing some people grief. Applications are being made at £7 a time with a minimum purchase of 10 and the shares, it appears, have not so far been very forthcoming. Paul will be contacting Ron to try to resolve this 'misunderstanding'.

If you buy a programme on match days, you will doubtless have seen the recent inclusion of the ground regulations. This looks to have followed a burst of standing in the West Stand seating, but is generally regarded as a rather heavy-handed overkill if it is going to appear at every home game. It was even claimed that mic-master Jeff would be required to read the whole lot out aloud before kick-off, which is patently absurd. The regulations may be as found in the FA's Health and Safety documentation, but the problem with them is they were written by jobsworths with jobsworths and not football fans in mind. United had the third-lowest arrest rate of any club in the entire Premiership and Nationwide League last season, so there is no need for anyone to be polishing up their jackboots on this matter. The rules are supposed to be in place for everyone's benefit and should be respected by all. But they should be enforced for everyone, not just home fans, and with fairness and common sense rather than plain old officious heavy-handedness. Standing can be a problem these days, but that is because some people want to stand and more and more have no place to do so. Not, of course, that that gives them any right whatever to impede the view of or antagonise those who wish to remain seated. The Trust now supports in principle the idea of a return to some safe standing and you can give your view by voting in the poll now on the Trust website – www.susc.co.uk The more votes we get, the more you know your views will be reflected on such things as terrace rather than seats in the South Stand lower and a home terrace at Fossetts Farm. Jeff is to meet the club's safety officer, Dave Jobson, for 'clear the air' talks, so expect an update in Number 24.

Hopefully all those ticket problems are now a thing of the past as United's new ticketing system should be in place. Their telephonic revamp is also due by February 16.

WORKSOP Town, currently featuring Chris Waddle in their line-up, are the latest club to invite us to stop off for a swift'un on trips north. Meanwhile Southend Rugby Club want to follow our lead and put up a plaque similar to the one we put on the Blue Boar to commemorate their founding in 1870 at Shoebury Garrison. Richard, the brains behind the Trust's own plaque, is currently liaising with the rugby club's grandly titled 'assistant archivist'.

Talking of travel, apologies to all those booked on the coach to Darlington for February 6 – some having taken time off work – who only found out at such short notice that the FA had ordered the game be postponed again so the Quakers could instead play their LDV Vans quarter-final against Port Vale. As ever, this showed all the consideration the FA usually give to supporters from the lower divisions. None. Not that it is much consolation, but the snow may well have claimed the fixture anyway. Next up is the double haul to Kidderminster (February 20) and Scunthorpe (February 24). Reserve your seat now by ringing Chris Berry on 01702-558978 or 07703-898698.

Chris is obviously hoping for less fun and games than on the ill-fated Plymouth jaunt. Our three coaches, numbers boosted by another Ron cut-price offer, were at Leigh Delamere services on the M4 when they first made contact with Home Park to check the weather prospects. But they had progressed to Gordano on the M5 just south of Bristol when the ref finally threw the towel in and called the game off shortly after midday with our troops about 90 miles from their destination. Not prepared to see their day out totally ruined, one coach headed for Oxford v Wycombe where lusty cries of "We hate Col U and we hate Col U" earned a swift warm welcome. Huge thanks to Oxford for their assistance. Many clubs would have thrown a wobbly at seeing so many aliens on the horizon. Chris, knackered after a nightmare for him, declared: "As well as our trips to games, I am also now think of organising one or two to service stations around the country." Great work.

I believe the Quiz Night at Boots and Laces on March 10 is already another sell-out. Well done again to Donna Fillary for using her powers of persuasion to such good effect. I will have more details of the Race Night on April 20 nearer the day.

One other potential fund-raiser that might interest someone comes via member Derek Gibson. He has a programme from the epic 1979 Southend v Liverpool FA Cup encounter for sale (offers a bit higher than the original 25p, please), with proceeds to go to the Trust. Any offers can be made via Richard on coxell@btinternet.com or 01702-712339.

Paul estimates our current membership up around the 560 mark. He has transformed the efficiency of this operation since taking over as membership secretary, so plenty of credit is due there too.

SOUTHEND'S recent twinning with the town of Sopot in Poland left us wondering whether we might track down a potential footballing connection. Martin Penton broke out his 'Teach Yourself Polish' and contacted the country's Embassy in London. Sadly, it seems Sopot do not have their own football team and are little more than a feeder town for Gdansk. Never mind, perhaps Lech 'Mr Solidarity' Walesa would like to sponsor a game.

Mention of sponsoring a game brings me to our big day on February 17, when the SUSCT will proudly put its money behind Blues' fixture against Halifax. This gives us the opportunity to allow 20 of our members to be entertained to a freebie in our 'executive suite', one of the perks of match sponsorship which we saw no reason to decline. And without further ado, here are the names of 19 of the lucky 20: Ivor Baker (a reward for his fruitless £260 round trip from Germany to go to the Plymouth game), Theresa Wellham, Dave Juniper, Victor Peretti, Rod Turner (East Yorkshire), Andrew Turner, Dean Allum, John Clench (Hythe), Deborah Howell, Chris Howell, Sarah Thomas, Ted Gunn, Matthew Gunn, Christine Petty, Martin Cranmer, Zoe Bashford, Terry Boatwright, Nicola Boatwright, Gemma Boatwright plus one to come. Enjoy your afternoon and don't forget to wave to those of us freezing out in the East Stand. Let's also have as many other members as possible

spread throughout the rest of the arena. Overall United gates this season are presently showing an encouraging rise, by my calculations, of 8.7 per-cent.

Just one small needless hiccup for future reference. We are not corporate clients along for an annual jolly of the sort who cannot distinguish a football from a rugby ball. We are regular, diehard, rock-solid, thick-and-thin Blues faithful and as such should be allowed to wear our regular football shirts in any Trust box, as some of our 20 would have preferred, even if jeans and trainers are reasonably ruled out of bounds. Powers that be please note.

For a brief review of the Trust's evolution from SUISC to S USC to SUSCT(L?) over the last three years, check out the Supporters Direct website on www.supporters-direct.org where we get our name in lights under an article entitled 'Partners for Progress'.

I see John Main has done a Chaucer and filed his Roots Hall Tale. Interesting reading from one angle, though South Eastern Leisure naturally see his reign as not so much fan-friendly as cash-disastrous. They reckon the United loss for this year will be around £200,000, certainly well down on the millions it seems went down the big black hole during John's well-intentioned time in charge. However, SEL insist the estimated £1million we owe them will have to be repaid at some time and the interest remains at 20 per cent. Which definitely makes us all feel a lot better.....

On now to a quick look at other recent fixtures and results, commencing with Shrewsbury. Worth a mention, though that is about all. Definitely not what we were looking for after Orient the previous week. OK, we were denied a penalty that only Stevie Wonder might not have spotted, but they fluffed at least two golden chances to put the boot in. A win would have lifted us to fourth, rather than kept us in sixth with further crunch home dates on the horizon. One is Rochdale, who looked impressive on Sky in effortlessly stuffing the Os, with Scotty called off for an early shower again.

THERE is something about the LDV Vans Trophy fixtures for me this season. I am always at work when they take place. I hear we had a bit of luck before seeing off Bristol Rovers, but it was good to see Martin Carruthers back on the goal standard once more. Did he really want £3,500 a week to join Rochdale? That must be about what they pay their entire squad, though from my old days of covering football up north I remember Dale used to do a fantastic half-time Press spread at Spotland bettered only by Blackburn. Next up in the Vans is Swindon and many of our supporters are already booking their seats at the Millennium Stadium. Personally, I would have swapped our three wins in the tournament to date for the nine home points we have surrendered to Darlo, Cheltenham and Orient. Swindon chairman Terence Brady – dad of Karren – has actually genuinely booked his side's accommodation in Cardiff for the final plus a suite for himself, so confident is he the Robins will make it. Clearly an arrogant buffoon who deserves a good stuffing from whoever Webby sends out to do the job.

Lincoln should have been thrashed – but weren't. At least we got all three points thanks to Ben Abbey's excellent header, the 2,000th Blues goal at the Hall. Poor pitch quality is not helping us, but the horrendous recent conditions mean everywhere is the same. The pre-match one minute's silence in memory of United president John Woodcock was impeccably observed and a credit to both our support and Lincoln's. As requested by the family, we shall be sending a donation to the St Mary's Church roof fund. Leo, fresh from further allegations of putting it about in the nastiest possible way, was left on the bench and had to watch Carl Hutchings – seemingly not so far hampered by his new SUSCT sponsorship – put in another tasty performance in the middle of the back four. I would still prefer to see Carl in midfield, though, in preference to Leon Johnson. Now don't get me wrong. Leon has done well. But he looks better suited to games where we need a more defensive element to our play, exactly the opposite to what we require at home against strugglers like the Imps. I also cannot help but feel Leon's total reliance on his left foot will, unless he addresses this, hold his game back.

Webby is certainly backing the new boys. Winger Michael Black has signed and it would be nice to see him start getting the confidence to take on and beat some defenders. Stuart Thurgood seems to come highly rated

and Tesfaye Bramble's late right-wing burst against Lincoln and disallowed rocket against the Shrews hinted at definite promise. At the other end of the scale, Neil Tolson is rumoured to have put his house up for sale. Will he and his groin ever get it together again? And it's adieu to Peter Trevivian after five years. Meanwhile, Leo just remains pondering his FA Cup stupidity. The biggest joke of all was that the Kingstonian player dismissed for appearing to elbow Ben Abbey won his appeal, making Leo's macho madness an even more costly extravagance.

Good to see locked-out Hull beating yet another winding-up order – well, for 14 days anyway. Just a reminder that our home clash with the Tigers – assuming they are still in the land of the living – has been switched to Friday, March 23 from Saturday the 24th to avoid a clash with England's World Cup date against Finland. Worryingly, this fixture has been switched for the past two seasons as well – and we have lost both times. Third time lucky, please lads! We also have Blackpool and Hartlepool on their way and it looks as if six points from those two showdowns will be essential. Of course, Chesterfield might help our cause by getting themselves chucked out of the League for their supposed book-cooking irregularities. My latest tip says they could be docked sufficient points to ensure they do not go up. Tough on the best team in the Third Division – we are the only side to beat them in their last 26 league games - but what a possible play-offs boost for us. All's fair in love and war.

PANTS! That described a number of Mark Beard's full-back performances while with us, though I suppose he did OK in helping Kingstonian to their moment of FA Cup glory against Blues. Prior to the Ks' fourth-round visit to Bristol City, however, he made the error of posing in just a pair of Y-fronts in an ad for Jockey men's underwear. His lone garment sported the words 'We potted the Shrimps'. Looking at the picture, inanely grinning Mark might possibly be better advised to consider why he has what looks a bit of a shrimp of his own down in the winkle department.

Meanwhile a current first-choice Blue looks to have taken on a new career – film reviewing. In an ad for what looks to be generally regarded as the appalling 'Beatiful Creatures', Mark Salisbury of FHM magazine goes against the grain to declare the film 'Very black, very funny'. He is backed up by a declaration of 'Smart and savvy' from.....Kevin Maher of The Face. Could it be?

A Carlisle nut I work with tells me David Morley is wowing them up at Brunton Park. I have told him to give it time. Gordon Connelly has already faded to the bench after a period of initial promise. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? As for the Barnet loon, he informs me the Bees are looking for a new theme tune to greet the team on to the pitch. It seems the top choice so far is 'Send In The Clowns'. Look forward to hearing that at Underthrill on March 17. And how is this for a description of one of their latest signings? 'A skinnier version of Glenn Hoddle who is allegedly very fond of charlie'. A bit of a dope, possibly.

Royce continues to pick up the plaudits for his Leicester performances, e.g. Man of the Match v Arsenal. The carp fishing fanatic has even been tipped as a Sven Goran Eriksson possible. We'll see. When is Sven's spy mission to Roots, by the way? Brett Angell has made it to 150 league goals, while it was disappointing to see Stanley decline swamped Southend for sunny Spain. I don't reckon many Blues followers would have had Real Oviedo on a list of his possible clubs once he hit the big-time. What a waste of a player who should now be the Eriksson spearhead of England's 2002 World Cup bid. Stay off the San Miguels, mate!

Macclesfield keeper Tony Bullock has paid for his red card at the Hall back in November and hitting a little boy in the face after booting the ball into the crowd as his pique peaked. The FA took £800 off him and gave him a two-match ban.

Our favourite author, Peter Mason, informs me that Match of the Day producer Phil Bigwood is, according to Q magazine, a Southend fan. Must be very frustrating in the studio not having anyone else around who knows what the hell you are talking about.

LOOKING for another decent Third Division website? Then head for www.leaguematters.com Their shrewd analyst tips us to finish seventh, but to be promoted by winning the play-offs. That's what we like to hear from

someone who clearly knows his stuff. But don't forget the best website of all – www.susc.co.uk - constantly updated by Richard.

Finally, if Sammy the Shrimp was away for three weeks for a wash and brush up, how come no one has bothered to hose down and repair his feet? They look muddy awful. As for Elvis J Eel, I'm still saying nowt.

We're done. Any comeback, it's the usual address – nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (11/2)

PS – Quiz Night warm-up.

1. Which recent ex-Blue allegedly regularly feasts on large pizzas or doner kebabs and is claimed often to be seen staggering back home on week nights 'totally hammered'? Clue: it is not Paul Byrne, who hit a late equaliser for Bohemians against Galway United on Thursday.
2. Which Second Division side's manager allegedly celebrated the last-minute postponement of yet another home fixture by immediately swooping on a local hostelry and downing copious quantities of amber nectar?