

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 27

THE tables were groaning under the weight. If only it had been down to the trophies won by Blues this season. But, no, sadly the only silverware on display was the trays containing the monster array of sausage rolls, vol-au-vents, pizza, sandwiches, crisps and other calorie-packed goodies that made up the SUSCT Player of the Year buffet.

I am delighted to report that there was no sign of any of that French rubbish – two lettuce leaves surrounded by a flicker of red sauce and that will be £60 please sir. This was an old-fashioned English blow-out at its very best, put together by Craig and Donna (or should that now be Delia) Fillary and Theresa Wellham. The two-for-the-price-of-one offers at Southend's various supermarkets had been ruthlessly plundered and the assembled SUSCT members present felt the 'benefit'. There was such a lot to scoff, there was too much – even with around 170 present. Which greatly pleased Chris 'Have Coach, Will Travel' Berry, who must have shipped enough of the leftovers home in an assortment of black bin bags to keep his family going for a week.

Donna fully deserved her bouquet reward from Trevor after starting her preparations at 5am, while Theresa did her bit having been working until late the previous night. It was a fantastic effort and helped towards making the evening on May 2 a big success, despite all the problems caused by the uncertainty of the date for the replayed Mansfield fixture.

Kevin Maher's hugely improved form this season made him a meritorious winner of our 2001 award, presented to him by Dave Webb, with joint runners-up in Scott Forbes and Damon Searle. The Trust will be donating £50 to a charity of Kevin's choice and £25 to each of the charities selected by Scott and Damon. Kevin also owes a debt of gratitude to Mike Way, he of goalpost sponsors Greenway Associates, for bringing the winner's trophy up from Brighton after Nathan Jones had finally condescended to dig it out from wherever he had been keeping it. Mike got his reward by winning three prizes in the raffle. Meanwhile Kevin also netted a £20 bus stop bonus, only to request most graciously that the cash should go elsewhere. The next team scratched off the card saw the money head straight into the Cranmer-Bashford wedding fund. The raffle was another Alan Perry special. A huge bottle of whisky found its way to the wrong home, while committee man Jerry Moss was positively ecstatic when his player pick, Scott Forbes, won the bottle of Les Cent Vignes he had donated. Whether Scott chose it because he recognised this particular white as being from a vintage year or just liked the colour of the label, I am not sure. A football signed by the squad brought in £40 and an SOS T-shirt with the signatures of all those players in attendance – including even Leo – added another £50.

Trevor made his usual 'rousing' speech and, overall, the night did us a power of good. It certainly proved the Trust is no 'private members club', as one ignoramus claimed recently on a Blues website. Such people should get involved more – or perhaps get out more.

SINCE NEWSLETTER NUMBER 26, two major issues have dominated much to do with both the Trust and the football club – the SOS campaign, of which more later, and the Mike North tragedy of Easter Monday. It is strange how I remember absolutely nothing of the 42 minutes of Mansfield match action that preceded Mike North's collapse. But the image of his prone body being lumped off on that old stretcher is one I shall never forget. Death and dignity too rarely accompany each other. Jeff Allen strove manfully to keep the crowd informed in respectful tones of what, I suspect, most already feared was occurring. Maybe, in hindsight, an unexpected time-filling encore for the Pulse Cheerleaders was not such a good idea. But whoever could have imagined such an awful thing happening to a referee aged just 41 in the middle of a League match – let alone in the middle of one of ours. All involved on the medical side did their best to retrieve the situation. Unfortunately, it was simply beyond retrieval. By the time the game was called off, I sensed the crowd saw it as a relief. No one was any longer in the mood. Even the superb SOS flag, proudly unveiled pre-match by Dave Scriven and his cohorts, now took a very distant second place. But not everyone had respect for the dead flooding through their veins. By the time I returned to my seat after talking to Jeff and updating The Current

Bun on what was happening, someone had found it in them to nick my umbrella off the back of L107. Nice one.

Once Mike North's passing had been confirmed, it all became a question of: What can we do? I believe the football club's decision to donate the proceeds from the rearranged fixture to Mrs North and her two young daughters was absolutely right. It was an honourable thing to undertake, along with the ongoing shirt auction, in an age where honour in football is in very short supply. The Trust, as well as making a donation to the Poole Children's Hospice, was also only too happy to provide collectors to raise cash for the family at the second match. All that made me slightly uneasy here was the 'charity' connection that goes with a bucket collection and the apparently almost automatic assumption that Mrs North had been left penniless, which I feel sure was not the case. Perhaps we might be told at some time how much was raised. It appears those present at fixture two were incredibly generous and the Trust believes it has a right, in the light of our efforts, to be informed by United just how generous. I also look forward to discovering which clubs have not donated shirts for auction – and letting the world know who they were.

My big disagreement came with Dave Webb and his claims that there could be a 10,000 crowd for the rearranged game, that we should have guest players, that the points should be split and the action should be more of a friendly benefit played out of season. Firstly, in the excitement, no one seemed to ask themselves what sort of game Mike North might have wanted in his memory – a kickabout as DW seemed to be suggesting or an all-out, let's-go-for-it encounter with something at stake that Mike so relished controlling every week of his refereeing life. I think I know what his choice would have been and, fortunately, that is what we ended up getting – despite the game being played after the full season had ended and after a ludicrous amount of time had elapsed before Blues and the Football League could finally agree a date.

Talk of a 10,000 crowd was always just pie in the sky, even if we had made the play-offs. Think back to Ron Pountney's pre-season testimonial. A bloke with more than 10 years' service to United, Premiership opposition, Chris Powell on show and the gate? Around 3,300. I thought the attendance on May 8 would have been about 4,500, so 3,345 was indeed a blow. But people tend to have short memories. Mike North's death had happened three weeks before, Leeds were in European Cup action on TV and Mike had no connection at all with either Southend or even Essex. Fans from one or two other clubs, like Leyton Orient, made an effort to get involved. But there was no Premier League interest as far as I know. And who is surprised at that? In the end all that really mattered was that Mike North was properly remembered and the courage of Mrs North, which she put on public display in such a dignified manner, was recognised in a fashion that sadly could never seem more than token.

As for the game, which did still mean something, I'll mention it in the round-up.

THE season may be over, but the SOS campaign certainly is not. Election Day is looming and so, therefore, is that crucial planning meeting. The SOS flag has already made its presence felt up and down the country, with its message beamed especially loudly and proudly I felt as it was passed over the heads at Cheltenham. The Trust Executive Committee has focussed on the issue at both its last two gatherings on April 23 and May 16 and here is the latest update.

Chris, Jeff and Garry Smith have had two update meeting with Ron Martin postponed because of the Mike North situation. Jeff has now been mandated to get both an urgent get-together fixed and also one where Ron can again face the committee. Those nagging little doubts about United support for SOS are starting to creep back. We distributed our information leaflets against Carlisle, we got our postcards out (muchos gracias Dave Oliver) against Hull, but the joint football club-Trust turnstile letters never materialised. Why? That was about all the club have had to do. The feeling remains that if Ron does not take the leading role, there is paralysis behind the scenes.

From what we hear, it would not be wise for over-confidence on Fossetts Farm getting the go-ahead to start to resurface. That happened last time and we do not want a repeat of the outcome. As Richard Coxell declared: "The next couple of months are do or die." And we would be a lot happier if we thought everyone involved in

this recognised that fact. We will be contacting council planning representative John Collins again for a state of play report from their end.

Nor have we have not forgotten the Q & A session, another victim of the Mike North tragedy. We want that on the agenda again smartly, so both Ron and Webby can fill the faithful in on exactly where we stand both off and on the pitch.

The SOS postcards have evoked a great response and are being returned to the council in various ways and in considerable numbers. Dave Scriven's 'Save Our Southend' car stickers have arrived and are a must for all our members' automobile rear windows at just £1 each. If you want one send your cheque and an SAE to Dave at: SOS Car Stickers, 276 London Road, South Benfleet, Essex, SS7 5XR. Or you can e-mail him on fossettsfarm@hotmail.com or webmaster@sufcfans.com about your requirements or any other Fossetts Farm points you feel need raising. The Fossetts website is alive and well on www.saveoursouthend.co.uk while there will be the usual updates and snippets on our superb Richard-run Trust site www.susc.co.uk Trevor remains our physical point of contact at Save Our Southend, 45 Audley Road, Great Leighs, Chelmsford, Essex, CM3 1RS. Theresa still has four SOS T-shirts left (ring 07867-515378) at a more than reasonable fiver only. If you still have your postcard, send it off NOW. And once the election is out of the way, please do not forget to write your letters of support for Fossetts Farm to both your new councillors and MP. The e-petition and paper petitions are still available for signing. As long as we have more names than KARERS. On council meeting day, whenever that may be, we shall be trying to galvanise as many SOS/Blues/Trust followers to rally peacefully behind the SOS flag on a march to the council offices in Victoria Avenue. There will be more information on this nearer the actual time, but Richard is already dusting off his old Socialist Workers Party membership card and looking forward to reliving the great days of fighting for another 50p on his student grant.

Next a look at other Trust business, starting with the resignation from the Executive Committee of Cliff and Kerry Denton. Kerry was thanked in absentia for her efforts as Press and PR Officer, a role now taken over by Martin Penton – or Prenton if you read the Echo. Jeff will be Martin's No 2.

ONE thing the Trust must do is look to the future – especially with all that holds for United in the coming months. The Trust has to be aiming constantly to move forward as an entity and so Paul FitzGerald, after doing a fine job as membership secretary, has been appointed to the role of development officer. He will review our way ahead via various strategies on which our membership will, naturally, be kept posted.

Our treasurer, Craig Fillary, has our accounts well nailed down and, on his recommendation, we have asked *Devonports* to act as the SUSCT auditors for our year-end accounts to 30/6/01.

The football club have been sending out order forms for anyone who wished to buy a packet of shares at £7 each. You had until May 18 to reply and it seems a number of fans have taken up the opportunity. None, hopefully, expecting to make a quickfire killing.

The Trust AGM will take place on Thursday, October 25. So if you fancy putting yourself up for election to the committee (Mr G), now is the time to start thinking about it.

Derek and Trevor were due to attend the 'Supporters Direct' conference in Huddersfield on May 19. Even more creditable because it was due to kick off at 10am.

Shirts and Tickets for 2001-02. There has been a lot of talk about United changing their shirts again for next season. Needless to say, the Trust was 'disappointed' that rumours began emanating from the club without any initial seeking of fans' opinions on the matter. If there is a valid reason, communicate it to us. Also the increases in ticket prices after another hardly sparkling campaign have not gone down well, while those like member Carl Barker are distinctly unimpressed at being told their season ticket slots in the East Yellows are being given over to supporters (corporate?) paying £750 (plus VAT) to become a member of the 'Blues Lounge'. Or, presumably, a Lounge lizard. Once again the club's PR on the issue has hardly been a beacon of brilliance. Our secretary Derek Murr is writing to Ron to let him know we are not impressed with the lack of

consultation on either of these matters. When will the club learn that driving away even one supporter at our level of the game these days is tantamount to attempted suicide. Average gates were up just four per-cent last season from 4,137 to 4,306 and with the Brighton and Cardiff hordes moving onwards and upwards even those figures will take some maintaining in the next campaign – even more so if we pursue the barmy idea of playing some games on a Friday night. That was great in the late 60s and early 70s when we had average gates around 10,000, no one had anything else to do and travelling to away games was almost unheard of. But times have changed.

Alterations to the club badge, bringing the return of the shrimp, will be reflected in a reworking of the SUSCT logo and the design of the new SUSCT badge that Richard has in the pipeline.

THE beer in the Shrimpers Club is pretty much universally rated as rank. So Derek Murr is to suggest the club adopt a 'Beer Festival' approach, with better ale on offer all round at best and at least a guest beer at worst. We also feel away supporters should be made more welcome in the Shrimpers Club. The greater the numbers present, the greater the club's cash take. And when – if – we get to Fossetts Farm, the Trust feels we should have our own self-run bar there. Cheers!

Richard has been further investigating the possible renovation work on the last resting place of club founder Oliver Trigg in Sutton Cemetery. This is the perfect opportunity to show KARERS and Co that United fans are the exact opposite of grave desecrators and we might even get a bit of SOS-boosting publicity out of it. Oliver's plot looks the worse for wear thanks to a car backing into it and the restoration to former glory will cost around £200.

It seems king Karer Peter Bliss has written to Sir Teddy Taylor claiming a Trust member has been spreading untrue rumours of a political nature about him. We have given this due consideration and reached the following verdict – complete tosh.

Final figures show that Chris Berry made another tremendous job of running our SUSCT coach service throughout the season. We will be obtaining quotes from other firms for 2001-02, but at present it looks most likely that we shall again be sticking with Supreme. Anorak facts and figures for last season include: Miles covered – 10,364. True Blues taken by coach – 2,321. Different passengers travelling – 805. Coaches used – 53. Most people carried – 286 to Blackpool. Fewest people carried – 18 to Plymouth. King boss – Trevor (18 coaches ruled).

Theresa has slipped smoothly into the membership secretary groove and reports our membership standing at another all-time high of 746. On now to the 1,000, we hope. For all membership info, ring Theresa on the number given earlier.

Donna would like to hear from anyone with bright ideas for the Meet the Players Day on July 29 – apart from a bouncy castle. Other fund-raisers blossoming in her hyperactive brain cells include: an abseil, production of a new Trust T-shirt, a Trust 'panto' in which Paul has already demanded a leading role, a 92-hour sponsored dash round the 92 League grounds and another Christmas Draw. I assume there will also be another quiz night at some time. Further details in the coming weeks.

JEFF Allen's liaison meetings with the football club led to close SUSCT/club co-operation on the subject of Mike North. There seems to have been no further movement on the matter of compensation for those inconvenienced by the ticket arrangements at Orient and Ron Martin does not look to have requested any direct action. The SOS flag can – and has – been placed in a designated site in the north-west corner of Roots Hall. Our initial room hire charge of £80 for the Player of the Year event was trimmed to £40. We have funded training equipment worth £93, with further requests from SUFC to be considered.

So what about our chances for next season? I really thought my latest £5ew on promotion was going to earn, but, no, the betting slip is in shreds in the kitchen bin once again. Webby has begun his cull, with Michael Black (didn't knuckle down enough), Ben Abbey (disastrous decline once he donned those silver boots), Neil

Tolson (crock around the clock) and Russell Williamson (very unlucky?) on their way, Martyn Booty listed and Mr Maher being coveted by the inbreds up the A12. And I get the feeling all these one-year contract offers is pushing our luck a bit. Frankly, I still believe we should have reached the play-offs this time round. But three wins from our last 17 games was pretty pathetic, despite the occasional flashes of promise shown by the likes of Tes Bramble and Stuart Thurgood. What really cost us was our horrendous form against the teams near the trapdoor of the Third Division table, clearly illustrated in the SunSport Bores League. This £5-a-head annual event pits me (Southend) against work colleagues who follow Halifax, Carlisle, Lincoln and Barnet and takes in just the results of the home and away matches between the clubs. This was the amazing – and nightmarish - final table.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barnet	8	4	0	4	10	12	12
Carlisle	8	2	5	1	9	8	11
Halifax	8	2	4	2	10	6	10
Lincoln	8	2	4	2	11	11	10
Southend	8	3	1	4	7	12	10

It was clearly no good doing the double over Brighton, taking two draws off Cardiff and four points off Chesterfield with form like that, including an abysmal goals tally, against the bottom dogs. No wonder we again had nobody in the PFA's Third Division line-up. At least my gutted Barnet-following mate Steve Kingham had something to cheer him up. I have suggested he spends his £20 winnings on maps to Forest Green, Telford and Stalybridge.

The youthful talent is there, now we need the couple of wise old heads to bring it out, a marauding midfield goalscorer, Stephen Broad to stay and Tes and Mark Rawle each to hit 20-apiece. Blues fans have accepted one season of transition. Two might prove an overdose. So where did it all go wrong towards the end of the campaign? Let's see.

EXETER (A, 2-2): Two-up early thanks to Tes opening his United account with a double. A pair of points are then promptly blown. The Devonians featured someone called Steve Epesse-Titti. Errrrrrr, that's it.

MANSFIELD (H, 0-0 aban): No more to be said.

MACCLESFIELD (A, 1-0): Blackpool, Chesterfield and Scunny all did us a favour by losing, so what do we do. Bashers' analysis was 'We looked more like a team looking to go down to the Conference'. Yes, it was that grim – even though we hit the bar and had a shot cleared off the line. Capped off by the coach breaking down on the M6 and the first-team's alternative transport whizzing past without a second glance. Not impressed.

PLYMOUTH (A, 3-3): Our brave little band were treated to a storming second-half comeback. Daniel Webb showed he can put the ball in the net, while last-gasp Rob Newman showed he still knows where the net is. Kevin (1 red, 14 yellows) Maher popped in a penalty in between.

CARLISLE (H, 1-1): It says something that the biggest cheer of this match was for Chris Powell walking round the touchline after the Junior Blues prizegiving. Another desperate home effort, made worse by Gordon Connolly's weedy shot setting up their goal. Sub David Lee headed us level with six minutes left. Overall too much hump and not enough guile – again.

HULL (H, 1-1): The HUMBERSIDERS being near the top of the table, we decide to perform. Webby fields what looks like his best side. Sorry, folks, for me that means Leon ‘One Foot’ Johnson did not play. Recovered well from the shock of letting them score after four minutes, though not even Tes tried to pretend he meant his equaliser. It was the least we deserved, though.

CHELTENHAM (A, 2-1): Another one that left you asking ‘How did we lose that’? Nice to see Mark Rawle hit the back of the net at last, even if he did not strike his shot totally cleanly. Almost as nice as seeing Grayson get his comeuppance for two late lunges at Damon Searle. Pity Grayson also equalised when the defence fell asleep – could be their brain waves were being interfered with by GCHQ just down the road. Kevin Maher then nodded off and lost his man (McCann), who sank us with the 84th-minute clincher. A travesty. Webby declared: “I learned a lot about my players in the last 10 minutes.” Meaning one or two of them probably sealed their fates.....

MANSFIELD (H, 3-1): First home League game I have missed this season. Plenty of emotion as Mrs North came on to the pitch to join the one-minute’s silence for her husband. She looked distraught in that picture in the Echo. Let’s pray we never see such a heartbreaking incident at the Hall again. We let them score, then romped home with strikes from Stuart Thurgood and Emile Heskey Mk II plus a blockbuster Damon Searle free-kick. It left us 11th – just seven points better off than we were under Alan Little in 1999-2000. Must do better.

I hear 16 Third Division clubs have backed a York proposal for a League EGM on June 9 to try to get Chesterfield expelled from the Nationwide and have Barnet restored. I am not sure if we are one of the 16 or one of the six left, but it sounds interesting. The way Chesterfield’s punishment for their misdemeanours was handled was another prize cock-up.

After that little Blues anagram in NUMBER 26, guess who this is: Tits Conclude Here.

Right, that will do. I had better save something for NUMBER 28 next month. Any moans, groans, comment etc, contact me on nigel.rick@the-sun.co.uk

NR (20/5).

PS. Jeff the self-confessed ‘Lard Monster’ and Craig have arranged a one-hour informal football session at Boots and Laces every Monday at 7pm. It is £3.50 a head, eight people needed. Full details from Jeff on jeffallen.premiere@virgin.net