

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 29

THE evening of August 11 will see three of the world's great chefs once again come into their own. At The French Laundry, a former saloon and brothel in Yountville, California, Thomas Keller, classically trained at eminent restaurants like Raphael in New York and Guy Savoy in Paris, will be sweating over his signature dish – paquets de rillettes de lapin with a fennel bulb, Yukon Gold potato and black truffle hash. Meanwhile, over at Tetsuya's Restaurant in Kent Street, Sydney, Tetsuya Wakuda will be knocking up a 'tasty' confit of Petuna Ocean trout with fennel salad, plus roasted langoustine seasoned with tea and scampi oil. If you ask nicely he might do you a sea urchins in tea consommé.

But business for these two kings of the kitchen is unlikely to be brisk. Because those around the globe who prefer their palates to be tickled in a style guaranteed to be truly unique will be heading en masse to the Boots and Laces open-air terrace, Southend-on-Sea. Here, Donna Fillary and her team of culinary chancers and boil-in-the-bag experts will have the grill and griddle smoking nicely for the SUSCT BARBECUE. Kick-off is 6pm, not long after, all being well, Darlington have been despatched from the Hall with a sound opening-day-of-the-season thrashing to ponder on. And the grub, with any luck, will have Gordon Ramsay and Co tearing their hair out – sizzling chicken, sausages or burgers plus jacket potatoes etc served on a nice paper plate. For those who do not enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, there will be a vegetarian option. And the only sauce being drizzled will be tomato or brown. Donna's dishes are also sure to be a bit more price competitive, costing about £2 – pay as you eat – compared to the £75 a head or so for a couple of mellow mouthfuls with Messrs Keller and Wakuda.

A sumptuous banquet of haute cuisine, though, is not all that is on offer for the first SUSCT social event of the 2001-02 campaign. There will be additional activities for both the grown-ups in attendance and their little darlings. We will have a drawing competition run by Miss Bashford (remember to bring her an apple), a penalty competition (D Murr and P FitzGerald in charge), a quiz run by our ever-popular boffin Richard Coxell and a six-a-side tournament controlled by Mr Bashford and Mr Allen. We could still do with two more teams for that, so contact Donna on dfillary@visteon.com if you want to take part. There are some worthy prizes on offer e.g. a football donated by the football club for the drawing competition, with the best efforts to be displayed in the Shrimpers Club. The quiz winner gets a home or away shirt. We shall also be inviting all who attend to enter this season's Prediction Competition, with a simplified form for youngsters.

A lot of effort will have gone into this event and, weather permitting, it will be a solid success. But what we most need is YOU to attend. Yes, YOU. The one reading this. Please do your best to turn up, if only for an hour. If you have been to the game you cannot say it was too far to travel. These social events are key fundraisers for us, so do your best. There might even be a couple of players around, though all they need dish up is a victory earlier in the day. See you there.

You have to say that little glow of anticipation as the new campaign looms is now well alight. The letter telling me I can collect my season ticket has arrived, so we are almost there. Webby has certainly brought in more than his fair share of new blood, though it is not until the serious stuff starts that we are likely to be able to judge the true value of the latest imports. One or two look more fired up than others, though Tes Bramble and Shane Wardley are going to have to learn to expend their energy more wisely than getting involved in disco dust-ups. Facing court proceedings two days after the season opens for an alleged assault at the Liquid nightspot in Ipswich back in February will hardly benefit United's image. I see the other party involved was a certain Michael Jackson. Could it be? My spies inform me a 'man' was definitely seen at the scene sporting a black face mask, moon dancing and shouting at a monkey swinging from a lamppost: "Bubbles, darling, time for bed."

I DON'T think the friendly encounters really tell us a thing about our prospects once the League action gets into full swing. Beating the likes of Bury Town, Heybridge Swifts and Soham Town Rangers gives the team a

bit of a boost and allows various members of the squad to have a run-out. Yet if we can't kill off that calibre of opposition, then the boots might as well be hung up.

I made it to the Leicester friendly as it was on a night off. Some of us gathered in a cut-price executive suite for the encounter, but the almost total lack of atmosphere – due in no way, I hasten to add, to the company within – served only to enforce my determination never to watch from a box any game that has even the slightest importance. It just feels so cut off and, with no air conditioning, was like a sauna. We were a little unlucky to lose and defended pretty well – apart from their second goal – with a major contribution from Leon Cort. Darryl Flahavan was rock-solid, apart from the one occasion when he tried his George Best impersonation, and I thought Kevin Maher and Stuart Thurgood showed what an important contribution they have to make to our midfield this season. It was up front that worried me – just as it does Webby, as he admitted at the SUSCT's Q & A night that I will come to later. Daniel Webb still shows tons of effort, but little goal threat – well, until Gillingham. And Tes, who used correctly I believe could be the Third Division's Emile Heskey, looked totally wasted wide on the right.

Injured Mark Rawle has clearly succumbed to the curse of SUSCT sponsorship even earlier than his predecessors and then we come to Tony Richards, late of Sligo Rovers and Hong Kong Rangers. Now you know I hate to be negative, but it is hard not to be when you pick up the vibe from Barnet on our £36,000 splash – money we simply cannot afford to waste. Steve Kingham, the saddy Underthrill regular and now Conference aficionado that I work with, declared gleefully on hearing of the transfer: “He is absolutely dreadful. We got him on a free from Orient and he soon became the boo-boys' favourite. His biggest impact came when he scored the winner against Hampton and Richmond in last season's FA Cup first round and then got sent off for fighting with their keeper.” A trip to the No1 Barnet fans' website was no more encouraging. I give you these gems: “This has to be a joke. Surely no one would pay money for him.” “Are you sure it's not 36,000 pesetas?” “The best bit of business we have ever done.” “I thought 36,000 was the number of chances he has missed for us.” “It's at times like this you realise we have the best transfer system in the world.” Hardly encouraging, is it? And not exactly the sort of thing our fans were saying about someone like David Lee after he left us for Hull. Or what we would probably say about Martyn Booty should he depart. Webby is generally a very shrewd judge of a player. Let's pray he has spotted some hidden talent in our Tony yet to burst into bloom or we could feel the unfortunate loss of Neil Tolson even more. I will need further convincing than a strike against the might of Billericay. And then there was Leicester.....sorry, Spud, you are going down. And you deserve to just for signing Dennis ‘Anyone want a taxi?’ Wise.

Gillingham, our only other truly valid test, I missed. Webb jnr got the goal and my spy tells me we were unlucky not to sneak it, their keeper made a couple of high-grade saves and the Maher-Thurgood partnership just gets better and better. Keep it going, lads – from this Saturday to April 20.

As for Dean Holness, our three-month capture from Sky TV's Dream Team, good luck to him. He is taking a gamble, but at least it shows he is keen to turn out for us. Dean certainly cannot be addicted to the cameras. After all, there is precious little chance of seeing Blues on the box in the near future. The Nationwide League is now on ITV Digital, formerly OnDigital, which is currently being watched by the TV equivalent of one man and his dog. Sky goes to 5.5million homes, ITV Digital to about 1.1million. And if you have Sky, you currently have no way of picking up ITV's digital sport channels through the dish. Fantastic. All we can do is pray the Nationwide highlights survive on terrestrial ITV on a Monday night or we are totally kippered. I have heard, though, that ITV's digital experiment is costing them so much money that backers Granada have given them six months to sort it or they will pull out – leaving Sky to come in and pick up the pieces!

One other little snippet of transfer news. Blues fans' favourite wing wizard Gordon Connelly has been shown the door by Carlisle and has moved on to.....Queen of the South.

AND just to return momentarily to David Lee. A source has sent me details of comments the silly boy has made in an interview with a Hull newspaper. They include: “The training is a lot better and much more professional here. Also, the supporters are a different class and you see plenty of Hull shirts when you're walking around the city centre. You don't get that in Southend.” And: “I wasn't happy playing as a wide man at Southend

because we had a very direct style. Here we'll be trying to play football." Never bite the hand that fed you, they say. I think Mr Lee could be in for some ear-bashing at the Hall come January 22.

The executive committee met on June 28 and arranged what proved a very short follow-up for July 24, as that turned out to clash with the Q & A. The next full get-together is now on August 14.

The main matter of import from the June / July sessions has been the forging of an even more positive link with Ron Martin and the United hierarchy. This has seen a furtherance of the liaison between Ron and SUSCT, following on from the important link work already done by Jeff Allen and the positive impact that our SOS efforts to date have had on Ron. The SOS issue will obviously move back into a higher gear once we discover the exact timing of the next council consideration of the revamped Fossetts Farm plans. We now have a Liaison Group in place, made up of two Trust executive committee members – Jeff Allen and Paul FitzGerald – and two United board members. This supercedes the previous Jeff-Ron get-togethers, though their head-to-heads will continue on matters Fossetts. The Group has already met for the first time, with details to follow.

Our SOS postcards have so flooded the council that they would prefer no more were sent. I think they will find themselves unlucky when D-day again approaches.

We are always concerned about whether we are actually doing enough on behalf of our members. Paul will be considering this as he works on the overall way ahead for the Trust. This will also be an important consideration at our AGM, set for October 25. Remember to get that date in your diaries. It is crucial as many members are there as possible.

Craig Fillary has taken over our newsletter printing, but anyone with an unbeatable deal should still contact coxell@btinternet.com with any details. Meanwhile Richard, a man blessed with a phenomenal licking technique, has handed over his cherished role as Mr Envelopes and Director of Distribution to Terry Jeffreys. Welcome aboard, Terry. As long as you all receive Number 29 before August 11th, you will know the job is well in hand. Those who want e-mail delivery or have a change of address in future should inform Terry on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com Postal recipients of the newsletter also face a further slight delay as we are eventually switching to second-class post in a money-saving push.

If you are expecting your share certificate from the football club and it has still not arrived, get in touch with Helen Giles today.

A vote of thanks to all those renewing memberships, especially those who continue to enclose a donation to the Trust in addition to their subscriptions. All membership queries should be directed to Theresa on 07867-515378 or by e-mail to bluesbabe73@hotmail.com

We will be having another Christmas Draw this year following the major success of the one Donna organised so skilfully last year. So start saving up for your tickets. Top prize will be £1,000 again, but a local winner would be a bonus this time.

THE Liaison Group's first meeting was on July 18, with Geoffrey King and Derek Wilshire representing United and Jeff and Paul acting for the Trust. The plan is that this will become a regular forum for the exchange of ideas and information, giving both parties a clear point of access to the other for whatever issues require to be raised. The desired aim of the Trust to support United in whatever way is feasible was made clear, with discussion on further possible future Trust purchases that can be of benefit to the football club. **Security:** A new steward training programme and qualification has been implemented by United, which, hopefully, will resolve some of the past problems that have been seen on match days. An updated 'state-of-the-art' closed-circuit TV has also been installed (so be on your best behaviour for the battles ahead!). **Catering:** An improved tea bar is being opened in the South Upper, while new cooking facilities for the West Stand kiosk should greatly improve service times.

Geoff King detailed improvements in the marketing and commercial sides of SUFC and expressed gratitude for the feedback on both, even though, inevitably, some has been non-positive. He also pointed to the new SUFC website, which Jon Childs in commercial has thoroughly revamped in collaboration with NTL. The United site is undoubtedly a huge improvement in its present guise (www.southendunited.co.uk) - nearly as good as the Trust's (www.susc.co.uk), which Richard will be updating before the start of the season. The possibility of discounts and other incentives for Trust members availing themselves of United purchases is under consideration, as is a scheme involving c2c and some discounted rail travel. The Trust has also pushed the importance of United's links with the Junior Blues / Blues Youth and stressed that a supporters' section for youngsters is vital.

Overall the Liaison Group considered their first link-up highly rewarding and they will meet again on August 29.

Ron Martin and Dave Webb came into their own at the SUSCT's Q & A evening on July 24, attended by nearly 90 members and welcome interlopers – most of whom made their way to the Shrimpers venue via Boots and Laces. Once that maestro of the mic Jeff Allen had persuaded someone to ask the first question, the event chugged along nicely through to about 9.45pm. I will just gloss over a few of the main points.

Fossetts was the opening issue raised and Ron, as ever, was bursting with optimism. The next development plan has been agreed, with the greater emphasis on retail rather than leisure that the council favour. Martin Dawn, Delancey and Lansbury were due to meet council representatives for discussion on the next steps on August 1, so, by the time you read, this details of what occurred will most likely be available.** God willing, an amended planning application can be submitted without further ado. The nightclub and casino elements of the Farm which so upset 'Karers' and their ilk have now gone and been replaced by retail elements for which tenants are already in place. As long as agreement can be reached with Lansbury over remaining land rights, matters are looking far brighter.

Asked about the youthful element to his close-season signings, Webby declared that he is trying in his own way to put some assets for United back out on the pitch. His hope is that some of the youngsters he has pinned his faith in will eventually be worth money. He said: "This is what I started to do with Vic Jobson, but then the assets began to go all too quickly and we eventually fell out." Ron Martin fully backs his squad judgements, but Webby admitted United remain in "a very delicate situation."

TO that end, Ron chipped in that costs are being cut where practical, efficiency is being improved, losses have been trimmed by well over £1million and next year SUFC should break even. He put the number of season tickets sold for this season at around 1,200 (worth £300,000), the best for some while. Ron declared: "We are making sure this club can survive wherever it is located. In the past, assets were stripped out for whatever reason and that is now at an end." Notably more significantly, he added later: "I think the Fossetts Farm plans will be passed. But if that doesn't happen, I believe we could now survive where we are with a fair wind." And in case you were wondering, the Priory Crescent improvement plans are of no consequence to the club whatever.

While we may badly need a striker like a 100-per-cent fit Neil Tolson – Webby admitted to being "a bit concerned" about our poor goalscoring record of late – the former York man will not play for United again. Webby revealed Tolson wants to call it a day at only 27 because of his pelvic problems, but the surgeons have not yet classified him as unfit to play in the League.

Lack of discipline on the pitch was brought up, focusing on the costly yapping abilities of Messrs Maher and Whelan. Costly, that is, in terms of yellow cards and suspensions. Webby revealed that mouthing off to referees, kicking the ball away and so on will in future be punishable by a substantial club fine. Whelan's captaincy qualities were questioned and the boss agreed we really have no natural leader at United, which is a bit sad. Stuart Thurgood looks the tip for campaigns to come.

The old North Bank chestnut was broached, hand in hand with the dismal lack of atmosphere in the Hall these days. It looks like the police view will continue to prevail as they find it much easier to monitor away fans in that part of the ground. A poll of those present in the Shrimpers found about a 50-50 split on a return to the North Bank, while Ron agreed that polls he had held on the issue had also proved anything but decisive.

The evening was rounded off with a couple of overviews from our two guests. Webby said: "I genuinely regret not finishing what I started before. I wanted to be the first person to take this club into the old First Division and I want to try to do that again. I believe Ron Martin has a genuine concern for this club to do well for the town. The club can have a great future in front of it and if we go forward together then we can go places." Over to Ron: "This club has been in turmoil for years. But the last nine months have been good and the next 12 could be great."

It looks like we shall discover if they are right very shortly. Thanks to both, though, for an entertaining session and.....we must do it again some time.

DID you make it to the Meet the Blues Day on July 29? I couldn't, but I am sure there was a profusion of lobster-like bodies on display in the scorching heat. Comment seemed favourable, attendance was well up to around 2,000 and, though 'celebs' leave me stone cold, it was good of those that could be bothered to turn up and turn out for United. It always helps to have a Terry Alderton – new TV show coming up – to the fore. I hope you said hello to the Trust's faithful band on the day, doing their best, as ever, to publicise us to the world. I am told our antics just about broke even. Jeff certainly seemed to enjoy it and 'hail to thee' again Donna!

Rebus will sponsor United home and away this season, with everyone in brand new strips. I see that as a season ticket holder I can get 10 per cent off a new shirt, but I reckon there is still plenty of wear left in my vintage blue and yellow quartered sweatshirt. Anyone else still got one of those?

Nice to see Blues make it into the Champions League. Well, one of our old boys anyway. Paul Byrne, Churchills' favourite son, is still hauling his bulk around the pitch for League of Ireland side Bohemians, who have just gone out of the tournament to Swedish outfit Halmstad at the second qualifying round stage. In the first round against Estonian giants Levadia Maardu, the boys in green had to overcome a canny protest by their opponents, who complained to UEFA after a 2-0 defeat at Bohemians' Dalymount Park ground that the crossbars were two centimetres too low. Sad to say, we have also bid cheerio to the likes of Torpedo Kutaisi, Sheriff Tiraspol, KS Vilaznia and Slavia Mozyr.

Ipswich have recently decided to splash £30,000 on a bust of Bobby Robson for his great managerial feats of the past at the club. Who would you suggest Blues do one of? I would propose Alvan Williams, our Welsh legend from the 60s. Is he still doing time for manslaughter?

The SUSCT travel machine is starting to wind up again. It's Mansfield first in line on August 18. All inquiries to our man with the mobile and the Supreme brochure, Chris Berry. The numbers are 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. Travellers should remember the trips to Torquay, Swansea and Hull are now on a Friday night, which has really helped us out.

A SMACKED wrist for Jerry Moss, the Trust's ambassador to the Sopotians, for failing to get us any free tickets for the ATP/WTA Prokam Polish Open in Sopot (Southend's twin town) a week or so ago. For all those gagging for details, the finals were all-Spanish affairs. Cristina Torrens-Valero beat Gala Leon Garcia 6-2 6-2 to take the women's title, while men's champion Tommy Robredo beat Albert Portes 1-6 7-5 7-6. This is one of those events that Tim Henman cannot be bothered to enter, while none of our 'ladies' is good enough.

Giggsy's testimonial. What a sick joke. I'll get into trouble if I say any more.

I hear you can still get Blues at 25-1 at William Hill. By the time you read this I will have joined Jeff's dad and slapped on my annual fiver each-way. I can almost feel those lovely winnings.....

Right, all done. Enjoy a great new season. We deserve one. Any ripostes, just e-mail me as usual on nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (3/8)

**** They did meet for a conflagration that Ron labelled 'very constructive'. Swift further progress is awaited.**

P.S. 1. Are there any more colours left for Martin Penton's hair?

2. Can someone please give Sammy the Shrimp a pedicure.

3. Anyone read the Sunday Times? Its front-page headline from the paper's correspondent at the Genoa riots on July 22 said in the edition we received here: 'Truncheons rained down on me in the battle of Genoa'. Not quite as good, you will agree, as that in the first edition until some bright sub spotted the double entendre: 'Truncheons rained down on me and my helmet disintegrated.' Nasty!

4. Shane Warne lbw b Caddick 0. Australia 102-7 in their first innings at Trent Bridge. Cameras pan on to crowd – and there in the middle of the screen is a hero in the Rebus home shirt. Top man.

5. Thought. Why does it cost £50 more to sponsor a corner flag at Roots Hall than a goalpost?

6. Mr G and Mr I. You know you still love 'em and miss 'em. See you back soon.