

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 31

HONESTLY, I go off on a week's hols and all hell breaks loose. Webby's taking a back seat, Lansbury come in on the blind side to inflict what looks a mortal blow to Fossetts Farm (as if it needed it), our form on the pitch continues to induce tear-your-hair-out frustration, Chris Berry discovers e-mail and Sammy the Shrimp comes last in the British Mascots' Grand National. Chaos reigns, folks. But hasn't that always been the joy of supporting the one and only SUFC?

We are struggling for lights at the end of the tunnel right now, though the supreme amount of work that some of the Trust committee have been putting into the new Southend Junior Shrimpers has been an absolute credit to them. More on that later.

The whole world has seemed somewhat unreal following the devastation in America of September 11. But the message from the battling Yanks has been 'Back to business as usual' – and I sure as hell was not going to let any terrorist threat stop me setting off on my little Indian Ocean sojourn. The 6,000-mile trip to Mauritius may take nearly 12 hours non-stop, but is well worth it. You will not see the quality of sand and sea they enjoy there off Shoebury, that is for sure. Drawbacks? Well, just one really. Keeping up to date with Blues news is, frankly, impossible. Unless, of course, you are prepared for extravagance of unrivalled proportions. Unable to resist finding out how we had fared at Oxford on Saturday, September 22, on Wednesday the 26th I lashed out 120 of the local rupees (about £3!) to snap up one of the News of the Worlds that suddenly appeared in my hotel's gift shop. Someone had nicked the football pull-out from my first pick, but number two was intact. A couple of frantic flicks past the dross surrounding the Chelsea drunkards brought up the relevant pages and, needless to say, my heart sank. Done 2-0 with Darryl man of the match again. That told me all I needed to know. The sorrows had to be drowned – and were with a swift Bourgainvillea (dark rum plus apricot, orange and lemon juice). The toast? All those bravehearts cruelly let down once more, remembering that under normal circumstances I would have been one of them.

Before departure for Blighty, I caught a bit of M*** U*****, the Arse and Liverpool live on the Mauritian box plus Tom Cruise in the film Cocktail dubbed very badly into German. But the real United? I don't think they have heard of us. And as for the Carlisle and Cheltenham results, no chance. Enlightenment came in the pile of Super Soaraways awaiting my return on the kitchen table. Carlisle seen off – just. Cheltenham – b*****s! I don't believe it. Thus came the return to stark reality and suddenly the vacation was merely a happy memory.**

So just where do Blues currently stand? I would say neck-deep in the smelly brown stuff once again. We appear all but rudderless, leaderless and spiritless off the pitch, while spiralling ever downwards on it. In fact, the perfect combination for utter disaster.

I know Dave Webb has had 'health problems' of late. But who was the last manager you can recall taking a couple of weeks off to 'consider his position'? Webby has constantly urged us to be optimistic about the team's chances, even when in recent weeks that has been looking more and more difficult. If he sidelines himself without making it crystal-clear why, what message does that give? Pick one from a) I'm not bothered; b) I can't hack it any more; c) It's all gone pear-shaped; d) my Fossetts pension is looking dodgy. Rob Newman has all but been thrown to the lions as he takes full responsibility for a team desperately struggling to find some form and, more importantly, find somebody who knows where the opposition net is on a regular basis. We have had enough of bad luck stories, such as Bristol Rovers and now, it seems, Torquay. We are 16th in the table and watching apparent duds like Rushden and Cheltenham ease past us and genuine duds like Carlisle and Exeter catch up. The only Third Division table we top at the moment is the one for team yellow cards (28), with Daniel Webb taking the individual honours (6).

The latest news on Fossetts Farm may have come as a kick in the gonads to most of our loyal band, yet it has given many the opportunity to gloat: I told you so. A Jeremiah like Jim Worsdale, one of those awful 'Sage of Southend' types who never knows when to retire gracefully, suddenly came out of the woodwork in the Echo of October 5 with a piece of totally negative thought on the subject that is indicative of exactly why Southend is now a town languishing in the doldrums about 30 years behind many of its rivals around the country. In 'The Friday Column You Cannot Ignore' – though many must surely have tried – Jim's depressing and done to death line was 'Pie in the Sky'. My message is take your pie, mate – and choke on it!

SUSCT committee members like Trevor Bashford, Paul FitzGerald and Jeff Allen have been spending even more time than usual trying to get a line on where United and ourselves go next on this, as well as formulating a response. That response should have come in a piece from Paul to the Evening Echo which, all being equal, will have been published by now and read by as many Blues fans as possible. We are entitled to an explanation of exactly what the hell is being cooked up and we are also in no mood to see criticism of fans from the likes of Delancey. Certainly after all that has been said, most Blues regulars are going to take some convincing that the club's future now still lies at Roots Hall and not at the new stadium which we were told would end all our troubles.

That is the line Ron Martin has pushed constantly and, it seems, continues to push – even though of late he has been about as easy to pin down as Tony Blair on the 'joys' of joining the Euro. Lansbury claim plans for the £12.5million project were shelved months ago – and that Ron knew it. There was a hint, too, from Lansbury that Ron has been 'misleading' supporters. Surely not. I mean, he promised us at the pre-season meeting in the Shrimpers Club that all would soon be sweetness and light on the Fossetts front! Is someone suggesting that wasn't true? (Afraid so!) Ron runs Martin Dawn, yet the implication from Lansbury, Delancey, South Eastern Leisure, Uncle Tom Cobley and all is that Ron does not seem to know what Martin Dawn has agreed to when it comes to remaining at our quaintly tagged 'spiritual home' – i.e. the Hall.

I am afraid it is going to take more from the Board to progress than for them pitifully to blame the incidents of September 11 for any impasse. For them then to come out with the old chestnut 'It is not conducive to good business practice for such proceedings to be conducted in the press' merely makes things worse. That simply will not wash. We all thought we were so far down the line on Fossetts, not that we had not yet even left the station!

It is encouraging to see Southend Council's chief executive George Krawiec – one man in all this who does at least have a bit of a feel for football – claiming that United's long-term future is of importance. But as Paul put it in the Southend Standard: "It seems nothing more than a grim battle for survival." The current Roots Hall lease runs out in 19 months' time and then what? A ground share? In front of what size crowds? We await Ron's next revelations with interest. In the meantime, the SOS machinery is ready to be cranked up and roll when necessary. And if you want to put your point of view to the council, then please do not hesitate to write.

ONE or two of our shareholders, like Peter Mason (12 shares), have been wondering where they stand if the you know what really hits the fan - especially when it comes to clout towards possibly influencing future matters. The news from our expert Mr FitzGerald (70 – that's shares, not years old) is fairly predictable. Your influence is minimal. You can vote at the AGM, which, as normal, is currently running somewhat late with no sign of any accounts, and at any EGM that might be called. An EGM needs 10 per cent support and at least one fan is currently trying to muster said backing for a vote of 'no confidence' in the present powers that be. Matters can always be raised with the board individually or through the Trust's Liaison Group of Paul and Jeff, who meet with Geoffrey King and Derek Wilshire monthly prior to board meetings. Everyone knows the Trust's goal is an eventual seat on the board, but that is not imminent. Discounts for individual shareholders are unlikely, though they are on the horizon for SUSCT members. Further details in the Liaison Group overview to come in a couple of paragraphs' time. The Trust is a shareholder (thanks to Paul gifting us 10), but has no plans to buy more – or rather to put any more money into SEL pockets in the light of the current situation. The number of shares in circulation is around 200,000, with 76 per cent owned by SEL (Martin Dawn/Delancey), up to 10 per cent by other directors like Alan Gershlick and John Bridge and the rest in the hands of the faithful.

Not that contingency plans for the United equivalent of a ground zero should not be considered and potential rescue plans put in place, 'futuristic' as they may seem. That is why the Trust is launching a 'Fighting Fund', whereby the cash raised could even be used to give us a potentially significant stake in the football club at some key time to come. Clubs like Chesterfield and Chester are now owned by their Supporters Trusts and who is to say we may not have a chance to step in and try to sort out our favourites before too long. Dream on, maybe, but what is worse than the position we appear to be in at this moment?

Right, on to details from the Liaison Group meeting of September 26. But before I run through them, a message from Jeff. *Any Trust member who wants a copy of his full post-meeting monthly report only has to contact him on jeffallen@blueyonder.co.uk to be sent one.*

1) You will have to keep buying your 'Pukka' pies at the outlets in place, as there are no plans to start pitchside sales at present. United's new concessionary and loyalty card project is close to birth and Trust members could be the first beneficiaries. Watch for more details shortly. The club shop is now fully stocked once more, including the new polo shirts.

2) SUSCT is now in the final process of developing the new junior division of the Trust – 'Southend Junior Shrimpers'. Rosemary Berry has been appointed secretary, with Sarah-Jane Harris as her assistant, Craig Fillary treasurer and Terry Alderton 'honoured' to be president. Membership will be £5 per annum, with a whole host of special privileges, prizes, promotions and concessions plus a free badge on joining and a special junior newsletter (*not* written by 'Uncle' Nigel). Hopefully there will be chances for juniors travelling away to be match mascots and we will be seeing if Frank Banks can offer discounts to members for his soccer schools. Membership forms – a thing of beauty in their own right – will be available in the club shop, though Rosemary Berry at SJS HQ is the person to contact for any SUSCT member or connection who has Under-16s who would like to join up. Rosemary will then get the all important application form to you. She is usually in the Shrimpers Club on match days – trying to keep an eye on Chris – but is better contacted at 26 Woodfield Road, Hadleigh, Benfleet, Essex, SS7 2EH, on 01702-558978 or by e-mail – theberrys@arfdun.fsnet.co.uk United are supposed to be right behind this – as they bloom in well should be.

(Getting this project up and running has involved Rosemary, Chris, Jeff, Sarah-Jane, Paul and others on and off the executive committee in a huge amount of work. The way they have carried it out so far is a tribute to them and again shows how much effort some people are prepared to put in to project the image of both the Trust and SUFC for no other reward than the feelgood factor. NR.)

3) We have provided four new goalkeeper's jerseys for the club and have been considering donating a substantial sum on 30 thermal jackets for the squad. We would regard this as another bona-fide outlay of Trust funds, but it is not yet decided upon. It is also hoped that our first Player of the Month prize will be forthcoming shortly.

4) The Trust and the club are in total agreement on any action taken against those using racist or unacceptably offensive language at home matches. The warnings are clear – heed them.

5) The football club agreed with the Trust representatives that a renegade bid to start a 'women only' supporters section should be a non-starter. The Trust believes in inclusivity ie catering for everyone. However, if there are any of the fairer sex among our number who feel there is something specific to them that the Trust should be looking at, then Donna Fillary (dfillary@visteon.com) or Theresa Wellham (bluesbabe73@hotmail.com) would be happy to hear from you.

6) We have supplied the club with our latest list of officials. (*Any member who enjoys drooling over the pictures and details on the committee page of the Trust website - www.susc.co.uk - will have noticed some of these are now a little out of date. I shall be looking to both old and new committee members very shortly – prior to the AGM - for their swift assistance in remedying this. NR.*)

7) Great news for those who use the The Family Enclosure in the West Stand. The ‘midday ticket sale restrictions’ are no more and match tickets for that area can now be purchased at any time prior to kick-off. The football club has also reviewed its complaints procedure and charter, with a ‘customer complaints’ log introduced in a bid to achieve swift resolutions. SUFC smoking policy is also being put under the microscope.

As for the executive committee, that last met on September 20 in my unavoidable absence. So thanks to Richard Coxell for the following details of what ensued.

Needless to say, the football club’s current position and the SJS were major topics, so there is no need to go over that ground again.

Terry Jeffreys has been beavering away on the new badges for both the Trust and SJS and with any luck these will be available for purchase in the very near future. Terry is also doing a sterling job on the newsletter distribution front and anyone with any queries – non-receipt, want it by e-mail etc – should contact him on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com or on 01268-523974.

Donna has the Christmas Draw in hand and when tickets are distributed we would ask ALL our members to endeavour to sell the small number each of you will be allocated. This is a top fund-raiser for us and as such it is essential that everyone does his or her bit for the cause. Donna is also behind a planned New Year’s Eve do, about which more in NUMBER 32. If you cannot wait for the details, just contact Donna.

THE Quiz Night is still set for November 10, after the Macclesfield game. That is the day England are due to face Sweden in a friendly, but I have not so far seen any indication that league matches will face a mass switching to the evening before. That would certainly have happened had not old Becks banged in that last-gasp free-kick against the Greeks and I am sure that was on his mind as he shaped up for the fatal shot. If you want a table – and they are going fast – contact Donna asap. At the next committee meeting on October 16, we shall also be giving further thought to the plan for a group of members to do a ‘92 clubs in 92 hours’ road haul to benefit both the Trust and a nominated charity. Kevin Feasey is the main man behind this and already has plenty of ideas whirling around. But anyone with any more can contact him on kevin.feasey@ntlworld.com

Next an apology to all those who travelled with us to Oxford and discovered that the coach driver appeared to somewhat ‘over-fatigued’ for duty. In the wake of complaints that Chris Berry has received, and following correspondence with Supreme, we will be offering all members on board that day a £10 discount off their next trip. That could be to Stevenage for the LDV showdown on October 15, to York on October 20 or Scunthorpe on October 23. For all travel info ring Chris on 01702-558978 or 07703-898698 or e-mail him at theberrys as above. Herograms, too, to all those on the nightmare Torquay journey – details with the match report.

The AGM has now been switched to THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29 from its original date of October 25. This is in part due to the unfortunate resignation of Trust secretary and Trust board secretary Derek Murr. Derek has been a Trust stalwart from the word go and the amount of work he put into getting us off the ground so successfully was immense. He will be difficult to replace and, while treasurer Craig Fillary has stepped into the Trust secretary’s slot temporarily, anyone who feels they have what it takes to move into this responsible post should make contact. E-mail Craig on craig39@tinyworld.co.uk or ring 01702-512169 or sound out our chairman Trevor Bashford on 01245-362742.

While United struggle for goals, it is infuriating to see the number of ex-Blues who keep popping them in elsewhere – notably Andy Thomson (QPR) and Andy Rammell (Walsall / Wycombe). Not so prolific has been Martin Carruthers, though it seems that after a recent rare strike for Scunthorpe he claimed a scout from Bolton had sounded him out. The way he finished with us, an approach from a girl guide might have been more apt.

Talking of girls, I do hope United's Essex Girls day v Kidderminster on October 27 does not turn into a cringe-making embarrassment. I would have thought such a tag was an insult to most women who attend Blues matches. Right or wrong?

GOOD to see Sammy did not let us down with his abject showing in the mascots' battle at Huntingdon race course. The rank outsider at 200-1, he could at least revel in being named the ugliest mascot on show. Elvis J Eel was decreed the best-named. Sadly, not even fun events like this are immune to ringers and the winner turned out to be a former Olympic athlete calling himself Freddie the Fox of the 'Countryside Appreciation Group'. Sad git. He eventually handed over his first prize to Rushden & Diamonds' Dazzler the Lion.

Next up, the review of recent matches. Thanks again to Richard for the good, the bad and the ugly of Oxford, Carlisle and Cheltenham.

HARTLEPOOL (H, 15/9 – D 0-0): How can I best describe this performance? I think I'll go with wretched. At least we can be grateful that if there is nothing else we do well at the moment, we can show the country how to observe a silence. Our minute here in memory of all those touched by the ghastly atrocities in the States again showed Blues fans at their best in another beautifully observed display of respect. Mr G suggested a bet, so £6 was pooled and stuck on us at 35-1 to win 3-0 with Tony Richards opening the scoring. It did not take long to see our chances of collecting the £210 minus deductions were about as bright as the night sky. The cash should have been down the plughole in around 10 seconds. We can only pray that was not a worked kick-off. Watching poor Tes flounder down the right is getting beyond a joke. Brother Titus, looking down from the directors' box with a new £12,000-a-week deal in his back pocket, is certainly guaranteed to be the Bramble family's leading breadwinner for a while longer yet. And what Webby was thinking of replacing Tes with a presumably baffled Leon Cort I cannot fathom. Does David Beckham play at left-back? Does Michael Owen play in goal? Barrington Belgrave, who sounds as if he should be next in after Brian Lara, looked a lively handful on his £40,000 debut. But I am afraid he will need someone a bit more able than Mr Richards – on current form – as his partner. Then again, the lumped service to the front men is currently woeful, with Kevin Maher suffering from playing far too deep. While we struggle to hit top gear on the pitch, though, the jobsworths off it continue to breed like rabbits. I see we now have a bloke in a fluorescent lemon jacket bearing the exotic title 'Tunnel Liaison Officer'. What the hell is that? The only person to enjoy this game was the bookie.

BRISTOL ROVERS (A 18/9, L 2-1): Miserable weather, miserable result. Got back to Hadleigh Church on the SUSCT travel machine at 1.10am still feeling the effects of another gutful of disappointment. We were done in the second minute of injury-time after Tony Richards – him again – had blasted wide when clean through with just two minutes of normal time left. Our slightly improved form from Saturday certainly merited a draw. But there cannot be a side in the League that concedes more goals in the last five minutes of each half, so why would anyone be surprised when we do it again. Congratulations to Paul Grange on deciding that a few gills in Hadleigh hostelry The Castle plus the trip to the match was the perfect way to celebrate his 25th birthday. I am sure it was an occasion he will never forget. Trevor and a few fellow travellers also had time for a couple of bevies in the Jolly Cricketers on the A127 before being picked up, as we were running a tad late. Our chairman revealed that the cabaret was provided by a couple of female Basildon factory workers having a catfight. Oh, I do love Essex. Couple of videos to pass the time – Traffic (good) and The Watcher (not quite so good). But I am proud to say I managed to keep 'Dude, Where's My Car?' off the screen. Jeff kindly introduced me to Terry Alderton at the ghastly Reading Services. Nice to report that Terry is still giving Dee an A-plus. The Memorial Ground was very welcoming and featured the best hot dog I have ever eaten. Ten inches of solid sausage. Theresa looked very tempted by my girth, but showed willpower beyond the call of duty by planting her lips round just a box of chips. If only the match had been as tasty.

OXFORD UTD (A 22/9, L 2-0). Hapless up front again and Webby admitted: "Oxford didn't outplay us, they outfought us." When fight has been all we have had to offer in a few contests already this season, once that deserts us then you know we are in trouble. Not for the first time, a team with four defeats out of five games at their new stadium were given a massive boost by being able to play and beat us. Phil Whelan was totally

dominated by Paul Moody, who hit the home side's first. Sam Ricketts added number two, 20 SECONDS after the break. What do they put in our half-time tea? Tranquilisers?

CARLISLE (H 25/9, W 3-2). A team reshuffle saw three front men played and more options at last for Kevin Maher than the pump forward. Blues recovered from a goal down to win with a Maher strike two minutes from time. Better late, than never. An improved display with a bit more passion. Jason Harris tried hard, but his control often let him down and not many people seem surprised that the club are already prepared to let him move on. Our other goals came from Phil Whelan, still not at his best, and Daniel Webb.

CHELTENHAM (H 28/9, L 1-0). One we had to win to keep up some pressure near the play-off zone. So what do we do? Lose. With a mini-size front-line we revert back to the aimless chips forward with inevitably fatal consequences. Mark Rawle hit the woodwork, but Cheltenham are the sort of team we have to dispose of. Paul Danson once again showed why the Premiership dropped him like a hot cake and has clearly paid more than one visit to the Joe Ross school of refereeing. Tony Naylor set up the visitors' winner with a lovely little backheel. Naylor was always a goalscoring threat with Port Vale and just the sort of little penalty area predator we could do with now. How also we can be leaving Damon Searle out of the side whilst still including Leon Johnson is another selection totally beyond me.

TORQUAY (A 5/10, L 2-1). Our band of braves on the Trust coach never came close to making the kick-off thanks to a motorway accident. Departure at 9.30am was supposed to guarantee a couple of hours of pre-match frolicking among the 'kiss-me-quick' hats and candy floss. But after a woman (noooooooo!) stopped on the M4's hard shoulder, opened her door without looking and had it smashed off by a passing juggernaut, all of two miles was travelled in four and a half hours. Arrival at Plainmoor came shortly before the interval. Total time spent on the coach? 16 hours! One plus – there were no no-shows. Who said going by air was a waste of money? And as if that wasn't enough, a monsoon of Bangladeshi proportions made the match a lottery. Sadly, our ticket failed to come up. Carl Hutchings popped in a neat equaliser from a free-kick, only for a rare Darryl misjudgement to ensure the home side nicked all three points. As Fraser on Dad's Army might have said: "If we cannae rely on Darryl any longer, we're doomed.....doomed."

A 5-1 weekend drubbing for our Under-19s by C** U was simply the icing on the cake.

PERHAPS we should turn to Mike Bassett: England manager for a few tips. This latest British cinematic 'classic' features our own Dean Holness, Arthur Scargill's left-wing mate from Brookside who doesn't seem to mind raking it in from everything on offer and a view of the East Stand. Someone I know who has seen it reviewed it thus: 'Total crap'.

Well done to Blues for being subject to only 10 arrests at Roots last season – joint 13th in the Third Division with Lincoln. Hull topped the table on 59, with, surprise, surprise, Cardiff second on 40.

So, exit Spud. It was always on the cards considering Leicester's recent record. Would anyone have him back here? I wonder. Not, of course, that there is any prospect of him actually returning.

I keep reading rumours of a potential players' strike over the amount of money being given to the PFA from the latest TV deal with the Premiership. But idle gossip that one league side has started early must surely be repudiated forthwith.....

And there you have it. The address for any comeback is, as usual, nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

As there has been so much agonising and angst in this edition, how about finishing off with a couple of those ever-popular 'father's details' from a selection of Child Support Agency forms. Well you are getting them, like it or not.

‘I am unsure as to the identity of the father of my child as I was being sick out of a window when taken unexpectedly from behind. I can provide you with a list of names of men that I think were at the party if this helps’. Hard to believe, but no more so than: ‘I have never had sex with a man. I am awaiting a letter from the Pope confirming that my son's conception was immaculate and that he is Christ risen again’. God help us is all I can say – along with a fervent prayer that we can dump on Swansea.....

NR (9/10)

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 31 – ADDENDUM

SORRY, everyone. The timing could not have been worse – and I do not just mean Webby's decision to call it a day. Super-efficient Terry got the newsletter printed for postal distribution and then e-mailed it out at 18.11 on Tuesday, October 9. What he did not know was that a mere FOUR minutes later the news would come through on the Press Association that DW was quitting as manager.

It would look daft not to make mention for another four or five weeks of this 'momentous' occasion, which marks the end of all our hopes that Webby would be able to reproduce a side capable of the same sort of glory that we enjoyed in the early 90s.

Most of my original comments in NUMBER 31 on his situation stand. Since his 'health scare' a month or so ago, Webby has never looked near back to his best. Maybe, at 56, time has caught up with his enthusiasm. He would not be the first to suffer in such a way. It would probably be unfair not to give him the benefit of the doubt. They say you should never go back, yet DW cannot be criticised for opting to give it another crack at the Hall. Pity the old magic was never really quite there. Even so, his new magic was still more potent than Alan Little's!

His exit changes nothing as regards our present parlous position. Now Ron Martin must decide whether to risk the inexperience of Rob Newman in charge or look around for a tried-and-trusted survival expert. Whatever happens, we need to start turning it around on the pitch without further ado - starting this weekend against Cyril the Swan and Co.

Spud may be taking a coaching session for us. But once you have managed the England Under-21s and in the Premiership, I cannot imagine you see your next full-time destination as a return to Div 3!

This is certainly not a time for dithering. It is a nightmare on top of all the confusion with Fossetts Farm and comes just when Ron should be keeping his eye firmly on the Farm ball and nothing else as it threatens to bounce completely out of control.

We wait with fascination to see how Ron jumps. If Rob gets the nod, he is sure to give it his best shot. The players clearly rate him – but like they once did Ronnie Whelan! It's a balancing act – and if Ron gets it wrong, we could be taking that Supreme coach to Forest Green and Leigh RMI next season. Whoever sups from the poisoned chalice, though, will have the full backing of the SUSCT. And, boy, they will certainly need it.

Fingers crossed. It is going to be another 'interesting' ride.....

NR (10/10 – and that really is your lot!)