

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 33

Hi and welcome to the latest edition of War and Peace. No, I exaggerate. This time we are down to about the equivalent of The Cossacks or Childhood, Boyhood, Youth. Tolstoy novels both, but significantly shorter and lacking the grand sweep of his epic masterpiece centred around the Napoleonic invasion of Russia back in 1812. Anyway, whether an enthusiast for Pierre Bezukhov, Harry Potter or The Beano, this is for you.

First, an apology. I am currently somewhat out of the loop when it comes to matters of a Blue hue, so NEWSLETTER NUMBER 33 may well be lacking the panorama of Trust and SUFC news normally striven for. All was well until around 7.40pm on Friday, November 23. Unfortunately, at that moment I was hit by a car while crossing a road junction close to the Wapping fortress. It was quality - a brand new Mercedes SLK. But that was small consolation as I was left clutching a right leg containing a cracked knee bone and some jiggered ligaments. At least there were some comforting words from the woman driver: 'I'm so sorry, I just didn't see you'. There then followed a series of adventures involving the NHS and C2C before I arrived home at 4.15am next morning plastered up from ankle to thigh.

Ever since I have been laid up doing little more than watch Sky Sports - apart from also having a small nose op. What an exciting life. I have so far had to miss the Lincoln game and Chesterfield trip, the last committee meeting and the AGM. All of which has cheated me off royally. In the meantime, Richard Coxell has been feeding me with various bits and pieces and has also gamely taken over from 'Bashers' as Trust scribe in the matchday mag.

Have you all sold your Christmas Draw tickets? Please remember it is vital for us that you do, rather than hide behind some feeble excuse for forgetting. Time is running out and we really need all ticket stubs to be with Terry Jeffreys by Saturday, December 22. In case you need a reminder, his address is 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR. You can also catch him travelling away or in the Shrimpers pre-match / Far Post post-match at the Chesterfield replay. Good on yer. Please e-mail him also on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com if you want your newsletter sent electronically in future.

The Trust Quiz Night on November 10 seemed to go down well again and a few welcome bob entered the coffers. Donna Fillary did her usual great organising job and the fish suppers went down a treat as ever. Winners were 'Table 11', none of whose players appeared to be Trust members - in fact, like a hefty proportion of those present. We definitely need more members to make an effort to take part in these events. No one could prefer a night in front of Blind Date, surely. Donna and Co finished second, with the Coxell clan plus Jerry Moss stunned to finish only third as some of quizmaster Guy Rickard's music questions for the younger element left the veterans flummoxed. Thanks to Guy for missing a concert by Transatlantic at the London Astoria to do us a favour. I think I added all the marks up correctly, Jamie Rickard was a modest maestro on the scoreboard and, overall, another very enjoyable evening. The raffle raised £115 and then came an auction that saw Theresa Wellham hand over £30 for a United first day cover from our 1,000th League game v Bristol Rovers back in 1972 and yours truly dig deep for £85 for the 'Flahaven' shirt, which Jeff Allen has since very kindly had autographed by the lads. Once I am mobile again, it will be framed and hung in my hall.

Talking of Darryl, his £50 for charity for being the first SUSCT Player of the Month has gone to the 'Building Blocks Appeal' at Southend General. Its twin objective is to provide local children with a major new centre for special needs treatment and to build a dedicated paediatric suite for the swift assessment and enhanced care of sick children. Definitely a thoroughly worthwhile venture.

Jeff did a fine job of auctioneering and talking up the prices. He has some talents we shall miss after opting to resign from the committee and as our Trust Liaison Officer to concentrate on the Southend Junior Shrimpers. Chris Berry has also stepped down from the committee, but will continue with his excellent Trust travel duties,

while pressure of work has cost us Donna's smiling face. That trio has been joined on the departed list by Martin Cranmer, Martin Penton and Jerry Moss.

This was all confirmed at the AGM, which, despite the pleas in NUMBER 32, was not as well attended as we would have hoped. I know some committee members were especially keen to see those few critics present who have plenty of negative views to express about the Trust on the quiet but nothing whatsoever positive to contribute when the chance is there and begging to be taken.

Trevor was unable to attend because of the amount of time he now has to spend on business in Edinburgh, but sent his overview of the current position to be read to the assembled gathering in the Shrimpers Club on November 29. It was not a picture of optimism. Trevor has been disappointed by criticism of the SUSCT from a small band of supporters and by the wholly unnecessary squabbling that has done so much to destabilise the Trust committee. The end result is that Trevor has stood down after three years as Trust chairman, but will remain a committee member.

Richard, our vice-chairman, was in the chair on the night and it was up to him to detail some of the achievements of the former Supporters Club and Trust under Trevor's leadership. Membership has grown to 850, the Trust has helped the club financially by sponsoring players, has sponsored a match, has bought equipment for the team, run many fundraising and social events, inaugurated a Player of the Year trophy and presentation and now a Player of the Month trophy, runs coaches to all away games, put a plaque on the Blue Boar commemorating the founding of SUFC, fully supported the plans the club had for the new stadium by meeting officers and councillors of the Borough Council, helped in the Save Our Southend campaign by raising over 2,500 signatures in support of the scheme and had many meetings with the club to discuss issues of mutual interest and build bridges between the fans and the football club. It shows Trevor actually had much to be proud of. The meeting thanked him for his strong chairmanship and all his past efforts.

Treasurer Craig Fillary spoke to his report on the annual accounts. The Trust had £17,897 in funds as at June 30 and our cash is clearly safe with Craig. Whittingtons Chartered Accountants of Billericay compiled the unaudited accounts for this period under Section 249A(1) of the Companies Act and it was agreed they will remain as our auditors.

Annual Membership for both SUSCT and Southend Junior Shrimpers will continue at £5, the same as when the SUI SC kicked off nearly four years ago. We must be the only organisation in the world which seems completely untouched by inflation.

Then came the election of officers, which were as follows.

Chairman: No nominations - TBA.

Vice-Chairman: Nominated Richard Coxell - elected.

Acting Company Secretary/Treasurer: Nominated Craig Fillary - elected.

Fund-Raising Officer: No nominations - TBA.

Public Relations and Club Liaison: Nominated Kevin Feasey - elected.

Membership Secretary: Nominated Theresa Wellham - elected.

Trust Development Officer: Nominated Paul FitzGerald - elected.

Committee: Nominated and elected were Terry Jeffreys, Brian Cotgrove, Mike Smith, Paul Yeomanson, Trevor Bashford and Nigel Rickard. Further committee members can also be co-opted. The first meeting of the new guard is due on Monday, December 17.

And that was that. It is clear the Trust needs to steady the ship after its damaging recent wobble. Hopefully that can now happen with the personnel now on board. A special 'good to have you with us' to new boys Brian, Mike and Paul.

A big welcome back into the Blues ranks as well to David Crown. If he can get the likes of Tes and Mark Rawle finding the back of the net in the same way he used to, as well as taking some of the weight off Rob Newman,

then the future will look a lot brighter than it does right now as we languish a mere five points off the foot of the Third Division.

But it's cheerio Daniel Webb. Is he really as good as his dad clearly thinks? I have never been wholly convinced and I cannot believe Spud sees him as the man to replace Bobby Zamora!

Nice to see the Phoenix League reduced to ashes. The usual delusions of grandeur from a few clubs who simply cannot stomach the fact that their days as 'big' clubs are well and truly over. If the likes of Bradford City ever were big, of course.

Not much new on the Fossetts plans, lack of them or shall we linger at the Hall. Bit of a contrast to Arsenal's Ashburton Grove relocation, which I have a sneaky feeling is going to get the full go-ahead no problem. But you can't help wondering what the reaction might have been if the Gunners' new stadium bid had come from one of the lesser mortals. I suspect the final outcome may well have been the same as we seem to have ended up with.

Our FA Cup draw could have been kinder - assuming we see off the Spireites and make it to face Tranmere. Rovers are always 'hard to beat'. Another 30-second goal like Andy Rammell fired in against them on the opening day a few seasons back plus a few more on top would go down well. As for the World Cup draw, let's just pray Michael Owen stays free of injury.

The latest Trust purchases for the football club, which have caused so much senseless strife, have been agreed with Rob Newman and sorted. In other words, a selection of footballs and 30 winter training jackets. Meanwhile Mark Rawle got the vote for the second Player of the Month award for November and, hopefully, will receive the impressive trophy against Chesterfield.

So what of United's latest performances. Here is the rundown as I can give it.

LUTON (FA CUP 1st rd, H, 17/11, W 3-2): At last. Much more like it. Decent crowd of 6,500-plus and we responded with 90 minutes of effort, fight and not a little skill to bounce out the Hatters. Quality fare for watching dignitaries like Sir Teddy and Graham 'Gissa Job' Kelly. Not even another abysmal show with the whistle by Barry Knight, honorary president of the Joe Ross School of Refereeing, could halt our progress as he and his linesmen somehow let the visitors get away with one blatant offside and one blatant push to rack up their two goals. Fortunately, we had Tes and Mark Rawle, giving as impressive a display by a Blues front two as I have seen in many a long year, countering with three corkers of their own to see us home. Only downside was what we got dished up with in round two.

PLYMOUTH (H, 20/11, L 1-0). A chance to make the rest of the division sit up and take notice by ending the front-running Devonians unbeaten away record. Sadly, we blew it. Once again we gave away far too much ball. Perhaps it was the strangeness of playing in white shirts at home, thanks to the ref perceiving a kit clash between our navy and their bottle green. Or the lack of a pre-match perk-up from the absent Pulse Cheerleaders. But it also has to be admitted that Argyle were a very useful outfit. New boy Steven Clark showed a couple of magnificent pieces of skill wide right, only to find himself starved of the ball for long periods of the game. Pity he crocked himself, too. Separating Tes and Mark Rawle for the last 20 minutes did not come off - and nor did finishing with four strikers. Chances missed proved costly and this may just have been the result that said: Not this season. Take away the vocal visiting contingent of around 400 and our representation at the hall amounted to 3,300 - meaning about 1,200 home fans who watched us see off Luton were so impressed they stayed away for our biggest league game so far. Not a solid base for a productive future.

SHREWSBURY (A, 24/11, L 2-0). Another abject away day by all accounts for the few faithful present. No need to say more, except if we do not turn our travelling form round soon the old grim reaper could start sharpening his scythe. Hello to GARY HORNE and PAUL TAYLOR. They failed to present themselves at

their pick-up points, meaning what should have been a full Trust coach was two short. This cost their 47 fellow journeymen a £2 rebate each. I am sure those who lost out will want to say a big thank-you to the guilty men.

LINCOLN (H, 1/12, D 1-1). Not even Imps boss Alan Buckley could understand how his team left the Hall with a point. Leaving an opposing striker with no defender within six yards of him proved a costly error, but Tes (get him on that new long-term contract, Rob) swiftly turned the tables by rounding off a neatly worked equaliser. Mark Rawle hit a post, but the winner we should have had just would not come. Too generous for our own goods again. It has to stop. The SJS was launched officially, so the best of luck to Rosemary Berry and her team.

CHESTERFIELD (FA CUP 2nd rd, A, 8/12, D 1-1). I was gutted to see that vintage explosion of Blue joy on Match of the Day as Tes fired us in front, knowing that under normal circumstances I would have been part of the celebration. Almost as gutted as seeing Damon Searle turned inside out by Martyn Booty of all people in the build-up to their last-gasp equaliser. But there is no reason why we cannot win the replay and then dump the Birkenhead brigade. Well done to United and Chris Berry for the brilliant way they got eight coaches containing 375 people to the match in great style. Ron was a happy man at the final whistle and that can be no bad thing. It should have been 376, but somehow poor Simon Rutter got left behind at The Elms. Our apologies and, irrespective of where the blame lay, Simon can look forward to a free trip to a game of his choice before the end of the season.

Chris is currently taking bookings for Hull on Friday, December 21. And anyone who has travelled with the Trust to any previous league game this season can go for FREE - as long as they make the trip dressed as Father Christmas!!! Ho, ho, ho etc etc.

Remember I mentioned in the last newsletter those lads from West Leigh Junior wearing all manner of football shirts bar Southend. I wrote to the headmistress, Mrs Wolfe, wondering if any of them might be interested in joining the SJS. She did not even have the courtesy to reply. If any of you have kids who go to West Leigh, like I once did, what has happened to this once great school?

Strange that no Blues players have made it into the last 50 for the European Player of the Year. For example, who in their right mind would pick that goalkeeping clown Barthez ahead of Darryl?

That domestic sprinkler demonstration advertised on the football club website for one day at Boots and Laces looked fascinating. Anyone make it along?

I see Mark Wright paid for his spat with Joe Ross with his job. I hope no racial abuse from the former Oxford boss was involved. 'Joe you are a rubbish ref' should have done the trick. Interesting, too, that two red cards given to Oxford players by Ross in the game that caused the bust-up have since been rescinded by the League.....

Great for Martin Carruthers to hit two goals for Scunthorpe to help see Brentford out of the FA Cup. Shame, though, he could not manage that one at Griffin Park last season so we could have squashed the Bees in the LDV area final!

I know things are not always ideal at the Hall, but surely Carlisle and Halifax are the true comedians of the lower echelons. Carlisle recently booted out a 17-year-old drummer after complaints about the racket he was making, while Alan Little's new club cut the capacity in their North Stand by 1,000 for the FA Cup visit of Stoke so they could save £6,000 on portable toilets. What a bunch of loo-sers.

Nothing personal, but I welcome the return to the team of Scott Forbes in place of Leon Johnson. Something I did not know, though, was that Leon apparently leads a double life. According to Sky Sports, Leon Johnson scored a touchdown for the Chicago Bears against the Detroit Lions last week. What an all-rounder.

Right, that does it. Fingers crossed for Rochdale and Chesterfield, but if this is going to get out before Christmas - thanks again, Terry - it has to go out now. Best wishes to all Trust members for Christmas and 2002. Perhaps the turn in the year will see the turn in United's fortunes we all want to see.

Any comeback, comment etc, e-mail me at nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk I will be back there shortly I hope - and at the Hall, too.

Yours in insularity.

NR (14/12)

PS Strike? What strike?