

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 35

TIGER WOODS has said he wants a piece of the action, even without appearance money. In fact, he has said he will pay to play! Darren and Lee declared: "Just tell us when and where." Jack Nicklaus announced: "I might come out of retirement for this one."

So what exactly has got the greats of the golfing world – Mr G included – so fired up? It is the possible chance of competing in one of the world's most prestigious new tournaments, one already looking a certain future addition to the European Tour – the SUSCT Golf Day. Exact location has still to be pinpointed – most likely venues are Castle Point or the Essex Golf Centre at Southend, probably around September time. But first the number of entrants has to be ascertained. So if you fancy yourself as an Open champ and can wield a club to an acceptable standard – ie better than Belfairs pitch and putt on a Sunday afternoon – send me your name and a contact address (preferably e-mail) asap. To start with the preference is for SUSCT members only. But if we do not get adequate numbers from the membership, we might open it to some select outsiders. NO bandits. Ideal entry would be about 30 – and I can think of five already. Once the numbers are there, we will come to cost. Whatever that is, it should be less than United manage to charge. But a non-returnable deposit will be required. So dust the cobwebs off your niblicks and spoons and then send your yeas (with genuine details of handicaps if possible) to nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk by March 22. We will take it from there.

As I pen this particular part of the newsletter, I think I would rather stick to golf. It is less than three hours since the Sky Sports videprinter announced: FT Hartlepool 5 Southend 1. I cannot remember when we were last hit for five (oh yes, it was at Carlisle in January 1998) and this result only confirms we are just playing out time. It is enough to drive you to drink – and when you see that the club are banging up the bar prices, you begin to wonder if there is not something more sinister behind our lack of form.

I can also reveal that Rob Newman is SUING the football club. But more of that later.

I dread to think what the gate for Bristol Rovers might be (a putrid 2,477 as it turned out, so don't breathe a word to Colin Wagman). Nationwide gates are supposedly up by 16 per cent this season, meaning some clubs somewhere must be enjoying an even bigger bonanza because ours are down, by my reckoning, a fraction over 7 per cent. The average after Rovers is 4,001. A position unlikely to change until the lads start doing the bizzo again regularly on the green sward.

Never mind, your committee's enthusiasm remains as upbeat as it can be in the current circumstances, with two meetings - January 30 and February 18 - to report on since NUMBER 34.

The meeting on January 30 was held at Paul FitzGerald's very pleasant abode in Leigh, with games room for the boys and banquet laid on by Mrs F. We will have to go back.

It has been agreed that an update of our website (www.susc.co.uk) would be highly beneficial and, all being well, that will be under way shortly when we have decided on the lucky operatives. Net nut Dave Scriven is in charge.

The Hall of Fame is a goer, too. If you have pictures or items that you think would hang proudly on the walls of the Shrimpers Club then contact Richard Coxell (coxell@btinternet.com) or Mike Smith (mike.smith@tfeurope.com) and give them the details. Also consult the website. Mike has set up a database of all the nominations for player inclusion. Dave Goody is also assisting and, needless to say, has some memorabilia which I am sure would go down a storm – as long as security is guaranteed. Mike is looking to a launch next season, with further discussion on that at the next committee meeting.

Carl Hutchings' Player of the Month award for December – and look how he rewards us by moving to Orient for another 50p a week – did not receive the fanfare it should have had pre-match before the

Torquay clash. As this is an award with the full sanction of the football club and there is a donation to charity on the player's behalf, we at least expect it to be announced . We have raised this at the most recent liaison group meeting and put our point across as to what we perceive to be the reasons for the Torquay joke. We will see what happens in future, when there may well be more to say. Mark Rawle will be donating his £50 to a cancer charity. But our big worry right now is getting the trophy back from Hutch.

Terry Jeffreys continues to beaver away on bringing our membership situation bang up to date, aided by Chris Berry. No names, obviously, but we have recently received one donation of £240 and another for £80. To whichever generous members were responsible, a huge thank-you. We have a number of members who make standing order donations of at least £5 a month and, in recognition of this, the committee has agreed that these members will no longer be asked to stump up their membership fees as well. Remember, any problems on membership or receipt of your newsletter, just contact Terry on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com (And can Terry have his stamps money?!)

Paul has now made contact with all SUSCT members who are also shareholders. Could be very important in future.

Delancey are still not making their latest position clear on the way ahead and, for commercial reasons, that is the way things are likely to stay. Therefore Paul has been pushing to get a meeting with the council to stress the urgency of getting some concrete proposals on the table for what comes next. Paul, Kevin and members Garry Smith and Hugh Cumberland will now be meeting chief executive George Krawiec for an update on where things stand as we move into what could be the decisive summer period.

It's always good to salute our hardy band of travellers, most of whom are good as gold on the SUSCT coaches. Carlisle (not again), the Os (let's take six) and Lincoln (two?) are on the horizon (March 5, 12 and 16), so if you want to book just give Chris Berry a call on his usual hotlines – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698.

But there are still some down sides. One member's behaviour means his running ban will remain in place, while two lapsed members have been banned from travelling with us sine die. Nor will they be allowed to renew their membership. Another member who threw a bottle on to the pitch at Darlington has at least seen the error of his ways after a dressing-down from Messrs Berry and Bashford. He has been banned until the end of the season for an incredibly stupid first offence that could have had dire consequences for both us and United, who have been informed. All concerned have received letters from Trevor on behalf of the committee confirming the above.

Next a wake-up call for GRAHAM TAYLOR. No, not the Aston Villa manager, but a member who seems to have such a severe case of amnesia that he has forgotten to turn up for THREE trips – Darlington, Halifax and Cheltenham. Graham, you either have money to burn or should read the travel schedules more closely. And where were you FRED FARTHING for Cheltenham? Otherwise a recent pleasing level of almost no no-shows. Keep it up – or cough up. Thanks also to United for their subsidised travel for the jaunt to Whaddon Road and if you got Hartlepool for a fiver it meant you deserved it. By the time we get to Macclesfield on the last day of the season, those present will deserve a celebration of some sort – even if it will not be promotion. That could turn out to be further free travel for any regular who dresses up to follow a theme yet to be settled on. Keep watching this space – and talking to Chris.

The Southend Junior Shrimpers badges have arrived, so buy one for your Blues babes from Mr Berry whenever you like.

We had a few fundraising ideas between us. Timing seems to be the major problem. The Quiz Night was set for late March, but then a key fanatic with a lust for prizes announced he was at a wedding that day. April 13 was next up, but Boots and Laces was booked. So stand by for further details asap. Kevin Feasey and Mike Smith investigated a possible Beer Festival, but, accompanied by major hangovers, had to report this did not look viable. The Player of the Year night was booked for April 24 in the Shrimpers Club, but staff changes at the Hall saw the message not passed on and United have gone and booked their presentation evening for the same date. We are now looking at an alternative time for our far superior gathering, so keep an eye on forthcoming programmes and NUMBER 36. Also start considering who you think should cop our

prestigious honour for 2001-02. It would be nice to have a 'star' to do the presentations, too. We are looking. The Golf Day plans you have already read about, a pre-season barbecue is up for future discussion and there are one or two other irons in the fire. So you can see we are not sitting on our a**es all of the time.

Chris Powell, our Southend, Charlton and England hero, is keen to meet up with his old 1991 promotion pals, so Paul is having a word to see if United can sort something out. Great photo opportunity. Sir Stanley has also been on TalkSPORT and apparently did not know that there is a suite at Roots Hall named after him. Let's get him down for an official unveiling. We'll have our biggest gate of the season for sure.

We are keen to get Derek Murr reinstated as our Trust secretary. Derek had to give up the post, but is now able to take it on again. And as he has a love for the intricacies of the job that no one else shares, unless there are any serious objections he is invited back on board.

We are looking for the member who has supported Blues the longest – and can give us some proof. I celebrate 40 years in April, Ron next to me in the East Greens has done 50-plus, but that is still nothing to current leading contender and committee member Brian Cotgrove, who has been suffering for 64 years. Any advance on that?

The football club invited us to take part in their company football tournament on April 27. Playing at the Hall would be great, but at £750 plus VAT we felt we had to say 'Thanks, but no thanks'. United seem to think that if they can make this sort of event a 'company' day, like their golf dates, they can ratchet up the price. But they must be losing out on a hell of a lot of people who would willingly turn out if the prices were more reasonable.

Anyone seen last season's sponsored shirts? We are seeking them urgently. Plus there is a rumour the club still has some old Stanley shirts. Now what we could do with those.....

The last Liaison Group meeting was on February 13, when Geoffrey King got together with Paul and Kevin. The main discussion points were: Subsidised Travel for away fans – GK will be writing to other league clubs for their views, as this would have to be a two-way street to be successful. Catering – Lack of lids for hot drinks should no longer be a problem and new catering equipment is on order. Changes have been made to personnel in the West Stand. One or two queries had been made about the 'hair length' of those serving. Would you care for dandruff in your burger, sir? Stools for ball boys/girls – The Trust has agreed to purchase 15 plastic stools for the kids to use on match days and, wait for it, Dave Jobson now has to be shown an example of the type to be purchased to ensure that storage will not be a problem. (Any chance of some leather armchairs in the East Greens?) F Block and the response from the fans – The club has used its website, the Echo and the 'Shrimpers Mailing List' to explain why a return to terracing is not a current option. GK accepts the fact that away fans standing will cause ill-feeling. He is meeting local police shortly to try to get them to back off a bit on the issue. PF said the Trust would continue to urge members to contact their MPs if they wanted to press the issue of a return to terracing.

Sammy the Shrimp wants a refit – and not a moment too soon. Lee Mason, the lucky lad sweltering inside our world-famous crustacean, has asked if we can get him some repairs done. Those muddy feet certainly look the worse for wear. KF is to have a chinwag with Brian Wheeler about the Trust helping out with costs, because these costumes are big bucks. Free Programmes at Matches – a non-starter. AOB – Don't lose your season tickets in future because you could face a penalty. Next season the tickets are likely to be of differing colours in a fraud-prevention exercise. Web ticketing – testing of the system has begun. Once it goes live, supporters will be able to buy tickets via the club's official website. The first order will have to be collected in person, subsequent orders can be delivered. This should prevent away fans butting in.

Afraid our recent form does not make for great reading. But what has been going off? Find out.

TORQUAY (H, 26/1, D 1-1): Kids got in for a quid – but many were ready to pay a fiver to get out well before the finish. Told you we would know just where we stood after this game and I think I was right. Mid-table and that's that for this season. Hard to believe we could have gone so far backwards in just four days since trouncing Hull. And let's not try and blame the dodgy weather. Kevin Maher returned, but, I am

afraid, we did not look the better for it. Poor Stuart Thurgood once more showed he is not the answer wide right - and even less of the answer wide left. The Gulls, in dire straits third from bottom, were more than value for their point and, but for Darryl, could have had all three. Tes looked heartily sick as he was hauled off. The service he and BB got again was desperate. Carl Hutchings received our December Player of the Month award from Paul Yeomanson before the game, though you would never have known it. Wasn't the presentation on the precious schedule? Every other b*****'s was.

HALIFAX (A, 29/1, D 1-1): Not exactly Real Madrid v Eintracht Frankfurt for the 1,251 brave enough to turn up. Well done to the 120 or so Hall boys. Gary Jones proved he still likes scoring against us, though very rarely anyone else, and it took a stroke of own-goal luck to get us level eight minutes from time. But that could change as Leon Johnson has claimed it. What will the League say? Certainly not a result that roared 'promotion'. In fact, it did not even whimper 'play-offs'. Halifax have just signed Scotty on a short-term contract. Not sure why. Must be Alan Little trying to preserve a record currently standing at 2 wins out of 22 games. He must be on a mega deal, though. The Shaymen have just sacked their commercial manger and shut down the club shop. They cannot have been amused that a Blues fan ran off with their 50p raffle prize.

CHELTENHAM (A, 1/2, P-P): The Berry brigade were within three miles of Whaddon Road when the ref put the final dampener on this fixture by ruling the pitch waterlogged. So it was about-turn and back home.

YORK (H, 9/2, L 0-1): Surely as bad as it gets. The combined debts of ourselves and the Minstermen may add up to something substantial off the pitch, but on it there was paucity aplenty. A minute's silence for the late Princess Margaret pre-kick-off should have been followed by one for us on the final whistle. Leon Cort could walk tall as our Star Man by a street, BB never stopped running and Darryl did his job. But if the rest were satisfied with their efforts then 'Houston, we have a problem'. The young ladies from Buckhurst Hill might have been more effective. York were the weakest team we have faced at the Hall all season and, even after Mark Beard's brainless red card, should still have been despatched. That they were not - and actually won thanks to a loopy little header - said plainly and simply: Finis!

SWANSEA (A, 15/2, L 3-2): Start off with five at the back and then concede one in the first minute. Errr no, I don't think that is how it is supposed to work. Afraid it was a Darryl clanger for the opener, our custodian had no chance with the free-kick second and Mr Whelan held his hands up for the third. So he owed us that twinkle-toed finish near the end, which, of course, meant nothing. Leon got on the mark again, so one plus point from a night to forget. 'We gave ourselves a mountain to climb', said Rob. Yes - Everest.

CHELTENHAM (A, 19/2, D 1-1): My spy at Whaddon Road said that yet again we never started playing until we went behind. Cheltenham had lost only three of their previous 28 games before this clash, so a point does not look bad. But maybe if Mark Rawle had taken the great chance that fell to him we could have had all three. At least the boss showed he still knows how to find the onion bag.

HARTLEPOOL (A, 23/2, L 5-1): Hail the heroes who travelled to the snow-blasted north to endure our severest tanking in four years. The reports suggested we were quite good at times - it was what went on in between that was the problem. We conceded the Third Division's first goal of the afternoon and it was downhill from there. Pool boss Chris Turner said they could have had eight or nine and Rob admitted we had been taught a lesson. I think the lesson is also that some of the current line-up are, in fact, not up to the job and have to go before next season if we are not to be mid-table fodder - or worse - next time around. BB bagged our strike in injury-time, though did we still have anyone left of the 100 or so stoics on hand to witness it. The vice-chairman said he could hear the moans from the wedding he was attending in Morpeth!

BRISTOL ROVERS (H, 26/2, W 2-1): Deserters among the rank and file. An acreage of emptiness in the East Greens and our lowest gate for some moons. The bloke in front of me was in such a state of low esteem, presumably at current showings, that he had 'Duffer' printed on the back of his jacket. Better spirit on show, though, BB never stopped running again, Tes packed a mean punch with his penalty and well-taken winner and Leon Cort had yet another good'un. We are out of range of Halifax now so the least we can do is give it a right good go until the end of the season. Solid steps have been taken to repair the Frank Walton Stand clock, which at least no one can say is ever wrong these days. The hands have been removed.

Bit more cost paring on the home front with the farewell hankies waved at Shane Wardley (looked a bit frail), Gareth Risbridger (all action for 60 seconds v Darlington) and Edmund Chibogu (hit at least one for the reserves). And I see Rob is taking a tough one-year deal line with Darryl, Leon Cort and Kevin Maher. The difference is we probably cannot afford to let those three leave. Surely KM could not consider the pathetic Orient shilling more valuable than United's. One or two of the others offered new deals, though, I am not totally convinced about.

Have we won the lottery? Otherwise where did the money come from to sign Steven Clark. Needless to say he has been injured since putting pen to paper. Is he the new Ben Smith? I cannot see Brian Barry-Murphy staying past his loan date and Ian Selley will have to a lot better than during his last sojourn to get the vote.

David Morley cannot stop popping them in. Plymouth and Rushden have been his latest victims during a loan spell at Oxford.

See we found a hat-trick hero in the reserves. Stand up Sean Coburn. Well done – now go and put some pounds on.

Message to Phil Whelan: Abandoned – game is called off during play. Postponed – game is called off before play and will take place at a future date. Cancelled – a game is called off for good.

I think we will be bringing back conscription so that the front lines are adequately manned should David Lloyd and his acolytes get within sniffing distance of the Hall. Perhaps he just misheard someone asking if he fancied another crack at the Hull. Anyway, sharpen those bolt cutters.

The latest issue of When Saturday Comes revealed that the club with the most managers since 1982 was.....yes, SUFC. Top of the table, for once, with 16 - one ahead of Cardiff, Lincoln and Notts County. I'll let you name them all. Bottom of the pile were Crewe and M***** U***** with two apiece.

Did you see that cracking goal recalled Leo scored at Stockport? Letting the ball bounce a couple of times, he spotted the keeper advancing off his line and sent a high, pinpoint lob soaring one bounce into the top of the net - his own! That devastating strike sealed a 3-1 win for Nottingham Forest and probably another reserve stint for Herr Roget.

That was a tragic story concerning the death of Middlesbrough defender Colin Cooper's two-year-old son, who choked on a small toy. What a dreadful loss. I remember Colin Cooper best from his Millwall days, especially his appearance at the Hall in that live TV match back in 1993 when he tried to cut Sir Stanley in two on the half-way line and was sent off for his troubles. Otherwise, a very good defender, if not quite England class. Also sad that Derek Woodley has passed away, aged only 59. Did not seem to be a hint of trouble when he appeared with a group of his contemporaries during the Swansea game on October 13. 'The Fox' played 177 times for Blues, scored 23 goals and never seemed to lose his permanent tan. A very quick winger who provided reliable service for the likes of Ken Jones, Ray Smith and Mike Beesley. Also allegedly scored the fastest-ever goal at Wembley – in 13 seconds for England Schoolboys in 1957. RIP.

I know we moan about prices occasionally, but what about this for taking the proverbial. A colleague of mine is, for his sins, a Hamsters season ticket holder in their new stand. His tickets per Premiership match work out at £28 per game, but, of course, there are no Cup matches included. So when he rolled up at Upton Park to claim his seat for the Chelsea replay, he was told it would cost him.....£46, take it or leave it. Like the deluded fool he is, he took it - and got his just reward as John Terry's injury-time header sent the Hamsters spinning to FA Cup oblivion for another season.

The African Nations Cup offered us an interesting pointer as to how we might change our fortunes around - ju-ju. When one of the Cameroon coaching staff tried to curse the pitch before they played Mali in the semi-finals, he was promptly set upon by security guards, had his keks tugged down so he could not do a runner and was marched off in handcuffs. I wonder who do voodoo in Rob's first-team squad.

Talking of Rob, who has been panicking about him suing the club. Did I say it was our Rob? Actually it is the Rob Newman who broke his leg while playing for Harwich and Parkeston. He wants £60,000 out of opponents Stowmarket for loss of earnings as a semi-pro caused by what he claims was a reckless tackle. Blimey, how much were they paying him?

Never thought a Third Division club would have cause to praise a Premiership chairman. But credit to old Mohammad Fayed at Fulham for putting £50,000 of FA Cup gate receipts into the York coffers. All he needs to do now is stop trying to pretend to be a fan and get rid of that daft scarf.

I have to admit that I have never had much time for bands at football. If I had been stuck near that lot at Hillsborough on a regular basis, who double as the England band, I think I would have been in a mental hospital by now. But did you see why Sheffield United banned them from the derby at Bramall Lane? They might have damaged the ground. United safety officer (how the hell did we ever manage without them?) Steve Hicks declared in all seriousness: "A report from the Institution of Structural Engineers states the playing of music can stimulate co-ordinated crowd movement. This induces dynamic problems which might lead to unacceptable structural movement." Steve, take your report and shove it where the sun don't shine!!!

And on that delightful, we end another few thousand lovingly lingered-over words. Any comeback of whatever sort, you know where I am – nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (27/2)

PS1. Many thanks to all those who contributed ideas as to how I could restore my Word 2000 to sanity. I am afraid the final credit must go, though, to Linda F Johnson, a Microsoft expert who gives the benefit of her advice on her own website. And if you have such a problem as I did, I recommend it. Sadly, 10 days later my hard disk committed suicide, so while waiting to get that sorted the bulk of this missive has been done at the office. Afraid that is why it is later than it would have been normally. Thanks to Rupert, though.

PS2. The 'Flahaven' shirt is hanging proudly in the kitchen. Total cost: £165.67.

PS3. On the day the name of David Lloyd sent a shudder through the town, I was taking a walk through an area that, for security reasons, shall remain nameless. Suddenly, I sensed the presence of a figure well used to exposing the murky misdeeds of big business grafters. Deep Throat emerged silently from the shadows and whispered: "Remember HPC." With that, this sentinel of all that is holy at the Hall vanished into the late-night mist.