

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 36

IT'S that time again. Time to honour the Blues stalwart who you feel deserves the SUSCT's Player of the Season award in the wake of previous winners Nathan Jones and Kevin Maher. Voting, as ever, is for members only and this year can be done in not one, but two separate ways. Firstly by e-mail to pots.sufc@ntlworld.com (remember to include your membership number) or by filling in the slip you should find at the end of NEWSLETTER NUMBER 36 and despatching it post haste to Terry Jeffreys, 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR The big prize will be handed over on the evening of THURSDAY, APRIL 25, kick-off 7.30pm, in the Shrimpers Club. There will also be recognition of the second and third players in our poll and all the victors will be awarded sums of money to be donated to charity. It is another evening which demands as many of our members as possible attend, so please do your best to be there – just like Rob and the lads have promised. And don't forget your spare cash for the raffle! Entry is free, ie cheaper than the £35 per-head plus VAT bash that United are staging the evening before – though, regrettably, we are not laying on a three-course dinner and 'top comedian'!

There are also a couple of important dates to remember for our faithful away travellers. Director of Trips Chris Berry wants to end the season in style – even if it is in the worst possible taste. The top 30 on his list of those with the most miles under their belts for this campaign will all be going to Plymouth HALF-PRICE on April 6. There will also be an award for the star traveller/s at the POTS night. And for the last game of the season at Macclesfield on April 20, travel will be FREE for all those who have been on at least one non-subsidised away journey this season and who travel in fancy dress. You cannot say fairer than that and these offers again prove what a brilliant job Chris and his cohorts like Trevor B and Brian Cotgrove have done on the travel front once again in 2001-02. Book with Chris for our final treks on the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. And DEAN ALLUM (121), where were you for the Lincoln journey? Not at your pick-up point, that is for sure.

The lucky 30 who can look forward on present figures to what they hope will be a bargain day of Argyle trouncing in the West Country are: Brian Cotgrove, Matthew Overall (both the maximum 8,814 miles pre-Kidderminster), Barry Bettis, Phil Cox, Hazel and Peter Wayland, Dean Allum, Trevor Bashford, Jim Hummerstone, Roy Keyes, Michael Shawyer, Rebecca Keyes, John Wallis, Phil Lamb, James Bentall, Mark Wallis, Joe Elliott, Nicky Stott, Alan Perry, Andrew Perry, Chris Berry, Shane Chapman, Graham Overall, Steven Smith, Thomas Berry, Theresa Wellham, Danny 'Alien' Mays, Chris Wright, Andy Ruffell and Paul Grange. Our salutations to you all.

I had a nasty scare when I picked up the Currant Bun the other morning. Southend defence worker arrested for alleged spying. An Essex Police spokesman said: "He has been charged with obtaining information intended to be passed to an enemy." Was one of our back four trying to offload details of Rob's master plan for next season to Layabout Road? No, the answer was much more mundane. Some bloke from Rochford had been trying to flog systems secrets to the Russians. Let's just hope he gave them 5-3-2. We can guarantee it's rubbish.

Right, time for a review of official business, better known as the committee meeting of March 25. And to begin with it appears that the chances of seeing 'The Team They Call United', a film rated as important to the genre as 'Battleship Potemkin', are currently about as likely as Blues still making the top three. Apparently the only video was purloined by a spurned wife and we are talking around £5,000 to get the epic remade.

Entries for the Golf Day have not exactly been flooding in. If I do not already have you on my list and you feel you could 'hack' it, e-mail me at the usual address: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

Membership secretary Terry has now culled those who have not responded to either the general reminders or final reminders that the time for renewal has arrived. It has reduced our overall tally of faithful, but not by as much as we might have feared. The current paid-up membership stands at 752, still outstanding for a football club boasting an average gate that has now slipped below the 4,000 mark. The number includes Phil Potter from Memphis, who also sent a £20 donation – via his girlfriend's credit card. Clearly a shrewd financial operator. If

your membership renewal is due, please rejoin promptly. It makes life so much easier. Remember, too, to contact Terry either by mail or by e-mail (terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com) if you are having any newsletter receipt problems.

Next up was Kevin Feasey's take on the recent meeting that he, Paul FitzGerald and Hugh Cumberland had with council chief George Krawiec concerning what lies on the United horizon – if anything. After all, even our old sparring partners from Barnet have just got the all-clear for a new £12million redevelopment of their current locale. Indications from GK are that there are now just two possibilities for a site for a new United ground – Fossetts Farm or Southend Airport land. And as Fossetts does not look like happening (10 per cent chance), it could be a question of waiting five or six years until we can touch down at the airport (60 per cent chance). This stretch of greenery is in Rochford, but owned by Southend – by far the more powerful authority. But what of the Hall, you ask? It seems the Hall will only ever get planning permission for housing. A supermarket looks out, even though the land value might shoot up. The underlying message from GK appeared positive – that Southend Council both want and require United to survive and that nothing will happen to the Hall unless the club's future is assured. Kevin felt reassured we will not fold through any politico's action.

Even GK admitted that the football club is in a far healthier position now than it was two or three years ago – despite the current huge rent debt and other bills to pay. The council view is an excellent job has been done in turning round the club's financial fortunes.

ANSBURY still wish to develop Fossetts, but with a lot of retail construction. The council will not go for that as they do not want any exits from the town centre. United are saying there will be an announcement soon on what can be expected, but no one really seems to know what that might mean. Ron has also apparently upset a few people with his Martin Dawn purchase of the old Odeon site. (I take it he beat his bankruptcy order in the High Court then!) But overall Kevin reported that he felt reassured that United will not be evicted from its 'spiritual home' unless there is somewhere else for us to go. And such feelings have been a rarity in recent seasons. The council allegedly want the football club to be something the borough can be proud of.

Silence within the club can genuinely be for commercial reasons rather than something conspiratorial and, for now, the committee is recommending we keep our powder dry. In fact, Kevin is even reporting unprecedented levels of amicability within the Roots Hall environs towards us and vice-versa. And someone always told us that was impossible! Holding 2002-03 season ticket prices at this season's level should certainly keep United fans happy and the better concessionary prices are a clear sign that, at last, somebody up there is listening when the supporters express a view. Good to see. Prestigious friendlies v the Hamsters and Charlton will not do the coffers any harm either at the end of July. They could be paying us to come and watch Wimbledon, though.

Sammy the Shrimp. Our irradiated mutant is looking decidedly under the weather. It seems he has never been quite 100 per cent since his feet disintegrated the first time they were put in the wash. Also, wearing his wooden head is apparently a true labour of love – just ask Kevin. An improvement on the terracotta eiderdown he may be, but, sadly, United have decided that now is the hour for our Sammy to be put out of his misery. He will then rise phoenix-like, in brand new guise, at the Meet The Blues Day in July. Only problem is the cost of the relaunch, but the Trust has agreed to help United part-fund the cost of resurrecting our friendly crustacean – with provisos. We shall want some input on design and some recognition of our sponsorship on his eventual kit. United also hope to raise a few quid by flogging off Sammy's current bonce – so start saving.

Kevin is pushing ahead, too, with plans for the 92 clubs in 92 hours. This will now be a fund-raiser for the Trust only. Paul Yeomanson is the first person confirmed to join Kevin in the car, which we are trying to get from a friendly local dealer. The aim is to finish in the run-up to the first home game of next season, arriving in style at the Hall prior to kick-off. The evening of that first home game is now the date we are looking at for the next quiz night – chiefly because of the quizmaster's non-availability for almost the whole of April and May. Vive les plums!

Mike Smith is doing sterling work on the Hall of Fame project and revealed some beautifully designed templates that should eventually provide fitting tributes to some of those who have done United proud in the blue shirt over the years.

Sad to hear that there are still some concerns about the grub and service in the West Stand. Against Scunny it seems the chips ran out before the match and the coffee was all gone by half-time. Definitely not good enough and we shall again be pushing for action. You can also still get that dandruff garnish, as well. Mmmmmm, yummy!

And finally the Player of the Month award for February was a major success at the Rochdale game because it worked as it was supposed to. Our fave jewel of a matchday announcer, Brian Wheeler, was only too happy to let everyone know the presentation was going ahead - and has said he will do so in future to avoid any further incidents of crass immaturity.

Next, for readers both far and near, a look at how the lads have been performing since NUMBER 35.

OXFORD UNITED (H, 2/3, D 2-2): Surely this had to be the game that gave us our first two wins on the trot of the season. Wrong. We got into pole position, then blew it with the misplaced sense of generosity that makes us the side we currently are. David Morley's performance did not suggest we have missed anything and the way he hauled down BB showed there has been no change in his sense of timing. Tes tucked away the penalty intelligently, Leon Cort capped yet another good game with a solid header and we were all set. But more dithering in the 45th minute proved fatal again. BB then fired wide from clean through and somehow that said 'This is not going to be our day - again'. Scott Forbes' daft handball for their penalty equaliser proved the theory correct. Only four Pulses once more, so it is quite possible the pre-match bloodflow was not all it might have been among the boys in blue. Well, that's one excuse.

ARLISLE (A, 5/3, D 0-0): The brave Blue Army members in the crowd - reckoned to be all of 48 - hauled the total just over the 3,000 mark. A gallant 24 took the SUSCT charabanc, but was it worth the effort? Poorish pitch and dire weather made an unhappy combo and the game suffered as a consequence, especially with neither side having much to worry about thanks to Halifax now looking to have the black spot. Phil Whelan hit the bar for us when the Cumbrian News said he should have scored and they also rattled the woodwork. Carlisle boss Roddy Collins admitted we would probably be aggrieved we had not scored - a feeling hardly unique this season. The News also described Leon Cort as 'terrific'. It is getting to be a good habit. Rob was delighted that 'Every one of the players stood up to be counted'. What we would rather have counted was a goal!

ROCHDALE (H, 9/3, D 0-0): The omens were never promising from the moment before kick-off when I dropped my programme in the East Stand men's 'trough'. But a good wash under the basin tap and it came up like new! Leon Cort received his Player of the Month award for February pre-match from six-year-old SJS member Alexa Marshall. Boy, did she look excited. Pity her treat must have given her more excitement than the match. A blustery wind hardly helped, but could surely not be totally blamed for the fact we managed just one Stuart Thurgood 'shot' on target all afternoon. Did not see Ron in the directors' box. More pressing engagements? The Fosters was only £1 a pint in the Shrimpers Bar pre-match. If the offer had been on at the final whistle, the place would probably have been drunk dry as sorrows were drowned once again.

LEYTON ORIENT (A, 12/3, L 2-1): Almost like old times. Chicken and mushroom pie and chips out of the paper down Leyton High Road and an 1,100-strong Blue army massed together on a terrace. Ahhhh. Happy days. Pity the performance did not do us justice. We went down the pan thanks to a first-half show as dire as the performance of my quartet of yankee nags at Cheltenham earlier in the day. BB up front alone - doesn't work. Stuart Thurgood wide right - doesn't work. How many more times? Phil Whelan added a bit more umph up front after the break and Brian Barry-Murphy tucked his goal away well enough to give us a fleeting glimpse of a comeback we would love to have stuffed down Carl Hutchings' throat. But clearly the current side is going to need radical surgery - if possible - in the close-season if we are not go through all this again in 2002-03. And how many will hang around to watch that?

LINCOLN (A, 16/3, W 1-0): Something to celebrate at last. The Imps were moaning about offside as Steven Clark strode through to open his goals account for us. But in-depth analysis of the TV film on slow motion and

freeze frame proved the run was superbly timed along with the pass from the manager. Not a classic, but just now it is a case of all points gratefully received.

SCUNTHORPE (H, 23/3, W 2-0): Good mates are something special. So Steven Clark must have been really chuffed to see Stephen Broad describe him in the match programme as ‘the thickest man I have ever met. It’s frightening.’ Sadly Steven lived up to his reputation by dishing out a daft clip round the earhole to the Scunny defender who kicked him in the last 10 seconds to earn an automatic red card. It was the one real letdown of a fighting performance from a below-strength side. I have never seen a Blues player run further than BB did in the 90 minutes. The defence was solid under pressure, David McSweeney has been a revelation at centre-back, Kevin Maher was back up for it in midfield and Rob, after scoring possibly our goal of the season to cap a great build-up, had everyone on his side every time he tried to go through the gears and find overdrive. At last we proved we *can* win two on the trot – for the first time since December 2000. Martin Carruthers? Who’s he?

KIDDERMINSTER (A, 30/3, L 2-0): Perhaps we had a premonition all was not well with the Queen Mum. Or perhaps it was just that we did not have a fit forward. Whatever it was, a pleasant day out was ruined by the fact we rarely got going and were heading for Bo Diddley-squat once Dane Bo Henriksson had given Kiddie the lead. We had Good Friday. This was Bad Saturday.

Oh dear, Scotty’s new career at Halifax has not lasted long. He has now moved on to Stevenage Borough. Either way he was looking at a Conference career.

Talking of deals, it was hardly a shrewd one when the Nationwide opted to give TV coverage rights to ITV Digital. Their £315million is now looking like so much pie in the sky, with audiences for their matches down at the final curtain to about one man and his dog. And sometimes the dog was switching off. The ITV deal was never realistic – Sky bid around £190m – but yet again greed rather than reality got a grip of the Nationwide clubs’ senses. The consequences could now prove disastrous for some outfits around the country. Let’s hope we are not one of them. The News of the World reported that the accumulated debt of the Nationwide League clubs has reached a staggering £261m, with a minimum of 12 clubs in danger of going belly-up. We were not one of the 12 listed – but that looked to be because our financial figures were ‘unavailable’. It is hardest to feel sorry for those First Division outfits who have refused to cut their cloth according to their reduced status. But no, they have kept paying extortionate salaries to has-beens and never-will-bes and now the chickens have come rushing home to roost. Big time. As the ITV Digital ad said in our very own programme: It was not a mistake, it was a blunder.....

It might make some players whose contracts are due for renewal or renegotiation think twice about which side their bread is buttered. Most seem to have got the message at United – including Leon thank goodness – and it will be a brave man at Third Division level in the light of the TV cock-up who now thinks he is guaranteed employment next season at the club or level of his choice. We picked up Rio Alderton before the transfer deadline. I wonder if he is a bit of a comedian.

Anyone have a copy of Jon Ladd’s Guide to Football Grounds? He gives us a Total Football Experience Rating of an insulting 49. What was he expecting? U2 live, Kylie in her skimpies and lap dancing? Still, we must have something going. Grimsby, the one club below us, managed only 43.

Portsmouth fans felt a chill down the spine with the news that Peter Storrie has quit as Notts County deputy chairman and moved into Fratton Park in the same capacity. When he arrived at Meadow Lane there was all the usual old guff about making County great again, Premiership potential, waffle waffle etc etc. Sound familiar? At Pompey he is back in cahoots with his old West Ham mucker, Harry Redknapp. Pompey chairman Milan Mandaric said of Storrie: “I trust him implicitly.” Hope the sailors are counting the brown envelopes on order, that is all I will say. But strange how ‘Arry Boy is up into the manager’s hot-seat almost immediately in place of Graham ‘Was She Only 14?’ Rix.

Never been a big fan of the French, but some clearly do have some taste. SunSport’s Fixed Odds so-called expert Andy Totham recently took a skiing holiday in France – probably to try to get over his hopeless addiction to C** U. While there with his family in the resort of Valloir, he visited a bar to watch the England v France rugby

clash. So imagine his sheer joy when, as he ordered his first cold one, he looked up and saw draped above the drinks dispensers – a Southend United scarf. Choking on his foaming ale, he discovered it has been there all season, though the bar persons did not know who had left it. A herogram to the guilty man.

Talking of the enemy, it had to be one of their followers who drove the wrong way round the M25 at 100mph last week because ‘he feared he was the last human left on earth and everyone else was a clone’. He initially sped down the A12 from C*****r ramming vehicles in his mum’s car while suffering delusions that made him feel he was being attacked by motorists with melting faces. After crashing in Romford, he told police who he allegedly thought wanted to drown him: “Where am I? I thought I was in the pub.” No surprise that he was found not guilty of dangerous driving at Snaresbrook Crown Court on the grounds of insanity and ordered to have treatment.

Who has heard of Danny Brown? I’m not surprised. He is a journeyman midfielder with now Conference duds Barnet. Until recently, though, he had one significant claim to fame. The only first-team goals he had ever scored in more than 80 first-team appearances – three of them – were all banged into the Blues’ net either at the Hall or Underthrill. But along came Hayes a couple of weeks back and he made it four, thus ending a record to be truly proud of. Number five then came against Boston in last week’s deadly dull Sky telly meeting. He’s on fire!

What is that work of art by the entrance to the Far Post Club? You know the one: Dirty Sea Shell and Plinth Surrounded by Dead Bush. The Tate Modern will pay a fortune for it.

The curse of the Littles sees Alan, minus appendix, heading for non-league with Halifax – thank God we got shot – and brother Brian axed at Hull. After all their pre-season spending, it will not go down well if the Tigers fail to make the Second Division.

Talking of the Hamsters earlier, I see Her Maj is to visit Upton Park as part of the Golden Jubilee celebrations. No mention, though, of a trip to the Hall. Strange that. As a Blue blood, Liz has always been rumoured to be a closet Shrimper.

We will also not need to change our name to Southend City, as the old town lost out in the lottery for elevated Jubilee status. Hardly surprising. The whole town centre needs demolishing and have you seen the amount of rubbish the proles just drop on the ground after another saturated fat fest at McDonald’s? Gawd ‘elp us, guvnor.

REAT news if you pop your clogs. Municipal funerals mean your relatives could soon be able to pay their last respects to you at the Theatre of Broken Dreams. From April 8 certain councils will offer an alternative to a religious service, with trained ‘celebrants’ arranging specially tailored funerals. On second thoughts, maybe Gnot.

Afraid my Darryl Flahaven shirt is no long the world’s most expensive at £167-plus (including frame). Pele’s from the 1970 World Cup has just passed me at £157,750.

And that, I think, is that for another four or five weeks. Any moans, groans etc etc – unless it’s PC when you can forget it – just contact the usual address: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR(30/3)

PS1 – Quiz question: Which member of the committee has a cousin who is the nephew of the late Oscar-winning film actress Jessica (Driving Miss Daisy) Tandy? Clue – he is a big fan of Jake ‘The Snake’ Roberts.

2. I hear Ricky Otto is now bald!

3. Don’t forget the A127 chaos on April 13. Leave a little earlier to get to the Shrewsbury clash.

SUSCT PLAYER OF THE SEASON

MEMBER'S NAME..... MEMBERSHIP NO:.....

MY VOTE GOES TO:.....

RETURN TO: Terry Jeffrey, 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR