

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 40

BRUSHING aside the cobwebs and choking on the dust, I descend deep into the bowels of my Hadleigh castle and down on into the vault. It is here that, in the words of a current classic TV comedy (yes, they do still make them occasionally) the 'precious things' are kept. Or in this case, the SUSCT newsletter archive. Breaking the airtight seal, I begin the search. Ah, ha! Found it. In NUMBER 29, the prophetic words that could have saved SUFC 36,000 smackers. I quote: 'This has to be a joke. Surely no one would pay money for him.' 'Are you sure it's not 36,000 pesetas?' 'I thought 36,000 was the number of chances he has missed for us.' Sage comments on the Barnet website last August from incredulous Bees fans, all anxious for a glimmer of a laugh after plunging into the Conference, who could not believe we had paid a small fortune in our terms to sign a certain Tony Richards. Yes, the Tony who has just left the Hall on the always convenient 'mutual consent' basis. Presumably not having paid us back the £36,000 for being surely one of our biggest-ever wastes of cash. And at a time when we could hardly afford it. If only Dave Webb had consulted the people in the know - the fans - he might have got a more accurate report before lashing out so grandly on a genuine dud. Oh well, it is the way of the world. And the archive? Back under lock and key until, on my passing, it is bequeathed to a grateful nation.....

After our opening two home nightmares, I must admit I was beginning to fear the worst and that SUSCT NEWSLETTER NUMBER 40 would have to be wrapped in a doom and gloom cloak of gravitas. Our members were finding it hard to look each other in the eye. Unspoken questions demanded answers. Such as: Where is Northwich Victoria? (About 10 miles west of Macclesfield). But, even allowing for Saturday's letdown at Rushden and another quickfire Worthless Cup KO, the outlook appears brighter, we have tasted a play-off place already and Mr G has had no option but to return to active duty with his tail between his legs after we DID manage those three successive victories for the first time since September 1999. Oh ye of little faith!

Rushden. Two coaches. Excellent. Chris Berry, as ever, did all the groundwork. Then, while Chris had a deserved week's holiday, Brian Cotgrove stepped ably into the breach to take the phone bookings in the days leading up to the trip. The Supremobiles were ordered well in time, the passenger lists prepared and, as usual, all our members and prospective members had to do on the day was turn up where they said they would be and they would be whisked to and from just east of Northampton for the paltry fee to almost all of a mere £10. Sadly, however, the Trust is once again being let down big-time by those travellers who for some reason - bone idleness, excess pop, ignorance, no manners - book seats and then do not bother to turn up at their pick-up points. We hoped that, with the introduction of a £5 surcharge for transgressors last season, the problem would be cured. And at the end of the last campaign, it seemed to have been. But so far in 2002-03, it has crept back.

THE Trust wants to stress that this is totally unacceptable and will not be tolerated further. For a start, empty seats cost us money. Coaches are booked on places supposedly filled. If a section of 'passengers' fails to turn up, we can end up paying for a size of coach we do not need. The thoughtless individuals involved are also depriving those members on the reserve list who want to travel but are told we are full up. If we knew a space was going to become available, we could fill it with someone anxious to see Blues do battle. The committee will again be considering this issue at its next meeting and taking resolute action. So please be warned, we are not running a service for the selfish. And if you recognise yourself from the above description, beware!

If you have booked to travel away on a Trust coach and find you then cannot make it, even on match day, all you need do is make one phone call to Chris Berry's mobile on 07703-898698 and cancel. That is all we require and should not be too much trouble for anyone, even the genuinely ill. Chris can then attempt to make alternative arrangements. **BUT NOT BOTHERING IS NO LONGER AN OPTION.**

And in case you were wondering who has let us down to date, here is the roll of dishonour:

HULL - NICK BOURNE, CLAIRE SMITH, MATT ING, CHRIS POLLOCK, TREVOR EMERY, KARL BURNETT. Total potential cost to the Trust: £110.

OXFORD - LEWIS GREEN, GARY HORN, NICK KEYES, PAUL TAYLOR, CARL THAIN, KARL BURNETT (wakey, wakey, that's twice). Cost: £50.

ROCHDALE - SCOTT PETERS, DAVE BURNIE, NICK KEYS, GRAHAM TAYLOR, PAUL TAYLOR, BARRY BETTIS. Cost: £120.

RUSHDEN - SCOTT KEYS, LEE SHARRATT, GRAHAM TAYLOR (again), NICK MALPASS, JOHN HALL, JOE HARRISON. Cost: £59

So in just four games the above could have cost the SUSCT nearly £350, had Chris not been able to recoup a small proportion of that amount on the Rushden journey by filling some of the empty seats after the coaches had begun their journey. Some people were that keen to join the party. So come on, let's get it sorted. Chris is now taking bookings for Lincoln on September 21 (01702-558978 / 07703-898698). If you book, be there - or else it is going to cost you. One other reminder. Basildon pick-ups are now from the Marconi bus stop and not the too dangerous Jolly Cricketers.

As if Chris had not had enough problems, a very close relative of his recently went on a wrecking spree in the Berry automobile, involving knocking down a wall and doing about £500 worth of damage smashing into some scaffolding in Southend. Oops. Who could that have been?

The committee's last meeting was on August 19 and the upcoming date is September 23. Anyone who has something they want discussed, just speak to, e-mail or phone one of those listed up in the header field.

WE began on the 19th with a huge collective sigh of relief on hearing from treasurer Craig Fillary that we do not have to pay any corporation tax. This has apparently left Gordon Brown with a huge black hole in his finances, but no doubt another stealth tax will cover it.

Membership secretary Terry Jeffreys reported that membership remains around the 700 mark. Once we have seen how United's early season pans out, we can then look at ways of trying to move that figure higher still. Any would-be members or anyone having trouble receiving their newsletter can contact Terry on 01268-523974 or terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com

Dave Scriven and Paul FitzGerald will be attending the next liaison meeting with football club representatives on September 18. Items they will be raising include:

- Seeking better deals for our season ticket holders.
- Discovering where all our sponsored shirts have got to.
- Suggesting we have more 'kids for a quid' games.
- Demanding the seat numbers are sorted out in the East Stand. They are presently a disgrace.
- Trying to get more improvements in the Roots Hall catering.
- Poor quality of tickets available for away games.

Paul has also had another of his 'chats' with Colin Wagman on the Hall's lease. 'Options are being looked at' was about as much as Mr Delancey would let slip. Paul will be writing, too, to Charles Koppel, the boss of Milton Keynes / Franchise FC on the subject of selling Wimbledon fans down the river. Not, I suspect, that they are quite as bothered now that AFC Wimbledon is up and running. But what has happened to the Dons has been a total disgrace, sanctioned by the lapdogs of the FA.

The Meet The Blues day raised about £200 for the Trust, with quite a bit of success on the memorabilia and programmes front. We may well look at doing something along those lines again in the future. Unclaimed raffle prizes included a giant pink stuffed toy and a bottle of bubble bath.

Dave Scriven is continuing work on our website update. Until then, keep tuning in to the usual address: www.susc.co.uk

OUR first fund-raiser of the season will be a quiz night. This will be the usual brains trust at Boots and Laces. But note the date. Originally it was October 12, only for Dave Scriven's cruciate ligament op and England's thoughtless decision to play their first Euro 2004 qualifier in Slovakia that day to necessitate us altering our schedule. The new quiz night slot is SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, after, all being well, we have given Wrexham a drubbing. So if you want to book a table - or just a place - e-mail Dave Scriven on dave@shrimperzone.com and let him know. Otherwise speak to any committee member. You can order your fish or vegetarian supper at the same time. Let's make it another good night - and see some first-time member contestants in attendance.

We will be seeking to get a Q & A with Ron(ald), Rob Newman etc asap. Recent results should make this more of goer than it might have been.

The Trust will be resuming its Player of the Month award, though this seems to be another of our ideas that United have now nicked. Still, no harm in there being two pieces of silverware up for grabs, eh? Meanwhile, Ian Selley is looking like our sponsored player for 2002-03.

Once again, the Christmas Draw will be up and running again within the next few weeks. Last season we had a fair response from members when it came to selling tickets. This season we want much better from you. Helping the Trust in this way should be one of the reasons why you are a part of it. The draw will take place, with SUFC's permission, when we tackle Scunthorpe on December 28. The prizes will be as big, if not bigger than last year. There will also be at least a prize for the person who sells most books of tickets. If you do not think you can assist us in this venture, please contact Terry as above and it will save him wasting his time sending you books of tickets with your appropriate newsletter - probably NUMBER 41.

Then we have the prospective Scriven-inspired Quid A Goal. This will involve any adult member who wishes to pledging £1 for every league goal Blues blast into opposition onion bags from a date to be decided. This is likely to be as soon as is practical after the fine detail has been worked out at the next committee meeting. Watch for further details either in NUMBER 41 or a forthcoming matchday programme.

TALKING of programmes, it seems the football club would like some of our members to sell a few for them. Preferably with better mental arithmetic skills than one or two of the current vendors, though United have hardly helped matters by retaining the price £2.20 instead of a round £2. Volunteers will get the standard rate of £8 plus a matchday ticket. Contact a committee member and we will try to put a list together. Or you could always go direct to Geoffrey King. Mr I, a job for you I think.

I see Leo has undergone another of his revivals, this time at Brentford partnering the exotically-named Ibrahima Sonko. Bees boss Wally Downes said from second spot in the Second Division 'Leo has been terrific'. What I found harder to understand was Gillingham's excitement at capturing.....Leon Johnson! The Gills claim he is a 'fantastic signing'. Have they seen him play?

And how about this for a letdown. Sir Stanley was on Soccer AM about three weeks ago to take a penalty against that lump of scouse lard whose name I forget. Stan was asked which clubs he had played for in his career. In the six or so he reeled off, one name was glaringly absent - Southend United. I thought he always claimed his happiest times were at the Hall. Should we forgive him?

The SunSport Bores League has resumed in all its glory, with a huge shadow over its contestants. Two seasons ago Barnet were lost to the Conference. Last season Halifax went the same way. This season only United, Carlisle, Bristol Rovers and Lincoln are left to battle it out for the prestigious crown proudly held by Blues. Who do you fancy will be visiting Forest Green Rovers in 2003-04? We were rated a 12-1 shot to drop with the Tote.

But, much more important, what about the real league. How have the lads been doing so far this season? Read on.

HULL (10/8, A, D2-2): Written off by all the pundits, reports tell me this was a highly encouraging start by us. Good battling right to the end that brought a deserved Tes equaliser after Neil Jenkins' 'lob' had made it 1-1. The Tigers' second came from Stuart Elliott, who cost the small matter of £230,000 from Motherwell, so a point against a side spending that sort of dosh was even sweeter. Could all those sceptics who feared we might not have what it takes this season be wrong? Errr.....

CARLISLE (13/8, H, L1-0): Same old story. Bit of expectancy from a Tuesday crowd of 3,881, which ended up badly dashed in another big letdown. Mark Rawle could not find the net even when their keeper lay on the ground and fumbled the ball on to the end of his toe. Chances were made, but about the one shot we had on target came from David Crown's mum as she tried to win a Ford Fiesta at half-time. It was possibly the hardest we put in, too. And what about the chances Carlisle made and missed as their little left-winger was frequently given a quarter of the pitch to himself? Very poor refereeing capped a game to forget from Mike Thorpe, an official who shall from now on be known as the white Joe Ross. He showed no 'feel' for the game whatsoever. Defeat was made harder to bear by the fact no Pulse Cheerleader accosted me to buy a 50-50 ticket. But then, whisper it, came.....

SHREWSBURY (17/8, H, L2-3): And we thought it could not get worse. Wrong. All was well until we put a smashing little move together and Neil Jenkins nipped in to give us an eighth-minute lead. The Blue contingent in a putrid crowd of 3,150 on a steaming hot afternoon sat back thinking: 'Southend are back, Southend are back' etc etc. Except we weren't. Shrewsbury, nothing special, were simply allowed to take over. To be fair, their striker Luke Rodgers, who has had one or two Premiership scouts sniffing around Gay Meadow and is allegedly rated worth £1million, banged away two beauties, one with each foot. He also missed a couple of much easier opportunities. But our defence gave him more help than his team-mates. United's back four was again all too frequently totally at sea and it was a blessed relief when Phil Whelan was finally spared further embarrassment 10 minutes from time. If we played the lump forward once, we played it on 50 occasions - all to no avail. Tes popped in a penalty, but the luckiest lad on the pitch was Town defender Matt Redmile. Only ref Clive Penton, a Mike Thorpe clone, thought his clattering of Tes while their keeper was in no man's land was not worth a red card. I was hoping to see the goals on Sky's round-up programme next morning, just to prove my eyes had not deceived me. But film of our debacle was not shown, suggesting it may already have been destroyed to prevent giving forthcoming opponents an unnecessary confidence boost.

OXFORD UTD (24/8, A, W1-0): What a difference a week made. Well, for 40 minutes at least, when we were electric in our new light blue at the modern, if sterile, three-sided Kassam Stadium. We at least tried to play some football in that first-half spell and kept the ball, mostly, on the ground - much to the delight of a fired-up Blue Army of around 600. Our neat headed goal from Mark Rawle followed determined build-up, but the thought of trying to add to it seemed to paralyse us with fear. Once Oxford began to assert themselves close to half-time, we began to revert to type. The hoof came into play and we surrendered possession time after time with near fatal consequences. Thankfully, on this occasion Messrs Whelan, Cort and Flahavan showed something like the form we prefer from them. And, oh joy, Graeme Jones got a shot on target - just one. Berry Travel was first-rate again - though I feared the worst when I was the only boarder at Hadleigh Church - and the Pulse Cheerleaders have nothing to fear from the Manorettes. Two days to bask in the warm glow of our first victory before.....

CAMBRIDGE UTD (26/8, H, W2-1): The second part of our Oxbridge challenge - and we finally got our act together. No Whelan, no Jones, no lumping, no sweat. Well, not quite. But Stephen Broad looked a hell of a sight happier at centre-back than right-back, that's for sure, and even scuffed in our opener. Jay Smith neatly nicked a home debut goal only two minutes after their equaliser. All of 4,462 in the ground and no one could have left disappointed after an engrossing end-to-end encounter. Defence pretty solid, up front much more mobile, Darryl one stunning save. But their midfield was better than ours, especially in its eagerness to get forward at pace. Can't moan too much, though - except at Premiership ref Andy D'Urso. Three or four shocking decisions, but, to be fair, he at least played some advantages and kept his cards in his pocket until they were really necessary. This was our best of the season yet. Up to 10th, a few top-quality moves put together, Steven Clarke at last showing a bit of confidence and Mark Beard having one of his best games ever. Can it get better than this? Afraid it has to.

ROCHDALE (31/8, A, W2-1): Three in a row and, by all accounts, thoroughly deserved against a team fresh from sticking in five at The Racecourse. Well-taken Mark Rawle header and Tes volley, marred only by another goal conceded from a corner (analysis courtesy of strikes being shown on Soccer AM). But the points were bagged, so great stuff.

RUSHDEN & DIAMONDS (7/9, A, L3-0): Blimey, eight passengers this time at Hadleigh Church. We must be winning - but not for long. First time I have ever seen a female coach driver - and very good she was, too. No surprise, though, to see Chris Berry on the other vehicle. Bashers got in some unexpected exercise rounding up a few Basildon strays before we spent 50 minutes stuck in the Stanstead roadworks sweating on whether we would make it in time for kick-off. It was building into one of those days and we were on the back foot for much of the time after the Diamond merchants rattled the bar in only the fourth minute. Broady conceded a clumsy penalty three minutes later, after a spot of WWF action with the intimidating Onandi Lowe, and the writing was now well and truly on the wall. Twice we gave the ball away needlessly - and twice they said thanks very much, we'll have another goal. They also hit a post. We did look dangerous on occasions, but so we should have with about five forwards on by the final whistle. Graeme Jones has still not scored - and did not deserve to from his fluffed penalty. The way Jones, who has been at United five minutes, was allowed to decide he and not Kevin Maher or the eminently successful Tes was going to take the kick was one of the most unprofessional incidents I have seen in all my years of Blues watching. Bad day, refereed by Joe Ross's lovechild Trevor Parkes. Back to earth for a superb 850-strong Blue Army. By the way, what is the point of our 'third' kit?

WIMBLEDON (10/9, H, L1-4): What a surprise. Out of the Worthington Cup. Work kept me away, though at least that meant none of my hard-earned ended up in the pockets of Koppel and Co. Mark Rawle scored for us, but it was no more than a consolation in the face of what I gather were four fair-and-square strikes from Franchise FC. It seems we were right in it at 0-0 up until the 42nd minute, when Stephen Broad had to retire after a clash of heads. Phil Whelan came on and.....we conceded four. Funny that. Better luck next year.

Five days after refereeing our game against Cambridge, Billericay whistler Andy D'Urso came up against Patrick Vieira in the Chelsea v Arsenal clash. Apparently, the French midfield star, always a shrewd judge of character, informed D'Urso after a red card was flourished in his face: "You are a f***** w***** with no personality."

I see Alison Moyet has reinvented herself. She has shed about three stone for the pix for her new album. Yes, the bag lady I last saw at the Hall about a couple of seasons ago is no more. As for her support of Southend, anyone know if that has disappeared down the Swanee too? We don't seem to get any mentions in her interviews these days, suggesting she may have forsaken us to try to appeal to a different type of audience. Not that Terry Alderton ever forgets us. He and the missus were raking it in recently via an OK magazine feature, yet he still managed to get in his usual plug for United. Great work by Terence, also spotted holding court at Nene Park.

Fifteen Third Division clubs reported increases in gates for 2002-03. Unfortunately, Blues were not one of them. Our average dropped from 4,321 to 3,981 and has fallen this campaign after three games to 3,831. Looks like another 500 off the hard core and that has to be a worry.

One thing that has gone up, though, is arrests at Nationwide League matches - except in the Third. While figures in the First last season increased from 816 to 979 and the second from 601 to 647, our neck of the woods decreased from 351 to 277. Blues totalled two, down from 10 in 2000-01. But that paled against purer than the driven snow Macclesfield, who have had not a single 'would you mind accompanying me down to the station' over the past two seasons. Baddest and saddest boys were Stoke with 143, though if you include arrests in all competitions the leading louts were, no, I can't believe it, M***** U***** on 146. Meanwhile the total of hoolies banned, including from the Premiership, soared from 687 to 1,149. Stoke did themselves 'proud' again with 107, but had to admit defeat to Sam Hammam's nutter brigade from sheep-loving country. Cardiff had 125 kicked out.

RON Hogg, spokesman for the far-sighted, finger-on-pulse Association of Chief Police Officers, a body not known for their sympathy for football and its traditions, praised the likes of Newcastle for not allowing Sunderland fans into St James' Park. He declared: "I think these are positive steps to give a respite and a cooling-down period for the fans." Sorry, Ron, that is twaddle. Preventing genuine away supporters from travelling to games is a surfire way to kill football as we know and love it. Sure, crack down on the plankton. But let everyone else do their thing.

I see the Hall's Platinum Suite is on tap now. But you can forget wearing the colours in there. It is a corporate heaven-sounding collar-and-tie only location. ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ.

This month's 'Nice Work If You Can Get It'. Franco Baresi is appointed Fulham's Director of Football, sacked after 81 days' 'work' and given.....a £90,000 pay-off. Give us strength.

Next a word of praise for SunSport's Pat Sheehan, a man who has shown his football knowledge is unsurpassed. While all the other office know-nothings tipped Hartlepool, Hull and Rushden and Diamonds for the Third Division title in the Currant Bun on August 17, Pat made himself a host of new seaside mates by tipping.....Southend. To put this into perspective, he has not seen us play since Barry Fry was boss. At the other end of the scale you will find a certain Andy Totham, the man the bookies love and for some reason a key part of 'The Favourite' betting supplement on Saturdays. This sad character, his brain addled by years of watching C U, stated in a pre-season missive to his now penniless punting followers: 'So who is going to grab the Nationwide glory this season? Well, it won't be Bradford, Watford, Sheffield Wednesday or Southend'. His face is a picture every time we rake in three more points on our journey towards facing the team that shames Essex next season.**

I see Notts County, still trying to get over the Storrie Effect, will continue to play at Meadow Lane. They had planned to rename the ground the Aaron Scargill Stadium after a local estate agent had pledged £100,000 to the club. But, oh dear, the boss of Scargill's suddenly did a runner after declaring the firm bust. Ergo, no £100,000.

ANYONE remember Jamie Campbell playing against us for Exeter last season? He was their Player of the Year in 2000-01, but the midfielder has now made the headlines for a different reason altogether. Campbell recently pleaded guilty to actual bodily harm at Exeter Crown Court. He was ordered to pay £3,500 after delivering a Glasgow kiss to physio Damien Davey during a training session back in February. Davey required 11 stitches, while Campbell requires new employers after the Grecians gave him the boot.

And so, once again, the curtain must come down. If you want to communicate about anything you have read, positive or otherwise, the e-mail address is as ever: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk It's OK, I can take it.

Keep smiling, Enjoy the game (x3), Howay the lads (?), Come On You Blues, God Bless, Until Next Time and Keep the Faith.

(NR, 10/9).

PS1. This month's quiz question: If JG is JG, RN is RN and ST is ST, why is DC MM?

2. I am afraid my barrister tells me the identity of 'Stab in the Back' must remain a secret. But I heard from a source within the machine that they were desperate to know in the corridors of power. Guilt complexes?

3. Donna, we miss you.