

SUSCT NEWSLETTER

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HITLER was just getting his feet under the table as German chancellor, Churchill was once more a comparative parliamentary nobody and the bloke who was supposed to be working up to become the future King Edward VIII was discovering that a little illicit rumpy-pumpy with Mrs Simpson was more to his taste. The year? 1934, when your average football fan would not be seen dead without his flat cap, many watched matches in their best suits and the average weekly wage would not buy you a round of drinks today.

But that time 68 years ago was significant for another major historical reason of equal import, this time on the SUFC front. For 1934 was the last time Southend United could boast a start to the season at home as disastrous as that which the club is currently enduring. Five home defeats in nine games is, to quote a popular northern expression, 'bobbins'. There cannot be many Trust members who did not think a month back that we would be anywhere but the play-off places at least by now. Wrong, I am afraid. Still, at least unlike at Macclesfield, none of the squad has yet been shot, no matter how much we might occasionally have felt like it.

Yet all true Blues will continue to rally to the cause, while continually seeking explanations from Rob Newman as to where it is currently going wrong and how he plans to put it right. In fact, it sounds like the perfect time for a Q & A session, something individuals amongst our number frequently ask about being set up. Well, sadly, you might have missed your chance for a while.

Remember my plea last month? Will as many of you as possible please attend the Trust AGM on October 30. In fact, a handful, and thanks to all of them, did heed the call – though certainly nowhere near enough from a membership of 650-plus. The bulk of the committee was there and, as promised, Geoffrey King. But who should also walk through the door of the Shrimpers Club on the night than.....Rob Newman, gallantly prepared to answer questions on our plight of the moment. So if you were not present, i.e. most of you, I find it hard to sympathise. You have lost an opportunity, for now, to quiz the boss. And what did he have to say? Don't worry, I will be coming to that later.

After everyone had got over the shock of seeing the Armani ear-muffed Jerry Moss burst through the doors in full biking regalia looking like he had just cycled from Nepal rather than Westcliff, vice-chairman Richard Coxell opened the AGM and gave his overview of how the Trust stands.

He believed the clique-free committee had pulled together better as a team in the past 12 months following certain changes and progress had been more 'steady as she goes' than anything dramatic. It is vital, though, that we have new members ready to become involved in the future. He rated the SJS surge to 140 members as 'brilliant' and a tribute to Chris Berry, who, along with Trevor Bashford and Brian Cotgrove could be 'rightly proud' of their provision of the Trust's away travel.

PICK of the year's events have been the Player of the Year night – a triumph for Kevin Feasey – and our Quiz evenings hosted by Guy Rickard, though it was agreed that the social side has suffered in the same way as our fund-raising with the departure of Donna Fillary. This is something that has to be addressed. The Player of the Month award has helped our profile and the Christmas Draw remains our main fund-raiser.

Richard felt we had done well in 'building bridges' with the football club through the liaison committee, of which the current Trust members are Dave Scriven and Paul FitzGerald. Formed out of fear United was about to fold, this body has enabled us to pass on to United the fans' feelings on a number of issues such as catering, ticketing etc and get action on them. Councillors have been met, it is a line through to the likes of Geoffrey King

and Paul is not afraid to ruffle Delancey's feathers when he feels the need. Both sides need to keep working together as it would be disastrous for the town, its city ambitions and South-East Essex if United ever folded.

That report was Richard's final act as vice-chairman before stepping down and he deserves huge thanks for all the work he has put in since taking on the post. This is a real true Blue.

Yours truly read the treasurer's report in the absence of Craig Fillary. The Trust's financial position remains sound, but like everything else in today's economic climate cannot be taken for granted.

Membership secretary Terry Jeffreys revealed a total of 658 adult Trust members in addition to those from the SJS. Terry asked that members try to renew their membership shortly before expiry rather than wait to get final reminders. It saves time and money. We want more members and will be pushing to attract them, though those moments when a club appears to be going out of existence or into administration in a week's time always tend to concentrate the mind more. The general feeling remained that there was no real reason why any Southend United fan should not feel comfortable about joining the Trust in its present format.

Next came the election of SUSCT officers for 2002-03. They are as follows:

CHAIRMAN – Trevor Bashford (glutton for punishment back in the hot-seat).

VICE-CHAIRMAN – Paul FitzGerald (cool head when the flak is flying).

SECRETARY – Terry Jeffreys (great organiser – and plenty of free time).

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY – Paul Yeomanson (ideal for his computer expertise).

TREASURER – Craig Fillary (figures wizard keen to keep us in the black).

PR / LIAISON OFFICER – Dave Scriven (electronic whizkid with the gift of the gab).

FUND-RAISING OFFICER – To be appointed.

COMMITTEE – Brian Cotgrove, Richard Coxell, Joe Elliott, Kevin Feasey, John-Paul Fitzgerald, Alan Perry, Nigel Rickard, Mike Smith. Ex-officio – Chris Berry.

As far as the committee goes, a special 'welcome aboard' to Joe and John-Paul, who can bring important input from the younger end of our membership. For a couple of others, the phrase 'one more year' springs to mind.

It was agreed that the membership fee should remain at £5, which has been the figure just about since the Supporters' Club's inception and has to be the biggest bargain in football bar none.

GEOFFREY KING now took centre-stage to update those present on what's what around the Hall. He quickly stressed he would not comment on any new ground rumours, but stated: "Things are going well. If and when a deal is put together, we will let you know." In the circumstances that prevail, possibly fair enough. He believed the liaison meetings with the Trust were proving beneficial, though within United his job stops at the manager's door. He declared that Rob Newman continues to have a very good working relationship with Ron Martin. The dual goals are success on the field and to make United profitable. He retained an open mind on the North Bank debate, though the main issue to be addressed would be one of public safety. It was also revealed that the club monitor the various supporters' websites and GK had to be informed that NO site expresses official Trust opinion or is connected directly to the Trust other, of course, than www.susc.co.uk and the new site currently under construction. Nor have we any direct link to any of the newsgroups, chatlines etc.

GK then offered a little carrot to the Trust by announcing: "My ambition is that eventually I would like to see a Trust member on the board. But that won't happen until we know where we are going in the future." Next came the rub. "At the moment, no one would want to be a member of the board of a technically bankrupt company." But he added: "We're getting there. And there's still no reason to believe the ground lease will not be extended."

He then took questions, with the North Bank swiftly raised. I must admit I was depressed to hear GK say that when he visited the West Stand to garner opinion, the main question asked was 'Where are we going to drink?' Is that really all people worry about these days? He admitted there would be a cost, estimated at around £15,000, and wondered if that money might be better spent elsewhere. He also stated, remembering the 'F Block' battle, that fans would have to remain seated under public order legislation. The law as it stands prevents seat removal and any replacement by terrace. A Football Licensing Authority inspector, who has previously advised the South African government, has told United that if anyone were to stand they would simply have to

be ejected. Yes, that is our democratic government's position. Make your own mind up. There is also the danger of extra police and stewarding costs. Apparently Southampton fans are already facing a prohibition order in part of their new ground because of standing. Nor will there be any standing at any 'new ground' thanks to the Thompson Report, which I have lambasted more than once in the past. As GK admitted, when it comes to standing "the worst thing that happened to Southend United was getting into the First Division." The slips in the programme v Hartlepool had produced only around 30 responses on the North Bank issue. So will it fade and die or grow in intensity? We'll soon see.

Rob was asked for his view and said: "From where I stand, if we are doing well then the atmosphere in the ground is good. If the support starts in one part, then there is a domino effect. I have not experienced the North Bank, though some people say it was something special."

On the question of Trust funding for United, the next handover could come via Dave Scriven's Quid A Goal to help with the provision of certain items for the physio department following John Gowen's departure for Hornchurch (? – what league are they in?) and his replacement by John Stannard from Crystal Palace. A GK costing is being done. There is also another item 'in reserve'. GK noted that the club was also not helped by having 24 pro footballs stolen from Boots and Laces. They cannot be bought in the shops, so if you are offered one by somebody or know someone who has one, grass on them! (Just as you should if you find yourself alongside anyone who hurls anything on to the pitch, thus risking a costly fine for Blues they cannot afford.)

NEXT up was the boss, clearly as cheesed off as we all are at the recent slump in form that has cost us so dear. He mentioned that Lee Turner has been brought in from Swindon as a coach to keep keepers Darryl Flahavan and Danny Gay on their toes. As for the malaise of the moment, he admitted: "We need fresh faces when we are doing well as much as when we are doing badly. But Tes is our match-winner if he can just put 10 games on the spin together when he is fit. I believe he can go on and play at a higher level and he knows he must get himself fit again and do the business on the pitch. He has aspirations to do as his brother has done." (And couldn't we do with £5million!). The hope is we can keep Jay Smith to the end of the season.

On recent setbacks, he declared: (Swansea) "A poor game, but we deserved something out of it. Swansea are a poor team. We have to go to places like that and get points." (Swindon) "I decided to risk some players, but brought in mostly experience and they never performed. We should not have lost as we did." (Hartlepool league) "We got geed up and from the moment you kick off you believe your are ready to go. Instead we got off to the worst possible start. It not only annoys the fans, but me as well. It knocked the stuffing out of everyone, but we came back and performed well. A poor result, but the performance was positive. (Leyton Orient) "Not too many sides could have filled that end at Orient with fans like we did. But we let in another sloppy early goal which was unacceptable. The first half was poor and ended with a farcical second goal. Then we changed the system and showed what we could have done"

I inquired why we bother with 5-3-2 when our best performances always seem to come via 4-4-2? The response was that we won like that against Exeter, Bury and York. True, maybe, but was the quality of the football much to write home about and did it augur well for a long run of success? I think not.

Rob closed by saying: "The players still feel we can get something this year. The confidence is still there and they are a good bunch of lads. But with one, maybe two or even three new signings we can really kick on. I have this vision that this year is going to our year. Next year would not be as easy with the teams that could come down. I thought Hartlepool would be the outstanding side in the division, but now having seen them I don't think they are. We need to get an average of three points off each team. If we can do that we will not be far off."

And with that we said our thank-yous and once again wanted to believe that promotion was all but sewn up. Trouble is we need a few results to start going our way if we want to make that belief a reality.

The final word from Geoffrey King was a plea for people to remember the flight to Torquay on December 21. But in case any of you were thinking of dumping the Trust coach to pay £180 to travel by Sopwith Camel down to the west country, you can now forget it as the employees at Exeter Airport have decided they cannot cope with the flight back at the time required as it clashes with their Christmas party. Yes this is the madhouse that is the UK in 2002. GK urged as well that we should try the corporate facilities, such as the Blues Lounge, and

don't forget Christmas Dinner with the Blues on December 12 at £35 plus VAT, with dancing until late etc. (Why is it always plus VAT?). The lads will be there, hopefully not abusing their bodies too much before tackling Boston in the SUSCT-sponsored clash at the Hall two days later.

THE likes of GK and Rob do get stick, sometimes justifiably. But credit to them for showing up at the AGM when they did not have to – and when others who should have been present opted not to bother. It says something words often cannot.

Our new committee's first meeting was held on November 11, but I will report on that after a match review for our absent friends and those far afield. Our current record says we are not as good as we would wish. So what have United's performances really been like of late?

SWINDON (A, LDV Vans, 22/10, L6-1): Swindon have been one of the Second Division's rubbing rags, a side we are looking to replace next season. This Blues show, I am given to understand by those who saw it, suggests we might as well throw in the towel now. One or two unfamiliar faces were included for a clash in a competition no one is too fussed about. Unless, of course, as we did two seasons ago, you get somewhere near the regional final. 'Dreams' of a repeat lasted until Swindon's second, after which we were routed in humiliating fashion. Another daft Steven Clark red card did not help. The one good thing to come from this degradation was we avoided a trip to Kidderminster and a match that did not end until 11.05pm thanks to an electrical fault at Aggborough.

HARTLEPOOL (H, 25/10, L1-0): A further blank and further disappointment for a decent 5,168 crowd – including the usual sprinkling of occasionals like my brother. He was making his first Hall appearance in three seasons thanks to United's farsighted 'get a friend in for a fiver' offer to season ticket holders. Even worse, though, a fourth home defeat in eight games was another boot in the goolies to our yo-yo-style promotion bid. Maddeningly, we played some of our best stuff since beating Cambridge two months ago and the one Pool shot on target all night found our net after 52 seconds. My heart sank as our five defenders were read out, but this time we played more of a 3-5-2 than 5-3-2 and actually managed some telling pressure and chance creation. Top dogs Pool also showed, though, that three central defenders left alone can leave worrying space down the flanks and we could easily have conceded a second. We managed even more chance creation when Steven Clark came on. He was on fire during his 20 minutes and trust Mark Tinkler to be the man who cleared Phil Whelan's header off the line. By the by, any reason why those carrying the 'anti-racism' banner were all white? Full credit, too, to the Pulse Cheerleaders for doing their stuff in that half-time deluge. But they could at least have finished with a Miss Wet T-Shirt competition. Oooooooh, pardon! Ref Keith Hill brought a new meaning to officious, particularly with all that chat to the top cop second half after some nut threw an object on to the pitch from the South Stand. He was so bad he made po-faced gauleiters Steve Bennett and Barry Knight look like the Chuckle Brothers. Our seven goals at home from nine games means we now have the worst tally in the division.

LEYTON ORIENT (A, 29/10, L2-1): They must have been laughing their heads off in the Laurie Cunningham burger bar inside Brisbane Road (what a tribute) as we bled more precious points. We survived marginally longer than against Hartlepool before conceding, but our 1,400-strong Blue Army – somewhat more than the 849 Wimbledon attracted the same evening – could surely suck one in for at least a point second half, couldn't we? Well it was one until Darryl and Phil revealed their level of communication is hardly telepathic seconds before half-time. The big man's header looped over our hapless keeper and rolled into the net at about the same pace as the SUSCT coaches managed for much of the queue-bound journey to Cockneysville. BB pulled one back, then got himself sent off for, my insider informs me, calling referee Lee Cable 'a fat b*****'. True or not, you cannot get away with that now under the latest FA edict, though I am not sure anyone in the Premiership has been informed. Jay Smith functioned up to par, but not many of the others in our line-up could say the same. A major letdown when we were looking forward to a party night.

WREXHAM (H, 2/11, L1-0): Steady drizzle throughout and a big black cloud over us all at the finish as we made it four straight league defeats – last season it was never more than two – and five in all at home. OK, we hit the woodwork twice, but since when have there been prizes for that? The sphere rattling the rigging is all that counts and the boyos did the bizzo for their first victory in seven matches. Wrexham fan Peter Jones had all his Christmases come at once – three points away from home and a baby son at half-time. I began the afternoon wondering why Mark Rawle looked more like Wacko Jacko on the front of the programme. Was he taking the same whitener? No, it was just a printing fault – and at least Mark still has

his own nose! Then came the presentation of the SUSCT Player of the Month award to Jay Smith. This was made by seven-year-old RYAN White, not Colin White as Mr Berry told me for the Trust prog notes. Colin is daddy White. Tony Scully made a big impression with his first touch since joining us for a month on loan from Cambridge United. A vicious right-foot volley took off, hit the bar (supporting the north stand roof) and ricocheted off up Prittlewell Chase. Barrington wore Ben Abbey-style silver boots - sadly, with the same lack of success. We battled, but just do not totally convince. The only fireworks came right on the final whistle, when an aerial bomb exploded over the Hall. Astra, Brock's or Payne's? Time to worry again.

BRISTOL ROVERS (A, 9/11, W1-0): Hallelujah! The rot is stopped. Two Trust coaches wend their way west and are rewarded with three points as Tes returns and does what we always hope he will – bag us a winner. It was a neat left-foot finish, following good work by Mark Beard, and the boy Bramble had earlier hit the bar. The NoW correspondent's first edition match report described the game as a 'dire clash'. But by the time his rewrite for the London area arrived in the office he had clearly had time to ponder on our fluent fantasy football and judged our performance as pretty dominant overall. It's back up to 13th and still only two points off a play-off slot in this crazy division.

HARTLEPOOL (H, FA Cup, 16/11, D1-1): Kid a quid again and reduced prices. Our former vice-chairman arrived to find the East Greens were a lock-out and it was black seats only left. Well done to United for more sensible forward thinking. The commercial set-up has surely never been more on the ball, as reflected in the club's recent recognition at the Southend District Business Awards. But the crowd was still only 4,984. So why were the police in panic mode at the final whistle, stopping people going through the gate next to the programme hut and across the private car park to Fairfax Drive? The portly goon doing most of the appalling PR said it was for 'your own safety'. But when have Hartlepool fans ever rioted? So we had to go via Victoria Avenue and round the block to get to where we would have gone anyway. Hey, PC Plod. Keep your noses out! As for the game, we were electric for three minutes, got a deflected opener and then retreated into our well-worn shells until half-time whilst allowing Pool an equaliser. But once Steven Clark, who had been performing like England's batsmen in the second innings in Brisbane, and Tony Scully were ordered to head for the by-lines, things improved greatly. In the end – again – we should have won. We have now scored more than one goal in a match just once in our last FIFTEEN (yes, FIFTEEN) matches. Say no more. A replay was the last thing we wanted, though if there was one consolation it was C** U being horribly embarrassed by Chester. Plenty of councillors present among the match sponsors. I take it they all back the club and its future existence and were not just present for a few large ones on the house.....

The Quiz Night went ahead as planned on November 2 and seemed to have been universally enjoyed by all those who attended. Guy Rickard, recognisable for being just a fraction shorter than me, did a great job as quizmaster once more, the scorer is too modest to say he was superb, Alan Perry's raffle was right up to its usual standard and raised a magnificent £140, Craig and Donna Fillary ensured the food arrived and Dave Scriven saw that we had a venue, that the Boots and Laces bar was staffed and we filled 11 of the 12 tables. If only Mr G's all-stars had made it. Victory went to 'Table 7', a team of all-round talents who surprised pre-event favourites 'Table 3', the Coxell camp, by nine points. There was an auction, too, with a Blues first-day cover going for £15, a much sought-after Danny Kerrigan shirt fetching £40 from young Scriven (Terry Jeffreys later took it off him for another fiver to funds) and Alan Perry's donated flying lesson (parachute not provided) went for a bargain-basement £65 to Cliff Newton. The overall take from the night was a best-ever £641.23. Brilliant.

PAUL YEOMANSON was absent while spreading the Blues gospel to the ayatollahs in Iran. After narrowly avoiding a mullah-ing for this seditious behaviour, and fed up with the lack of supping facilities, he has now returned and will be taking over his membership secretary duties at the end of the month.

Next a key message from Terry: PLEASE sell your Christmas Draw tickets. Everyone should have received their quota by now, so all that is left is to dispose of them to whoever you can. In fact, a frighteningly simple task for even the most mentally challenged. Then once you have just the stubs and money left, send the lot asap to Terry at 32, Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR Cheques should be made payable to SUSCT. If you want more tickets or you want to return some unsold just write in, or you can also make contact on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com or 01268-523974. Remember this is our big fund-raiser of the year so badger those friends, enemies, wives, boyfriends, girlfriends, lovechildren, relatives, workmates etc to invest even just £1 – but preferably more. The prizes are £1,000, £500 and £100 plus an assortment of minor rewards, with £100, £50 and £25 for those three people who sell the

most books of tickets. Try not to forget. We are relying on you all. Terry's contact addresses are the same if you are having a problem with receiving your newsletter.

Now to the first committee meeting of the new line-up, which began with Terry officially replacing Derek Murr as the Trust Board secretary. Further thanks are due to Derek for the all the effort he has put in since the inception of the Trust.

Returning chairman Trevor was unable to attend due to being marooned on bank business in Jockland again. But he sent a rallying call to the troops and laid out a set of objectives that we should be trying to meet in the next 12 months. It was generally agreed that one should be to try to lift our membership from its present 665 up to 1,000 in whatever ways we can, while, hopefully, Chris and Rosemary can haul the Southend Junior Shrimpers up to 250. Current members can help here by pushing the merits of the Trust and what it stands for to friends, family and fellow Blues. But the Trust also needs to raise its public profile as, believe it or not, a number of United followers still claim not to know we even exist. The more people we can get involved, no matter how small or large their contribution, the better. We must strive for more media coverage and we shall be asking the football club about possibly providing us with somewhere we can use as a base, if only on match days, at Roots Hall.

We plan to hold more Q & A sessions, Quiz Nights and Trust draws than ever before and an extra bit of very good news is that Donna Fillary is prepared to give us her valuable assistance on the fund-raising front. She will make the perfect ally for Alan Perry and they should form the nucleus of a fund-raising sub-committee now in the melting pot. The first social event on the horizon is a 10-pin bowling night at the Broadway Superbowl in Leigh-on-Sea on January 16. Entry is £10 per person, there will be 'refreshments' available and a number of the 40 slots available have already gone. If you want to enter, send your tenner to Alan at 109 Blenheim Chase, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. SS9 3BY It is what your right arm is for!

We want to help local charities as well in any way we can and will be seeking a meeting with our president Sir Teddy Taylor MP for advice and guidance on where any money available might be best guided. Craig Fillary also has access to an executive box at Roots Hall being used to help children's charities and allow unfortunate youngsters to watch matches. It has vacancies for December 29 (Scunthorpe), January 1 (Oxford Utd), March 8 (Lincoln) and April 26 (Bury). So if you know of a charitable organisation for children that might like to make use of the facilities, contact Craig on 01702-512169 or on cfillar1@visteon.com

THE random draw will be made shortly to find those members to be invited into the Trust box at the Boston game on December 14. You will have committee men Brian Cotgrove and Richard Coxell for company, with Richard no doubt eager to discuss further the fascinating snippet that his grandfather came from Boston. That fixture, when a bit of attention ought to be focused on us, will also see a major pre-match membership push.

A cheque for £75 is being sent off so that we can become members of the recently formed Football Supporters Federation, a body which, judging by its magazine, seems strong enough at last to push the wishes and views of fans throughout the Premiership and Nationwide League into the thick skulls of both football's administrators and the government's apparatchiks. Issues like safe standing at grounds, times for televising games, ticket pricing etc are all the sort of issues that really require a national approach as well as just local effort.

Craig revealed that our finances had not had much chance to change since the AGM, though he is shortly to have a major overview of the accounts before they go off to the auditors.

The next Liaison Committee meeting is planned for November 20. One issue to be raised will be to try to get the 5% club shop discount granted to Trust members for November turned into a permanent arrangement.

The Hall of Fame is on temporary hold while Terry sorts out his new and burgeoning Trust workload, while the new Trust website ought to be fully up and running before Christmas. Dave Scriven has a bit more time to spend on it now thanks to his unfortunately early enforced retirement from active footballing in the wake of a knee injury.

Chris is now taking bookings for Hartlepool (November 26), Darlington (November 30), Torquay (December 21) and Cambridge (December 26). Just ring the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. The latter is the one the following forgot when deciding not to turn up to travel to Orient – KARL BURNETT and TINA SMITH – and Bristol Rovers – DALEY KEELING and JACK KERSHAW. The usual fine will apply before they can travel by Trust coach again. With luck, eventually the message might just get through. If you book to travel and then find you cannot make it, LET CHRIS KNOW!

ALL the best, too, to our rivals up the M11/A14 – Bazza’s Posh – in their battle with the Spice Girl. What is the Beckham bird’s game? If the saronged one had any sense he would say: “Oy, leave it aht babe.” The arrogance of these non-entities is staggering. Do us all a favour and Posh off, love.

What did everyone think of that ‘best-ever’ Blues team from the club’s website a few weeks back? Andy Ansah getting in ahead of a player like Colin Morris surprised me and I can remember Dean Austin and Peter Butler copping all sorts of stick at various times in their Roots careers. I would probably have kept Austin, though, swapped Morris for Ansah and played the legendary Billy Best instead of Butler purely because he could almost guarantee goals wherever he played. As for Sir Stanley and Richard Cadette up front, what a combo. And what a pair of sadly wasted talents.....

On the subject of goalscorers, did you notice that on the weekend when we played Hartlepool in the league and in the midweek fixtures that followed, EIGHT ex-Blues found the net while we continued to struggle? They were Tony Battersby (Boston), Martin Carruthers (Scunthorpe), the Angell (Port Vale), Barry Conlon (Darlo), Kevin Rapley (C** U), Jamie Forrester (Northampton), Andy Thomson (QPR) and Andy Rammell (Wycombe). Meanwhile Neil Tolson is back in action for Leigh RMI in the Conference after quitting us through injury – and he hit their winner in the recent 4-3 win at Southport. Why did so few of them do it for us?

No name yet for the Nationwide League player alleged to have tested positive for Nandrolone. But we could certainly do with one or two of our players being provided with a bit of extra ‘whiz’ or ‘speed’.

Sad to see Leo out for three months with a knee injury. And let’s hope Leon Cort is a bit cooler-headed than brother Carl, who seems to have put more effort into going head-to-head with his wife recently than putting it about on the pitch.

I noticed in the Hartlepool programme another piece of McDonald’s propaganda, proclaiming their community partner status with the FA and hailing the benefits of their new ‘grassroots scheme’. Still, I am, of course, totally convinced that everything this company does for youth football is for purely philanthropic reasons and not to drill their brand name into the impressionable heads of the young. Who would possibly think such a thing? After all, doesn’t every Premiership and Nationwide coach say to his team in the run-up to any game: “Today our pre-match meal will be a large Big Mac with fries and a strawberry shake!”

Remember you can buy those late Christmas gifts at the Blues ‘Super Stall’ in the Royals on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays. And please don’t spend too much on me!

MY home computer is back up, fingers crossed, so again if you have sent me any name, address, e-mail details in the past please send them again to the usual address for all my massive correspondence – nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk And that’s a wrap for another month or so. The AGM report has made NUMBER 42 a bit longer than usual, so please indulge me for that.

NR (17/11).

PS 1. My apologies for spelling John Gowen as Gowan once in 41A and I also missed that it is ‘wring’ your hands and not ‘ring’ your hands. Oops.

2. Les Shires. Do I know you? Amusing e-mail.

3. Jeff. Is the stag night at the ‘maison secondaire’?

4. Final thought from Bum Phillips, former head coach of the NFL's Houston Oilers. Asked why he always took his wife on trips away, he replied: "Because she is too damn ugly to kiss goodbye!" Sorry ladies.