

# ***SUSCT NEWSLETTER 44***

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**T**HE 'quiz' questions, for what they are worth, usually come at the end. But this month, get your heads round this little teaser for starters. What has six in the USA and Canvey Island, but only one in Canada and Chigwell? Need another clue? OK. It has three in C\*\*\*\*\* and Germany and a massive five in Hadleigh. There, that should keep you amused for nano-seconds. But if you must 'cheat', turn to Page 3 for the answer – just don't expect a topless babe.

It's an unexpected pleasure to be able to kick off NUMBER 44 on a reasonably light-hearted note. I must admit that, prior to the rearranged trip to Shrewsbury, United's points tally of seven from their last available 36 was making it appear that an atmosphere of terminal doom and gloom should prevail along with much navel-gazing as to where we headed next. The Conference looked the favoured destination.

But recent events – nine points out of nine in the space of eight days! – have lifted the depression no end and, unbelievably, we are back to within two points of the play-off slots. Air has been punched again at last, so bring on the happy new year and let us focus now on some people who have a special reason to be wearing some broad smiles on their faces – the lucky victors in the grand SUSCT Christmas Draw. Yes, those now radiating self-satisfaction because they took the trouble to invest as little as £1 in the Trust's major annual fund-raiser and came up trumps. The draw, with one or two minor niggles, went ahead as planned at half-time against Scunthorpe and the prize outcome was as follows:

£1,000 - James Welham (works at a bookmaker, I hear, and clearly backed a winner).

£500 - Mrs Kitty Butler (season ticket holder and our oldest lady member at 85. Immediately donated £25 back to the Trust. What a gal!)

£100 - Jennie Watkin.

Half season ticket - John Cassidy.

Signed away shirt - Kevin Feasey.

£30 Club shop gift voucher - M Moodworth.

Bottle of whisky - Maureen Smart.

Bottle of champagne - Les Allen.

Two bottles of red wine – Renee Phillips.

Bottle of white wine - Howard Cooper.

Only problem was that Mr Moodworth lives in the Isle of Man, not especially handy for the club shop, so alternative vouchers have been arranged. The main prize cheque was handed over by committee men Brian Cotgrove and Joe Elliott against Oxford – and very well received it was too.

Our top ticket seller was the selfless Alan Perry with an incredible 589. It really does make you wonder how some members cannot sell even one. A very big additional thank-you to second-best Peter Aldridge (125) and Paul FitzGerald (85). Committee man Alan, in typical fashion, has already donated his £100 prize to Trust funds, meaning we finished with a profit of £2,265. So a 'merci beaucoup' all round to every one of you who contributed in whatever small way by either selling or buying tickets. A fantastic effort. Nor could the draw have gone ahead without the particularly sterling efforts of Terry Jeffreys and 'promoter' Richard Coxell.

**T**HE success of the raffle was one of the first items discussed at the last committee meeting held for the first time at the newly revamped Blue Boar on the evening of January 13. It is good to see the Boar back in business after so long, particularly with its United connections. They certainly did us proud with a very pleasant spread to smooth discussions, though the throng assembled close by meant audibility was not always of the best. But we will probably give it a second chance.

Anyway, from waffle to raffle. Under the guidance of Mr Perry, new chair of the Trust's fund-raising sub-committee, we plan to go for another slightly smaller end-of-season affair with prizes this time of £500, £200 and £100. So if you did not collect at Christmas, all is not lost. Once again we shall be relying on members to sell tickets. And following on from that, if you did not, could not or would not sell any over the festive period we would love to know what it is that is holding you back. E-mail Terry on [terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com](mailto:terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com) and let him know – even if it is only 'I can't be a\*\*\*d'!

Alan reported that the 10-pin bowling night on January 16 was a sell-out – details on the event later – though there was a very poor response to the 'ad' in NUMBER 43 inviting members to take places in a follow-up the next week. We frequently get members asking us to arrange social functions and that is one of the Trust's goals. But if we do arrange them, we need them to be supported by as many people as possible. *Please* try to take part if you can. Perhaps if members let us know, again through Terry at the address above or Alan on [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com), what sort of social events you yourselves would like to see, that might give us a much better idea of what we should be looking to organise. Talking of taking part, whether you are a brainbox or brain dead the next SUSCT QUIZ NIGHT is scheduled for Boots and Laces on Saturday, March 8 in the wake of the match v Lincoln. We had an excellent turn-out last time, so to ensure you don't end up sidelined on this occasion book your place or table with Dave Scriven on [dave@shrimperzone.com](mailto:dave@shrimperzone.com) or give him a ring on 01268-757948. I know six of the available 12 tables have already been snapped up.

Dave will also answer all your enquiries, and take further competitors, in the *Quid A Goal* scheme. If you are new to this and do not want to start way back at the start of the season, you can now come in from January 1 and still be making a very worthwhile contribution to funds that will help improve the quality of some of the physio's equipment at the Hall. John Stannard, by the way, is being retained by the club following a successful initial period.

We had been looking at a Q & A for this month, but United form prior to January 14 suggested next month might be better – especially as we now find the United AGM is on January 30. This should hopefully shed light on a number of issues – notably Fossetts Farm and the state of the SUFC current account in the wake of revelations that we made a loss of 'only' £707,000 last year. But that is an improvement, so it is not all bad news! Clearly work to do, though, for our new financial director Anita Vine A.C.C.A., 26, United's first-ever female director. She'll be good with the shopping, anyway (sorry ladies!) At least we still look more secure than York City. The Trust will be well represented by shareholding members at the AGM. And, rest assured, they will have questions to ask.

Next something else to get back to Terry on if you feel the need. While we are the Southend United Supporters Club Trust, it would probably lighten our profile a little in certain circumstances if we had a slightly less formal tag such as the Shrimpers Trust. For that to happen we would simply need to register as the SUSCT, trading as Shrimpers Trust. We said we would test the mood of the membership on this, so if you have a view let Terry know on either the e-mail address or phone number given earlier.

**T**ERRY is taking his secretarial duties as seriously as you would expect, helped by a large tome entitled 'The Company Secretary's Desktop Guide'. It looks like the literary equivalent of watching paint dry, so we are lucky to have someone so devoted to duty in the role. Being secretary of a legally recognised Trust is no simple matter and there is a lot of tedious business that he is obliged to deal with. So try to remember that next time you wonder what some of the committee do with their time.

Bit of good news from Craig Fillary in the treasury. The Inland Revenue have let us off a £100 charge over their claim against us for Corporation Tax. Probably as they have found we do not owe them any. In fact we have been told we do not even have to file a Corporation Tax return for another five years. Perhaps the IR could now resume the hunt for my 'lost' tax return. Recorded as received on August 7, they no longer have a clue where it is. If you have not yet had an assessment notice for 2001-02, check it out. Apparently thousands of returns have mysteriously 'disappeared'.

Membership secretary Paul Yeomanson, another clearly warming to his task, reported that we have gained 69 members since December 9 and disposed of 30 no longer answering calls to renew for whatever reason.

The push against Boston brought in 22, so a special 'welcome' to them, and our overall total now stands at 711. Add on 112 SJS members and you have an overall tally of 823. That is progress made, but it is a case of the more the merrier so keeping spreading the word.

Paul also produced his fascinating breakdown of where the Trust's members come from – and here you have the answer to the quiz in the opening paragraph. The figures equate to the number of members we have in various locations worldwide. Certainly having three in C\*\*\*\*\* has to be significant, as that is more than actually support that sorry shambles up the A12 in the town itself. Great to see the 'derby' drawing ever closer. Anyway, needless to say the top venue for Trust members is Southend with 104, followed by Leigh-on-Sea (89), Westcliff (59) and Benfleet (45). Having six in America is fantastic, so how come we can conjure up only four in Eastwood and Thundersley?

Our singletons are all over the place from China to Canada, Preston to Prittlewell, Singapore to Southsea. All Blues devotees desperate to see the club succeed. If you want a fuller breakdown on the figures, I am sure Paul would be happy to let you have one. Contact him on [p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk) or 01702-302373 on that or any other membership matter. Also if you are having newsletter receipt problems or want to change the way you receive this 'mighty organ'. Hope you got NUMBER 43 in time for Christmas without any problem. A total of 320 were sent by post, the rest down the phone lines.

Dave Scriven continues to work on the new website and we hope that will be up and pumping before too much longer. It's no easy task.

Next on the agenda was the report from the Liaison Committee meeting of December 18, attended by Paul FitzGerald and Dave Scriven for the Trust and Geoffrey King, Derek Wilshire and Chris Phillips from the football club.

**F**OLLOWING requests that we try to seek a location where members can meet for Trust info, to book coach places, sign up, sign off etc, GK suggested we might like to use the yellow hut outside the East Stand. We could even paint it up and put a sign on if we wished. This was considered by the committee, but we would still prefer to get something sorted out inside the Shrimpers Club if possible and we will continue to push for that. One key question posed was: 'Once we have refurbished the hut, how long before the first arson attempt?' A sad sign of the times in a once genteel town.

PF inquired of GK about the constant nature of the prize in the 50-50 draw. At that, Brian Wheeler was summoned to reveal there is nothing suspicious about this and the books are available for anyone who wishes to have a gander. A lot of the reduction in the final pay-out comes because before the winnings can be doled out, items like commission, insurance, tickets costs and paying for additional prizes has to be deducted from the take. So rest assured, this event is very definitely *not* run to Anton Johnson rules.

Four directors have so far signed up to the Quid A Goal – Geoffrey King, Paul Robinson, Frank Van Wezel and Derek Wilshire. We hope to have the rest roped in shortly. Come on Ron, unlock your wallet.

The club have generously agreed to stump up one-third of the cost of helping the SUSCT and the owners of the Blue Boar to refurbish the grave of Oliver Trigg, one of the founders of SUFC, in Sutton Cemetery. Richard Coxell is currently doing the costings on this.

GK advised that the Shrimpers will be open for important televised matches, but not for all. Details will be publicised in advance. Hand dryers for the toilets are being purchased, as are soap dispensers. But GK stressed that if they are vandalised, then they will not be replaced. (It goes without saying that we hope no Trust member would even consider such half-witted behaviour).

GK has also offered to turn the Shrimpers Bar into the SUSCT Shrimpers Bar. SUFC would run the bar, but everything else in there would be the Trust's responsibility. We would be able to change things, within reason, as we see fit. DS and PF thought this an excellent idea and the Trust committee will continue to look at the yeas and nays, whys and wherefores etc in the coming weeks. In the meantime, GK felt changes were

needed to pull in more customers. He will be looking at décor and other issues in the next couple of months, though, as previously reported, several expensive pictures have been stolen of late by some toerags unknown. PF expressed the need for more seating areas, while DS suggested playing the last away match on the big screen. GK agreed to look into that. The handcart of shop goods was an innovation v Oxford.

Then it was on to Trust Travel, with details provided by the inimitable Mr Berry. The Torquay trip and quiz with the Seagulls supporters seemed to go down very well and was an excellent bridge-builder at the cost of just £100 for the late-stay coach. Only downside was that some vile creature unloaded the contents of his churning stomach in the coach toilet and basin, which could have cost us a £50 clean-up fee from Supreme. The guilty party should be ashamed of himself – and we have a good idea who it was. He is lucky he is not being exposed to the world after a DNA probe. One traveller was deeply unhappy at being left behind for the journey to Carlisle and, while the long-suffering Bashers has held his hand up, this should be a reminder to everyone to ensure you never leave your arrival at the departure point too close to the last minute. Then at Cambridge we had two or three travellers who thought we could hang about for them for up to 50 minutes after the match and were a little shocked to find that was not the case and the coach was long gone when they eventually fronted. Our coaches go to games, then leave asap afterwards. Those are legal obligations, end of story. One or two people have also queried the discrepancy in price between what members and non-members pay on journeys. That differential is actually for the benefit of our members, part of what the Trust is all about, and dual pricing on travel is common at most clubs. Chris is now taking bookings for both Scunthorpe (Saturday) and Wrexham (February 15). Ring him on the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. But, please, NO text message bookings on his mobile. Calls only.

**A**NOTHER date for the diary – Wednesday, May 7. That is when we have pencilled in the SUSCT Player of the Year awards. If they go as well as last season, when the event featured Kevin Feasey's excellent CDs, it should be a good night. Leon Cort (PotY), Stephen Broad (Goal of the Season) and Barrington Belgrave (SJS PotY) are the defending pot-holders.

Final item was the revelation that there have been rumours of a new Supporters Club starting up, offering 'cheaper' ('tattier'?) coach travel and the potential to travel by train (assuming the one you require is not one of the 100-plus just axed from the service). Suffice to say that, so far, we are not quaking in our boots.

Talking of good nights, the 10-pin bowling raised £286 for funds, courtesy of Alan. As I have said, Trust member turn-out was not what it might have been at what was a very pleasant social occasion. I am still trying to get my right shoulder back in its socket after nearly 10 years away from the lanes. I suppose, too, that I have to congratulate the player of the night – top scorer in the final 'bizarre bowl' round, collector of two bottles of bubbly stuff for strikes when the 'gold' pin was showing and winner of a pager in the raffle. Yes, well done.....Guy Rickard. Sorry, mate, just had to stifle a yawn there.

So to events on the pitch. Things may not be totally sweetness and light, but they are a hell of a sight better than at 4.42pm on January 4, when those individuals and website buffs claiming 'It is time for change' seemed to have a point. It was the moment in the NoW office when the Sky Sports teleprinter flickered and there was the stark image announcing 'Carlisle 1 Southend 0' and yet another dismal defeat.

At the same moment, former Chelsea and Liverpool midfielder and failed Sheffield United boss Nigel Spackman almost wet himself in his excitement to impart the news that Shrewsbury had gone 2-1 up in the FA Cup against Everton, looney Rooney et al, with just two minutes to go. And almost immediately after that another scoreline came through. Darlington, 'good' enough to beat us at Feethams five weeks before, had been turned over there by Conference side Farnborough. And Farnborough's reward in the next round? That monster money-spinner against Arsenal.

I suddenly found myself envying those sides the success they were deservedly enjoying, their moment under the spotlight. Usually I can console myself with the thought 'Well, maybe it will be us next season' or 'There is still time to push for the top'. But the way Blues were then performing, it was hard to imagine when they would next conjure up a pleasure-producing 90 minutes. Those seven points from 36 said 'We're in trouble' and a show like the one turned in against Oxford looked the stuff of fantasy.

Remember Rob was still saying at the SUSCT AGM on October 30: 'I have this vision that this year is going to be our year'. Naturally, we all read that as our year for promotion, not our year to go and join Hayes and Forest Green Rovers! Ron obviously had the same vibe, as he made clear in his hang tough public warning that things had to take a giant leap forward or the revolving doors could swing into operation.

**U**NTIL the last three games, there has been a tangible sense of disillusion amongst our fans – stemming chiefly from odd team formations and line-ups, the playing of people out of position, under-performance from talented individuals, a chronic lack of goals, disastrous home form and, most worrying, an almost total lack of quality about our general play. No one doubts Rob is a good bloke. But good bloke is not what we need. Good boss is what we require. We must all hope his new alliance with Stewart Robson works out and we can build on the huge boost that the victories at Shrewsbury and over Rochdale and Oxford at the Hall have given us.

No matter what you might have thought of Brian Clough, whether you loved him or hated him, there was something that dawned on all football followers at one time or another before severe overdoses of sauce began to blight his career and have just required him to have a Bestie-style liver transplant. Hey (young man), this bloke knows what it takes to manage a successful team.

Steve Stone, now with Portsmouth, did time under Old Big 'Ead. And he recently revealed that a prime philosophy of Clough's still echoes through his brain during every match he plays. He hears the familiar voice from the Nottingham Forest training ground bellowing: "Give it and go. Keep it on the deck and not in the air. Only angels play up there."

Such sound advice. On the ground is invariably where we play our best stuff – as Oxford can now testify. Even in the darkest hours of recent seasons under messrs Martin and Little, and now with Rob in charge, the little truly decent football we have played has come when we have stayed patient, kept possession, probed for an opening, played the ball to feet, eventually got behind defences and thus created chances. We have never done anything when our defenders or deep-lying midfielders have received the ball, looked up at their team-mates racing away from them and then tried a hit-and-hope 40 or 50-yard pass in the vague direction of a rapidly receding blue shirt. Why? Because 99 times out of 100, our Hoddle wannabes find an opponent.

The Bournemouth FA Cup replay was a prime example. We stayed in the game first half by battling hard, making good use of Tony Scully down the right and not conceding possession. Second half it was just lump it forward in a panic, surrender the ball, see it come straight back and, eventually and inevitably, lose.

Ron has made his feelings clear – and was right to do so. The team buck stops with Rob and he must be ruthless with any players not doing what they are supposed to or not giving it their all – no matter what their potential or personal rating of their own talents. If they get bored with shooting practice or passing practice during training, tough. When they can do it to the standard demanded, then they can move on to what they fancy trying. And if anyone wants to argue, Rob should just say: 'Hey, there is one boss here – me. And if you don't like it, try sitting on the bench for the next few weeks – in the reserves!'

We had the post-match lock-in at Darlington. Effect – nil. Then Rob's 'stand by for changes' tirade after Torquay. Effect – errrrr. Maybe Rob just does not carry enough conviction with 'the lads'. But he has to start. I understand Mr Robson is a genuine no-nonsense merchant. Hence, possibly, the sudden welcome upturn in both form and apparent player attitude. Let's pray it is not just another flash in the pan.

**I**wonder what old Arthur Rowley would have made of our antics of late. Sad to see that he passed away a few weeks back, though, of course, it was as a player that he really made his mark rather than as a manager. And, to be fair, if Rob had some of the talent that was available to old Arthur in the 1971-72 season when we finished runners-up in Division Four – Billy Best, Bill Garner, Gary Moore, Terry Johnson, Alex Smith, Brian Alberson, Joe Jacques, Dave Elliott etc – I somehow don't think we would have suffered this season as we have. I also notice that season that someone called George Duck played three first-team games. Can anyone shed any light on him as he has been wiped from my memory banks completely?

Right, how have we been performing of late against our Third Division rivals? Judge from this. All comments were written post-match.

**TORQUAY (A, 21/12, L3-1):** Pitch was soaked through, but deemed playable. Problem was we did not play that well. Their goals were neatly taken, yet could all be traced back to defensive slackness. Once Tes equalised, the last thing we wanted to do was go behind once more within five minutes. Of course, that is just what we did. Rob was not happy. Quite rightly. We now wait to see how, and if, the team will respond. All booked to travel turned up and had a very pleasant evening with the gang of Gulls.

**CAMBRIDGE UTD (A, 26/12, D1-1):** Work kept me from this one, but I was worried from the moment I discovered Cambridge had not been prevented from scoring in a league game since April. I rated them at the Hall back in August – even though we won narrowly – but this time the division’s leading scorers found Blues in knuckled-down mood with more than 1,000 travelling fans on hand to urge them on. Mark Rawle gave us the lead and, despite some scares, we could have added to it before they finally broke us down on 63 minutes. I almost ran into the Ripple Road flyover at Dagenham as I thumped the steering wheel when Kevin Maher hit the post late on. But this looked a more encouraging show, even with ‘Big Phil’ back in our rearguard. Coach no-shows were: NICK ALDWORTH, STEPHEN RIVERS, MARTIN RIVERS, SCOTT ELDER and JAY ‘SOMETHING’. Fiver fine, methinks.

**SCUNTHORPE (H, 29/12, L2-1):** First home game missed this campaign thanks to the switch to Sunday. Working again. But on hearing mid-morning that Wrexham was off and they were inspecting at the Hall, my fingers were firmly crossed for a postponement and a rearranged date. Sorry if that sounds selfish. It was lashing down by the time Wapping loomed out of the gloom and I felt sure the second inspection would prove to me there is a God. Wrong – game on! Leon Cort strikes on 39 minutes and I am telling everyone who will listen we are back on track. Then, of course, Kevin Maher misses our fourth straight spot-kick, bloody Carruthers equalises, we give ‘em another, that is home defeat number seven done and dusted and the flak I am getting is horrendous. I refuse to blame KM. It was Graeme Jones at Rushden who set our penalty arrangements back for the season. Tes was absolutely fine until he muscled in. This is just one more nightmare result, though, and it’s on-song Oxford next. Lose that and.....I daren’t think. One bloke enjoyed it, though. Tim Carey, a 40-year-old New Zealander now living in Japan, has followed Scunny from afar for 10 years without ever seeing them in action. But after splashing £3,000 for a 12,000-mile round trip, he took in four of their games during a two-week holiday – and this was one of them. “It was amazing,” he said – presumably referring to our latest collapse.

**OXFORD UTD (H, 1/1, postponed):** Teletext said inspection at 10.30am. The water laying in my back garden already indicated no chance – as it proved. Pity. I was looking forward to us traumatising Andy Woodman before his FA Cup trip to Highbury. Good to see United still pushing cut-price tickets, especially the Kid A Quid and £5 for those accompanying a season ticket holder. Spent the afternoon watching M\*\*\*\*\* U\*\*\*\*\* v Sunderland with Mr G in the Sarah Moore in Leigh Broadway. It was sickening just how many there actually wanted Fergie’s walking pound signs to win.

**C**ARLISLE (A, 4/1, L1-0): 4-5-1, Graeme Jones on his tod up front, Phil Whelan at the back and no Darryl. All the ingredients for defeat and so it proved, though no blame can be attached to Danny Gay between the sticks. David Crown said (again): “It wasn’t good enough.” David, old son, we know. What we want is for you to make it good enough. Mark Rawle hit the bar, but it seems we did not rattle the woodwork as often as them. A colleague of mine who attended the game in his capacity as a Cumbrians fanatic gave this verdict: “Carlisle were not very good, but Southend were abysmal.” Thanks for that, Mal. Just about all present and correct for the horror journey of the season.

**SHREWSBURY (A, 11/1, postponed):** Ms Chamberlain announced we were ‘orf’ on Soccer AM at 9.40. Heading for work about 20 minutes later I think I saw our coach at Victoria House Corner roundabout on its way back to base. The cancelled trip cost us an unavoidable £150. Waterlogged pitch with a bit of ice thrown in is the word. And just when we were planning to show Everton where they went wrong. Thanks to

Helen Giles for phoning over the bad news just as our party hit the M25. Hang about, by next day the match is back on. For Tuesday!

**SHREWSBURY (A, 14/1, W1-0):** Victory! Victory! League rules appear to say you must play on both sides' first agreeable free date after a postponement. Typically sound thinking. I mean, why entice a few thousand along on a pleasant April evening when you can get just over 2,000 to Gay Meadow on a grim one in January? But as it turns out, this rearrangement was inspired. The boy Berry pulled out all the travel stops to fill our coach, first trying to contact all those on board on Saturday to see if they wished to try again. Five initially could not be contacted, six wavered, 18 were up for it and 18 declined for various reasons. We ended up taking 24, who enjoyed Blues' best performance for some time and a 20<sup>th</sup>-minute clincher from Jay Smith. Strange how the goal came from neat build-up on the ground, the ball was worked to the byline, Tes slipped it across and Jay poked it in. QED.

**ROCHDALE (H, 18/1, W1-0):** Hey, we're on a roll. Jack Douglas celebrates his 12<sup>th</sup> birthday next day by bouncing into the limelight to make the delayed SUSCT Player of the Month award to Leon Cort. Tony Scully still has our original trophy and Jay Smith the reserve, so monster thanks to Tony Avery of Frameworks in Benfleet who has not only donated Mk3 to us but agreed to sponsor the silverware as well. Not one SunSport pools forecaster fancied Blues, with seven of the 10 backing a draw and three a defeat. Shows what they know. Dale were unbeaten in eight games. How? Much more positive and purposeful start for us at the Hall than for some time, but it took until the 89<sup>th</sup> minute for Tes to slide in the clincher. Lucky their defender running back did not stick out a leg. TV showed he would have blocked the effort for sure. Good to see Clarkie switching on the after-burners. But, apart from the goal, moment of the match had to be Lee McEvilly's classic 50-yard free-kick bender into the West Stand. Pre-match in the Shrimpers I was amazed that so many telly watchers cheered when Diego Forlan hit M\*\*\*\*\* U\*\*\*\*\*'s injury-time winner against Chelsea. Remember, if we were going belly up they would not lift a finger to help us survive.

**OXFORD UTD (H, 21/1, W2-1):** At last. The home performance we have been waiting for. Even Mr I was fulsome in his praise. Solid at the back, except for the last-gasp doze that gave Oxford the consolation they never deserved, buzzing in midfield, dangerous up front and pinging it around on the ground to great effect. Only 3,203 present, but they knew this was much more like it as we made it three wins on the trot. Andy Woodman showed why we let him go by allowing Mark Rawle's first-half shot to slip through his fingers. Tes followed that up with a beautifully-taken thunderbolt that would have killed anything that got in its way en route to the rigging. Steven Clark took the man of the match award and his potential is now there for all to see. Special mention, as well, for the outstanding Jay Smith and quietly effective Darryl Sutch. A good night, also, for the bloke who splashed out a fiver on the cut-price ticket my brother could not use. Final thought: Why did BB make such a berk of himself over the half-time prize shoot-out?

**F**URTHER to that surprise collection of Evil Empire backers in the Shrimpers before the Rochdale match, encouraging to see greed is still good in some parts of our national game. You certainly cannot believe that M\*\*\*\*\* U\*\*\*\*\* chief executive Peter Kenyon's claim that there should be only 40 professional clubs was made out of a sense of philanthropy. This is a man for whom money is all-consuming – which is why he fits in so well within the portals of Old Trafford. If you want more detail, I recommend this book: Manchester Unlimited (The Money, Egos and Infighting Behind the World's Richest Football Club) by Mihir Bose. Price: £9.99. Professional fat cat Kenyon's goal since replacing veteran lecher Martin Edwards is simple – push the brand worldwide and rake in the cash. And if the distrust of the United fans remains, along with the almost universal loathing of the knowledgeable neutral, so what. Screaming teenyboppers on the streets of Tokyo buying every bit of Becks merchandise they can lay their hands on are far more important these days than your average mug punter from the streets of Salford who just wants to watch his team in action. Then again, these days he probably cannot afford to get in anyway.....

Still talking of the Manchester mob, we have a 'traitor' in our midst. Trust member David Poole, formerly of FourFourTwo magazine, is now working on the United Review. At £3, it is basically a multi-page love-in on the club, plus the vaguest mention of the match day opposition presumably because they have to have one. Headlines include 'Graeme Hogg had Maradona in his Pocket' and 'Captain Sensible' (about Roy Keane!). To be fair to David, though, it is a first-rate production. I know because he sent me a couple.

United did a video of the Hartlepool FA Cup victory, while there was also a video of the Boston action shown on my coach to Bournemouth. Anyone else like to see the restoration of the videos of the entire season, even though an 18 certificate might be required?

See what a new ground can do for you? A mere 22,319 in Hull's Kingston Communication Stadium for the visit of Hartlepool and a 2-0 win in the bag. Not that they will keep such a record crowd consistently, but they will have a darn sight more than us. Just wait 'til Fossetts, Mr G.

Get any good Christmas presents? Mine included a framed 12" x 10" full-colour overhead picture of the Hall, a couple of Blues first-day covers and an armchair ref's kit. Does it sound as if I need treatment?

I would not have taken our Fourth Division title-winning boss Dave Smith for an author. But Devon-based Smith, now nearing 70, has taken the cartoon figurehead of his soccer schools and turned him into the main character of a children's book called Soccer Ball Billie. It seems Billie loves food and football and all he wants to do is get fit, lose some weight and become an international. Ring any bells?

Fancy being a TV star? Anglia are trying to revamp their Sunday afternoon coverage by inviting two or three supporters from the region's teams into their Norwich studio (no, Alan Partridge will not be there) and after showing the highlights getting a few comments from them. Any member who fancies taking part and sounding off on Blues should contact Terry Jeffreys on [terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com](mailto:terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com) or ring 01268-523974. Andy Porter and Robin Michel were our guinea-pigs post-Rochdale and it sounds as if they had a good time – especially taking the mick out of the poor specimens from Essex's oldest town.

**A**LSO nice to find the ITV programme planners are getting their scheduling priorities right again. Nationwide League Extra went out at 2.30am on December 23. Great for insomniacs, but what about the rest of us? And when did the BBC change the start time of their FA Cup second round highlights on December 18 from 11.45pm, as set out in my TV mag, to 11.20pm, thus ensuring that instead of Bournemouth v Blues all I got on my video was a bit of some crap film starring Roger Moore and Lee Marvin? Clueless.

One other snippet, not that it is likely to worry us much. The new Wembley Stadium. 90,000 seats, 3,000 car parking spaces. So does that mean 87,000 sardines packed on the tube? Well, not quite. Relief is at hand – at a price. If you fancy one of the 17,500 premium ticket packages that will be available at £6,000 a touch, you will be able to take advantage of a new exclusive £10-a-head train service running between Marylebone and grossly under-used Wembley Stadium. But, sorry, no package, no train. Doesn't it do the heart good to see the powers that be considering the genuine England follower and not the corporate prawn sarnie lovers, many of whom cannot distinguish between a football and a cricket ball? And if that sounds like Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell – risibly responsible for sport – it is supposed to.

OK, there, once again, you have it. Any comments, comeback, points of order etc, contact me at the usual address – [nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk](mailto:nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk) Until next time.....

NR (22/1)

PS 1. Worst result of 2002. SunSport's Fixed odds duffer Andy 'Hot Totty' Totham, one of the few people in the county still supporting C\*\* U, backing us to lose in the FA Cup at Bournemouth. The fact we did helped him to a winning 5-1 treble that netted this supreme saddo £150. His crowing was pitiful to see. Almost as pitiful, in fact, as the Layabout Roaders' slide into the relegation zone. Come on down!

2. As it is Super Bowl time, what about this quote from former Washington Redskins quarterback legend Joe Theismann: "Nobody in football should be called a genius. A genius is a guy like Norman Einstein." Mighty fine, Joe.