

SUSCT PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARDS – WEDNESDAY
MAY 7. DON'T FORGET!

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 47

THE £5ew Coral betting slip backing Blues for promotion in 2002-03 may have gone arrowing into the kitchen bin – a bit like 2000-01 and 2001-02 in fact – but hope must surely spring eternal following the arrival of our new boss.

I said in NUMBER 46 that Steve Wignall had done himself a favour by announcing we were the true No1 club in Essex and not those loser-backed Layerbouts up the A12. Steve was clearly sensibly trying to distance himself from a four-year spell in charge at C** U that he must now bitterly regret. But it is never too late to repent your sins – and look how it has turned out. Ron and Co have handed him the most desirable job on planet football. Well, for a masochist anyway.

How much input Ron actually had in the candidates' interviews, seeing as he appeared to have been roasting his pallid flesh at a Caribbean hideaway during the majority of the run-up to the appointment, can only be guessed at. It appears Derek Wilshire did most of the hard graft, pulling together a final group of about eight contestants for Ron to OK from his sunbed just before happy hour. But the board do at least seem sensibly to have weighed up a few options on this occasion, even though not all were exactly top-drawer, and in a last four showdown opted for Wignall ahead of Stewart Robson, former Coventry chief Don Mackay and Steve Thompson. Wignall, 48, was handed the manager's job on Good Friday and told he would swiftly become familiar with another day of the week – Bad Saturday. The one hat in the ring many supporters feared, chiefly because his getting the job could have sparked a mass walkout by the Pulse Cheerleaders, obviously never made the last round. It possibly explained why he was 'punditing' on the radio only a couple of days after his Hall grilling – and expressing an interest in the Fulham job!

Robson remains as first-team coach and let us pray we at last have a management combination that can get us moving onwards and upwards, both in terms of league position and quality of play, in 2003-04. With the play-offs now extended to six teams, there can be no excuses if we do not at least make the shoot-out next season. The process of weighing up the current squad presumably began against Torquay – though Robson must already have been able to pass on his thoughts on what he has seen so far of the talent available. They are unlikely to be very flattering and it was hardly a surprise to see that none of the lads was named in the PFA's Third Division Team of the Year. In fact, the odds seem to favour a fairly dramatic bout of fond farewells ahead. All we can hope is that the future will not involve us being asked to accept 'a Boston' every week. That would surely be asking too much of even the most devoted of Blues slaves.

REMEMBER, too, that we have also been promised a sports scientist and dietician will be brought in, with some of the squad apparently already asking if they can go on the P. Byrne patented pre-match energy-builder – triple deck burger, large fries, thick shake and a tub of Wall's finest to top it off. The squad will also be given a 'home programme' to follow through the close season – OK, in the last couple of days before training restarts!

Your Trust committee has met on April 7 and 28 and there follows an overview of the key points discussed.

After much mulling, secretary Terry Jeffreys has decided it makes no point at present for the Trust to change from a CLG to an IPS. I am sure that has put a lot of minds at rest.

The new website was definitely due up by now. Instead, we continue to live in hope. Eventually you should be able to get all the Trust info you need there or you can always call at the now resided Trust stand in the Shrimpers Club main bar on match days (from August!)

Richard Coxell has been pursuing the refurbishment of the Sutton Cemetry grave of the main man behind the formation of SUFC back in 1906 – Oliver Trigg. United are willing to donate some money and allegedly the Evening Echo regarded this as a potential feature. That's the same SOUTHEND Evening Echo whose back page lead was on the Hamsters the day after Blues' visit to Boston. Does anyone think the Newham Advertiser led on Southend? Get a grip.

While United seem to be existing at present without quite the scare level of recent months, the Trust reckons it will not do any harm to have a contingency plan in hand just in case the brown stuff should strike the fan once again and that is under consideration.

THE Trust is always keen to raise its profile wherever and whenever possible. But it seems these days the cost and petty, EU-inspired rules, regulations and busyboding are all trying to gravitate against it. Take a site at the airshow. Should be simple, but it could cost £700 plus VAT and involve us getting £5million of public liability insurance. That is in case, for example, some pathetic loser feels like suing us because he has cut his finger on our stand. Is it any wonder that so many once popular public events no longer take place? We have delayed take-off on this one until at least 2004. As it is, our latest insurance policy alone has cost us £295.

SUSCT MUSIC QUIZ NIGHT – SATURDAY JUNE 7. **BOOK A TABLE NOW!**

Treasurer Craig Fillary reported that our bank balance currently figures at about where it usually does. But with interest rates currently so low it was agreed that a sum should be transferred into a high interest bond to give a better return.

Membership secretary Paul Yeomanson reported that the SUSCT and SJS tally stood at 830, which is up two from the previous month. But this is before another no-nonsense culling of lapsed members and non-payers. Paul has also raised the possibility of us producing a Trust polo shirt, to be sold at around £12. This is likely to be a fashion statement that will grant immediate entry to the in-crowd, so we need to get some idea of the numbers required. If you would be interested in buying one or more (Mr G and Mr I), let Paul know on p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk or ring him on 01702-302373. It is certainly hoped to have some for sale by the time of the United Open Day on July 20. We also aim to produce a new SUSCT badge for 2003-04.

Alan Perry revealed that the April 3 10-pin bowling night was not quite all it might have been. It was disappointing to find 14 of the 45 people booked failed to turn up and otherwise there were only more or less the usual faces in attendance. Rickard Jnr induced a massive combined yawn from within the Leigh Superbowl as he hurled down his 16lb ball to kick off with three strikes. My bulging biceps had a job coping with a 9lb-er. Mr G's flat green bowls technique was much in evidence, with any success greeted by some very sad high-fives, whooping and hollering, while his partner Jane's delivery was promptly nicknamed 'the killer caterpillar'. Never have so many pins tumbled when struck so gently. Meanwhile Terry Jeffreys appeared to have more strikes bowling with his back to the pins than face on. He and Kath celebrated with the bottle of Chateau Bellegrave (a possible French relation?) they won in the raffle. Moira Coxell took time off from fleecing the Evening Echo's competitions department to claim the first raffle prize, opting for the Southern Comfort. Rickard Jnr picked up a.....ZZZZZZZZZZ! Most important, though, Alan again did his level best to ensure the evening went off in as fine a style as possible and many thanks to him for his usual unstinting efforts to add to the Trust kitty. The profit was £143.50.

BUT there was much better news from the SUSCT end-of-season draw. My East Greens neighbour Ron Allen, who has stuck resolutely by Blues since before World War II, was delighted to hear the name of his daughter and fellow Trust member Helen pulled out of the hat as the first prize winner at half-time

during the final home game against Bury. Helen, from Great Dunmow, is now a very nice £500 better off and all because she bought most of the tickets she was sent herself. Very sensible. The other prize-winners in the draw supervised on the hallowed turf by Brian Cotgrove and Joe Elliott were runner-up Tim Clayton from Benfleet, who was most anxious to get his hands on the £250 reward, and Matt Wells from Cambridge. He landed the top 10 CDs of the day. Unlucky if you bought tickets and did not cop any remuneration, hang your heads if you did not sell your tickets. Thanks a lot to all those who did make the effort and to Alan Perry in particular for more heroic flogging feats. He managed to offload an amazing 541 and, as usual, generously donated his £100 prize to the Trust. Steve Stone (not the ex-England player) got rid of 90 to pick up £50 and we are not yet sure what Bashers will be doing with the £25 he is due for selling an excellent 80. Overall, we made a superb £1,826 on this event, which was far beyond what we were realistically hoping for. And once again it goes to show the potential if everyone was to take just a few minutes to sell their tickets for us.

Once the season is over, all those who have entered 'Quid A Goal' at some stage will have Dave Scriven chasing them for money. Please be prepared to pay up promptly. It will be a big help.

We would like to try to auction a place in the United dug-out for the next campaign, though that will have to go through channels and the League. But it has been done elsewhere, so we will keep pushing.

Upcoming social events are as follows:

WEDNESDAY MAY 7: SUSCT Player of the Year *awards at the Shrimpers Club, 7-30pm for 8pm. Vote by way of e-mail to terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com or fill in the slip at the end of the newsletter and post it to Terry at 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR by the morning of the 6th. You still have plenty of time. Kevin Feasey will show another Blue movie so don't miss out. Erroneously appeared in the Torquay programme as May 17.*

SATURDAY JUNE 7: SUSCT Music Quiz Night *at Boots and Laces. Quiz master Guy Rickard is working his little shrivelled prunes off to come up with some varied and interesting rounds for music lovers of all eras from the 50s to 00s. This will be much more fun than just vegetating in front of the box watching Blind Date, some garbage fronted by Ian Wrong, episode 674 of Casualty or Parkinson interviewing Billy Connolly for the 15th time. So get your table booked now via Alan Perry on alanperry4@hotmail.com or 01702- 476458. Yes, I mean YOU! We hope to stage another auction as well. Originally scheduled for both May 10 and May 31, but this is definitely the real deal. 'I'll be there unless I've got a cough' - Major Charles Ingram.*

It was agreed that the Q & A Night on March 18 with Ron and the now departed Rob Newman had been a success, but that in future we should make a charge for all non-Trust personnel attending such a gathering organised by the SUSCT.

MIKE Smith suggested we should hold a members get-together in a local hostelry every so often and we will try to get this off the ground from the start of next season. This was an excellent idea from Mike and we will miss his input now he has resigned from the committee as he is moving to Spain. We wish him all the best.

Kath Jeffreys is taking Mike's place on the committee, which is excellent news as we have been without any female input for far too long. We also have one other person known to be interested in being co-opted and, even though the AGM is still some months away, it is something other members might like to think about as one or two other current 'officers' will be calling it quits in October after doing stints of four years plus.

When it came to the Blues hot-seat, even Sir Stanley appeared to fancy a crack. Was he really serious? That might have been taking romance just a little too far, but what a corking player-coach he might still make someone if he can get himself sorted out.

I have seen a few sad sights in football down the years. But one of the saddest had to be that of the great man reduced to taking penalties in his everyday clothes and shoes during the half-time kickabout at the Steve Tilson testimonial bash.

Just two days later England were playing Turkey in their crucial Euro 2004 qualifier and the nation was wondering who the hell could partner Michael Owen with the prospect of possibly conjuring up the odd goal. It sure as hell was not going to be Emile Heskey and, of course, no one really believed that Sven would break the habit of a lifetime and take a gamble on Wayne Rooney. Yet the question need never have been asked. Stan should have been celebrating about his 70th cap as the striker no England side could afford to be without. Stan insists he has no regrets about how his career has panned out. In that case, he is a fool. He had all the talents to have been one of the finest central attackers this country has ever produced – lethal with BOTH feet, good in the air, quick on the turn, blessed with blistering pace and strong on the ball. Sadly, it turned out that he went to the wrong team in Liverpool. While he was the top dog at SUFC and Nottingham Forest and thrived on the strength of having those clubs' game plans directed around his abilities, Liverpool decided he had to fit in with the stars already in possession like Robbie Fowler, John Barnes etc. Initial success followed for a while, but with Fowler around Stan was never allowed full control of that central striking role in which he could be so devastating. His long-range shooting and jaunts past three or four defenders were also curbed. Not the way we do it here, old chap. I believe that started to get him down and his lack of confidence was reflected in his below-par performances in his rare international outings. Then the personal problems began to creep in and it was downhill from there. The man who should have been a joy for any England boss to have at his disposal just faded off the scene with barely a whimper on the pitch but plenty of bangs off it. Yet no one who remembers the six months Stan spent in the Blue shirt in 1992-93 will ever forget his impact or some of the fantastic goals he scored. Thanks for the memories.

THE crowd of 4,555 at the Tilson jamboree – it seemed more – were rightly keen to say ‘thanks’ to a genuine SUFC man who made the most of what skill he had and gave his all for the cause whenever he was included in the side. Well, that is those saddos who were not just present to do a bit of celeb-spotting! (Or one or two mouthy half-wits in the East Blacks around J120 who did not seem to know why they were there at all). Steve is rated for his work with the youth team and maybe found himself elevated under Rob Newman just a bit quicker than he might have liked. Let's hope things now pan out well for him on the administrative front.

He certainly should not be short of a few bob, what with the gate money and cash through the year from numerous other fund-raisers. Count me out for the £50-a-head gala dinner. But it is hard to begrudge him in a way. After all, testimonials were designed for loyal lower-league players like him, not the fat cats of the Premiership. And Steve could not be supporting a more worthy charitable cause than Fair Havens. I wonder if he handed out jewel-encrusted Rolex watches to those who took part on March 31, like one of the players in action did at his big night. Let's just say I did not join the big clap-in when this odious Ex-England XI ‘star’ was substituted.

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The East Stand was packed and you could easily spot the strangers. They were the ones who did not know that there is a vicious sun which tracks across the top of the West Stand on clear nights at this time of year and so consequently were not wearing any sort of peaked headgear.

Game one featured Sky's Dream Team XI, including Mario Melchiot lookalike, v an Ex-Southend XI. This was settled by a lusty 35-yard lob from the Dream Team midfielder who only seconds earlier had missed an absolute sitter. It was good to see some familiar faces back in a Blue shirt. Dave Martin is clearly still colour blind, Roy McDoughnut's shooting is as effective as ever and Paul Roberts deserves credit for bravely returning to face his old West Stand tormentors.

Southend United v an Ex-England XI ended up 8-2 as some of the old guard ran out of puff and were exposed by our boys' withering pace. Tes hit a hat-trick and his finishing was lethal. So now let's see him get back to doing the bizzo when it counts in just over three months' time. Goal of the game, though, was Clive Allen's 35-yard dipper that had Danny Gay all over the place. The just axed Rob also appeared to sympathetic applause. A courageous gesture before he headed off to Chelmsford City and the West Ham scout hut. Victory at least meant we had the 'NatWest Trophy' to put in the currently empty cabinet. Shame Alan Shearer did not play – not that anyone could seriously have expected him to. I am not normally an envious person, but I would have loved that framed, signed shirt of his.

Terry Alderton was a genial event host and got in one little dig which did not go unnoticed. When did he say London's Burning is coming back by popular demand? He also led the chants for the return of the North Bank, where Blues fans allowed in for the night showed it is the only place in the ground where we will ever be able to rustle up some genuine atmosphere. But don't bet on it happening. Steve has some other events to come – golf day, sportsmen's dinner etc. If you want further details, contact Jackie Davies on 07787-525064.

TES'S testimonial treble must at least have temporarily taken his mind off the Bramble shambles currently causing him a hell of a sight more grief than the fact he has struggled so badly towards the end of the season with injuries and finding the opposition net.

Learner driver Tes, who apparently still lives in Ipswich, has got off to a bad start behind the wheel by being done for drink-driving, driving without insurance (suppose he had hit you!), failure to stop after an accident and driving while not in accordance with the limitations of his provisional licence. The result? A year's ban, £755 in fines and costs, plus he has been 'disciplined' by the club. Tes, who appeared in court sporting a conservative jacket, shirt and tie topped off with a debonair baseball cap and ear-ring, was supposedly discovered skulking in a nearby garden after his illegal little run-out was halted by a pensioner's brick wall. But while the court case is over, it seems the battle over the brick wall is not. Tes's attempts to effect a repair via a friend on a job quoted at £700 did not bear swift fruit and the pensioner feared she may have to go to the small claims court to make progress. His ban also means Tes is unable to drive his untimely, though gleaming, vehicular gift from brother Titus and now needs a chauffeur on constant alert. Doh!

Heat, Basildon boy band and Westlife wannabes, have split. I hope it wasn't anything I said after the Rushden fun day, though somehow I don't feel the pop industry will now come to a grinding halt.

SUSCT MUSIC QUIZ NIGHT – SATURDAY JUNE 7. **BOOK A TABLE NOW!**

So how did we approach the season's end under our various new masters? Read on for the gory details. Any observations, as usual, are post-match.

DARLINGTON (H, 5/4, W2-0): It had to happen. Walking up the car park, I suddenly thought 'Oh dear (well, something along those lines), I've left my season ticket on the bedroom window sill'. So many thanks to Jon Child for guiding me through the hallowed players' tunnel so I could take my usual seat without having to pay again. For while we got a win we desperately needed, and which probably kept us up, this was still not a performance that anyone would happily have paid twice to watch. Ron Allen (he of the now rich daughter) definitely got the better deal by opting to attend the Powergen Cup Final at Twickers. Darlo were more like Diro and, luckily, about the least threatening team we have faced this season. If the game had been as brilliant as the weather it would have been a cracker. It wasn't, though to be fair injuries hardly left Stewart Robson with many line-up options. Tes was 'ill' again and does seem to be rather more prone than most to last-gasp maladies, while Barrington B was reduced to doing a bit of glad-handing around the corporate boxes. Steven Clark was stuck up front, but again seemed to suffer a crisis of confidence and rarely did himself justice. He has to stop playing safe passes and start using his pace to grill full-backs, like we know he can. Kevin Maher and Neil Jenkins took their goals neatly just before half-time, when Darlo were down to 10 men, and we had three other menacing shots on target. It does not sound much, but is at least two more than in most home

dates of late. There was plenty of tedium in between, though. At least three points put a smile on the face of Jerry Moss, distraught after smashing his thermos flask.

BOURNEMOUTH (A, 12/4, L1-0): ‘Southend were absolutely magnificent. Every player performed superbly as they peppered the Cherries net for 90 minutes in a brilliant display of sustained attacking football which, if they can maintain it, is guaranteed to see them in the Premiership by 2006. The fact they lost was a travesty and ‘inquiries’ will be made’. Well, that was the report from the Iraqi Ministry of Information. But those present did not paint quite such a rosy picture. A stunning header sank us and, though there was a fair bit of effort shown to get us back into the match at a venue where we rarely click, this was a seventh straight away defeat. Missed chances crucified us once more and goals away from home are becoming as rare these days as an incentive to save in a Gordon Brown budget. Our new boss will surely be demanding a hell of a sight better than this before the season is out.

TORQUAY (H, 19/4, W3-0): Remember that 7 points out of 36 nightmare around Christmas? Well we were 6 out of 27 before this welcome boost. The anointed one presented himself on the pitch to a generous welcome and then disappeared up into the warm embrace of Ron and the directors’ box to see what was on offer from his new charges. Stewart Robson surprisingly stuck with the same line-up as was despatched down on the south coast, yet the performance was one of our more enterprising of the season against a Gulls side boasting nine games unbeaten but who never really got out of the starting blocks. Mark Rawle hit them with a crisp shot on the turn after only two minutes and followed that up with a left-foot strike from the edge of the box to cap his best display for some time. Neil Jenkins then rattled in a 25-yarder for his seventh of the season, though his goals tend to cover up a fairly meagre contribution otherwise. All in all Wiggers must have been fairly encouraged, but as we know only too well looks can be very deceptive – as was proven just two days later. Apart from three points we had a half-time proposal on the pitch – accepted by the groom-to-be as he wished the earth would open up and swallow him – a fan called away as his wife was giving birth and a new Trust grandad in Brian Cotgrove. His grand-daughter weighed in at a mere 11lb 2oz, so sounds like some heavy lifting ahead when Brian pops over to the States for a visit in June.

BOSTON (A, 21/4, L1-0): The video shown on the SUSCT coach was ‘Gone In 60 Seconds’. Most of those who witnessed this nightmare must have wished they could have gone after 60 seconds. It is hard to find the words to describe this apology for a football match. Let’s start with atrocious. In umpteen seasons of Blues watching I find it difficult to remember a worse contest. And that seemed to be the general consensus. The York Street pitch was a hard, rutted, uneven disgrace on which passing the ball on the ground was all but impossible. It made the Lincoln surface look like Wembley in its prime. That left both sides lumping it as high and as hard and as often as they could from one end to the other in a display as inept as any you would expect to see at your local rec. I do not believe six passes were strung together in the entire 90 minutes. Leon Cort was probably the one Blues player who could feel satisfied with his afternoon’s work, while messrs Darby, Salter and Strachan in particular showed why they should probably be near the top of Steve Wignall’s discard pile. Only a mistake could have given Boston a goal – and sure enough the suffering 300 faithful saw it in the shape of David McSweeney’s attempted header back to Darryl five minutes from time. The ball fell short, Darryl hauled down their clean through striker David Town in the box and the penalty was slotted away with no bother whatsoever. Only then did subs BB and Steven Clark appear, when we had been crying out for change since at least half-time. So it is now eight away defeats on the trot and we have not scored more than one goal on our travels since October. Let’s hope this was an eye-opener for Mr Wignall. Any Blues side planning to push for promotion in the next 12 months must be slaughtering the likes of The Pilgrims. The squad needs a massive shake-up, because if this is the best we can look forward to next season then the Conference is our best bet. At least, though, we can end on a positive note. Bashers got the coach to turn up bang on time – and for those wondering why we did not run a second, blame the Supreme Easter surcharge. Also York Street was right next to a Matalan, so I was able to pop in for a spot of pre-match shopping. It meant I got at least a spark of pleasure for my £26.50 outlay on the day. Oh, and obviously C** U 0 Luton 5 was another tonic.

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BURY (H, 26/4, L2-1): Ron Allen (he of the now rich daughter again) has seen it all at the Hall. So when Mr Mic announced the side's post-match 'lap of honour', Ron pronounced dryly: "Shouldn't the fans be doing the lap of honour after this season, not the team?" That comment put the finger on it perfectly after another 90-minute letdown which suggested a number of those on show should not be allowed to return to inflict further mental suffering on the faithful in 2003-04. So confident were the Rickard brothers that Blues would at least not lose in the final home battle of the campaign that Pridmore's were hit with no less than three massive £1 gambles. All, of course, went down the lavvy. The Shakers were workmanlike, but that was about all they had to offer. Sadly, it was too much for us and they guaranteed themselves a play-off slot while inflicting a record 10th home defeat on United – the worst performance in the club's 97-year history. Darryl was again twice caught on his line from a corner and cross he needed to make his. Instead he was left frozen like a rabbit in headlights as two headers from three and six yards hurtled past him. Leon celebrated his club Player of the Season award with a neatly taken strike, but our overall threat until the last five minutes was sporadic at best. Waking up when the contest was just about lost, and wasting three takeable opportunities, was pushing it too far. No wonder Steve Wignall has already admitted: "I realise the size of the task I have got here." I certainly hope he does. It was Family Fun Day again, though it seemed lower key than the last one and next time commercial should probably be looking to land a genuine 'name' rather than the latest here today, gone tomorrow local combos. But they are making the effort and you cannot ask much more. The same ethos from ALL the players would not go amiss.

LET'S hope that Ron Martin can keep cooking, sorry, balancing the books next season. Clubs that go into administration in future face possible automatic relegation or a fine of a large number of points. Watching a bit of the Reading v Brighton game recently, I wondered why the Albion sponsors had not been in touch with the Hall. The brand decorating the Brighton shirts was 'SKINT'. It appears the name on our heroes' shirts next season will be GKC Communications, a Wickford firm I suggest 99 per cent of our membership have never heard of. Certainly not quite a Vodafone. But their estimated £55,000 input has to be better than nothing (Martin Dawn plc?)

Talking of Ron, his end-of-season missive showed him in fairly upbeat light and he is clearly currently involved in a policy of massaging council egos. But if that's what it takes to get the next stage of Fossetts up and running, then go for it. Season tickets have been pegged – though some might feel they should have been halved after our latest inglorious effort. Good value? Well, let's just say that C** U have been offering 30 per cent reductions for next season, making the most expensive seats in their main stand £257 compared to our £275 if you snap one up before the June 1 deadline.

Right, back to official business – the Liaison Committee meeting of March 19, where Geoffrey King revealed that United would be taking on a consultant to study local competition to try to increase the club's matchday catering income. Terry Jeffreys suggested swifter service might help for a start.

In the Shrimpers Club and Far Post bar the experiment with real ale, which seems to be rather popular, is to continue. The SUSCT stand has been resited in the main area of the Shrimpers and GK is to seek an alteration to the licence to enable selected away supporters in for a swift one from next season.

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Shares can still be purchased from the club in batches of 10 for £70. Just write to Helen Giles to sign up with the new Marconi.

GK reported that United are to do even more than at present in relation to football in the community and a marketing consultant (Another one? Who's paying?) will be offering advice on improving the club's role in trying to attract new support from the likes of local schools and clubs. The Local Authority officer dealing with ethnic minority groups (ie sandal-wearing, politically correct jobsworth sporting profusion of facial hair and 20-year-old brown cords) will be visiting the club to discuss methods of attracting more ethnic minority

groups to watch Southend United. I would suggest that if he can conjure us up a top three place he will be on to a winner.

There was also an interesting meeting on April 23, but details of that will be in NUMBER 48 once the minutes have been produced and cleared.

IT'S amazing what fate can bring you into contact with. Flipping through the bookshelves in Waterstone's in Southend the other day, I noticed the following classic tome. The Complete Idiot's Guide to Ballroom Dancing. The author? One Jeff Allen. Surely, it can't be.....

A bloke called Frank Knight has come up with the ingenious idea of selling football club 'aromas' to fans. The stinking cubes will apparently whiff of grass, deep heat rub, dressing-rooms and pies etc. How he will add the stench of hypocrisy, lies, bull**** and failure he failed to explain.

Another bloke with a further grand plan is M***** U***** chief executive Peter Kenyon, who currently has the hump because the Red Menace are not being allowed to agree to have fixtures televised on a Saturday afternoon. In the true spirit of a genuine football follower, his thinking is that every fan should want to sit in their armchair watching the hairband and his mates dashing around rather than attending a match in person on the one afternoon of the week that has always been the game's traditional playing time. Selfish? Tut, tut, how could we nurture such a thought? But when there is more filthy luche to be had, even at the expense of a potentially major hit on gates elsewhere, I think we can be pretty positive that Kenyon's response would be 'These days, nothing is sacred. By the way, what is Third Division football? Now was that £37m or £38m for Becks?.....'

AS if our Third Division disaster was not enough, with gates down by 0.8% from last season's average of 3,982 to 3,948, there was further ignominy in another top-flight competition – the SunSport Bores League. This season's final table after the assorted battles between the protagonists turned out like this. When Carlisle do the double over you, you know you have got trouble.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Carlisle	6	4	1	1	6	5	13
Lincoln	6	4	0	2	9	6	12
Bristol R	6	1	2	3	4	7	5
Southend	6	1	1	4	4	7	4

On the refurbishment front, I can report that Lincoln's Sincil Bank pitch/cowpatch is being dug up over the summer and relaid. Imps fans are being asked to help with the cost under a 'sponsor a sod' scheme.

No travel details this month, of course, just another hymn of praise to Mr Berry, Bashers, Brian Cotgrove and all those others who played a major part in another season of successful jaunts around the country. Our top 20 travellers, gluttons for punishment to a man and woman, can each look forward to a FREE trip to the first away game they can attend next season. The roll of honour will be in NUMBER 48. We have looked at the possibility of 'late cancellation' insurance via the FSF (for trips like Cheltenham and Shrewsbury that are called off once we are on the road), but the cost of up to £600-plus has been ruled prohibitive.

Next you will find the voting slip you can use to cast your ballot in the SUSCT Player of the Season awards. Send in your pick as detailed earlier as soon as you can – closing date is May 6 – and do not let this exclamation from Mr G put you off. "Who am I going to vote for? They are all s***e."

SUSCT PLAYER OF THE SEASON 2002-03

My SUSCT Player of the Season is:.....

Member's name..... Membership number.....

Return to: Terry Jeffreys, 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR by MAY 6.

And there you have it for the time being. Any comments, complaints, praise, possible items for inclusion, contact me at the usual venue: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (29/4)

PS 1. Blind spot in NUMBER 46. Hauled 'over the coles' should have read hauled 'over the coals'!

2. The Tom Bower book I recommended in NUMBER 46 can be yours for anything up to £17.99 from anywhere like WHS, Waterstone's etc.

SUSCT PLAYER OF THE YEAR AWARDS – WEDNESDAY
MAY 7. DON'T FORGET!