

SUSCT

NEWSLETTER No

48

HITCHCOCK, Bergman, Fellini, Antonioni, D. W. Griffith, Spielberg, Kurosawa and...Feasey! Yes, the Trust's very own master of film surely joined the cinematic greats with his latest big-screen technicolour production: 'Southend United 2002-03'. This masterpiece was given its world premiere on CD in front of an appreciative audience of nearly 100 movers and shakers from the realms of the SUSCT, plus other 'dignitaries' (Steve Wignall and the first-team squad), at the Trust's Player of the Year Awards in the heaving environs of the Shrimpers Club on May 7.

The British Board of Film Classification had agreed to give the 50-minute adventure a 'U' certificate, despite the often disturbing nature of the content, to allow the youthful element in the audience to share with the older generations the abject misery of United's efforts overall on the pitch last season. It might not sound the ideal way to kick off a lighthearted evening's entertainment, but watching the way we played in some of the games you really did have to laugh if you did not want to cry. Clearly the action was highly instructive for the watching Mr Wignall, who within hours of reliving the few highs and many lows of Blues' last campaign had begun a cull of a ruthlessness not seen since the Night of the Long Knives.

The film action may well have been woeful at times, but an excellent soundtrack also came as part of the package. The sending-off of Tes against Hull to the pounding of U2's 'It's A Beautiful Day' was a perfect mix. It was clear to the assembled throng that Kevin had put in a huge amount of work to enable us all to relive the best and mostly worst of last season. In fact this valiant self-torturer had been working on the project since March, had sifted through 45 HOURS of material and had rounded things off only on the afternoon of the do. He received a deserved and enthusiastic round of applause when the CD, which portrayed three distinct sections of the season, eventually came to an end. Matrix Reloaded eat your heart out. A great job well done.

Before the main event of the evening there was, of course, another Alan Perry special – the raffle. Steve Wignall enjoyed just the luck we want to see next season by copping the first prize ticket, with Danny Gay and Mark Rawle from among the lads also bagging an end-of-season bonus. It will certainly be no problem picking out Rawley on the pitch in the next campaign – assuming he graces us with his presence. He will be the one overpowering opposition defences in a cloud of Artemis. The raffle raised £168 and, as ever, nice one Alan.

Now it was time to hand over the awards and, with SW doing the honours and Chris Berry flashing from all angles (with his camera!), first up were the Southend Junior Shrimpers' furthest travellers. Chris Wilson and Graham Overall had notched up a maximum 10,190 miles attending every away

game and fully deserved their Shrimpers clocks. The SJS Player of the Year then made his appearance and it was no surprise to see the highly popular Leon Cort come forward with a big smile on his face to accept the accolade.

NEXT up was the Goal of the Season honour, made in association with ShrimperZone. Third place went to Neil Jenkins, for his rasping free-kick at Lincoln. Second spot was bagged by to Tes for the drive that set up the superb comeback to victory in the Hartlepool FA Cup replay. But there could be only one winner – Damon Searle for his once-in-a-lifetime 35-yard volley that helped put the skids under eventual champions Rushden and Diamonds at the Hall back in February.

Moving on from there and it was into the SUSCT long-distance travel awards. The 10,190 mark was reached by Steve Wilson, Phil Lamb and Dean Allum, who all collected a Shrimpers timepiece, while Matt Overall took possession of a £20 gift voucher after doing the fully monty for a second successive season. Matt, you must be a glutton for punishment. There was also a waistline-busting container of Dairy Box for our leading lady traveller, Hazel Wayland, who registered a highly respectable 8,818 miles in following the team last season. But a monster well done to all our hardy coach addicts – and more about them later.

That left just one more gong to be handed over to the main man, the SUSCT Player of the Year. In third place, and collecting a £25 cheque for the charity of his choice, was Damon Searle. Runner-up, with £50 to distribute to his chosen charity, was Andy Capp impersonator Jay Smith. But the daddy, handed £100 for his favourite charity plus the top dog's trophy was.....Leon Cort! It meant a deserved clean sweep for him of just about every award going around the club this season and the good news is Leon will be back in the Blue shirt for 2003-04 after agreeing a further one-year contract.

And that was just about that. Time to wind down the party, though not without a quick mention of Dave Scriven for his part in the organisation and Brian Wheeler, who once again made an affable master of ceremonies. Plus, of course, all those members of both the Trust and the United gang who attended – including our evergreen veteran Phil Laflin – and made the evening such a big success.

It seemed hard to believe amidst all the bonhomie and optimism being expressed for how our new-look side will perform when hostilities resume in August that just four days earlier we had rounded off our season down in the west country on another dismal note – losing to a 90th-minute Steve Flack strike at Exeter that dumped us down from what would have a poor enough 14th place to a humiliating 17th in the Third Division. While those present were naturally keen to give City a rousing send-off to non-league, it would be foolish to gloss over the fact we finished up a mere SIX points from joining them.

OUR last-day demise was there for all to see in the shape of horrific extended highlights on Nationwide Extra deep into the night of May 6. Yet it was not the match action which scared me, though that was bad enough. The frightening issue that definitely needed resolving was this: Was interviewed Exeter chairman John Russell really sporting the worst syrup in the history of rugs? It took slow-mo to give the answer and my conclusion had to be a definite yes. The overall grey combo was a mix of styles, taking in Friar Tuck and early 70s saddo, while the embarrassing pate zone looked like someone had given it a couple of quick strokes of Crown matt black. All credit to him for showing it off in public, but the cruel-to-be-kind message to him would have to be 'Oi, John! No!'

Not that this is John's only hairy problem. For the man who took Scarborough out of the League in 1999 has now done the double with the £2million-in-debt Grecians. Let's hope none of his magic has rubbed off on Ron, because surely we all – Ron, Steve Wignall and our good selves from the Blue Army fraternity – must now realise that any 2003-04 repeat of our end-of-season record of three wins and 10 defeats from our last 13 games is likely to see us becoming reacquainted with Mr Russell and his boys.....in the Conference!

Or perhaps not with the follicly-challenged Russell, for since zipping through the trapdoor to snuggle up with Forest Green and Accrington Stanley, he, his wife and co-chairman Mike Lewis have been

‘invited down to the station’ by the Devon and Cornwall Police Fraud Squad ‘in connection with complaints of financial irregularities’. Surely not. How come associate chairman Uri Geller did not see this coming via the cosmic connection? How come his ‘thought power’ did not result in survival, as predicted? Answer? Because it is a complete load of ***! Right after the drop Uri claimed he could never see his link to Exeter ending. Two days later he was on his bike. The only worry for us is that Ron has apparently been spending large chunks of his spare time stroking his Sheffield Steel cutlery and mumbling strange incantations.**

The most deflating thing about our ninth successive away defeat down Cream Tea way, suffered to the strains of ‘We’ll Meet Again’ and ‘There’s Only Two Teams in Devon’ from the travelling Blue masses, was that it was hardly unexpected. When more than 9,000 turn up especially to see you – was there another reason? – they are entitled to expect something of a higher potency. Or did we concede so late just to make City and their supporters feel better? Perhaps if the lads had been able to check out the Pulse Cheerleaders performing in Romford the night before they might have been a bit more fired up. There was so much flak flying around in my office concerning our abysmal form that I determined to show them. £1 was slapped on for Blues to win 2-1, with Tes to score the first goal. Odds: 75-1. So imagine my reaction when the Sky Sports results service informed the nation that Tes had blown our sixth penalty of the season after only six minutes and thus set up aforesaid bet to head straight down the gurgler. Yes, six spot-kicks blown and, as I have remarked before, all since that numpty Graeme Jones cocked up at Rushden. Goals away from home have become a luxury, even against the dregs – we failed to register on our last four away trips – and that is just one of the team shortfalls our Steve surely has to be addressing during the summer break. I managed to attend only five away matches during the last campaign. But anyone who suffered all 23 – and we know from above that there were a few – has my undying admiration. From Christmas it must have been hell. When it came to league goals, we had no one in double figures – and that is a recipe for going anywhere but up!

I**N the end Blues’ record of 26 defeats equalled their worst-ever tally set back in 1965-66, when we dropped into the old Fourth Division for the first time despite the best efforts of legends like Johnny McKinven, Mel Slack and Tony Bentley. But we did make one bit of history. Our total of just three league draws out of the 163 in the Third Division last season equalled the league’s lowest-ever in a 46-game campaign. We can puff our chests out with pride as we join Reading (1951-52), Bradford PA (1956-57) and Tranmere (1984-85) on that illustrious roll of honour.**

Daryl Sutch and Phil Whelan were departing anyway. But Wiggers also clearly had the writing on the wall for the fringe squaddies from very early on and I cannot imagine anyone was surprised when Tom Jordan, ineffective Gavin Strachan and floundering Brett Darby were promptly invited to seek employment elsewhere.

The first surprises came in the next batch of ins and outs announced on May 8. Barrington Belgrave failed to make the most of his second chance, Mark Salter is clearly more of a threat at the Frome Town level than ours and Daniel Lunan was presumably rated as unlikely to make it. Cheerios all round there then and no real complaints. Danny Gay was possibly a little bit unlucky and might have been worth retaining as a No 2. Yet the big surprise was surely ‘See Ya’ Searley. Goal of the season and Goodnight Vienna! I think a little lack of pace was creeping in, which could now make Neil Jenkins the better left-back bet of two far too one-footed players. But DS did a good, solid job for the club and all the best to him wherever he ends up. Mark Rawle was offered a new one-year deal – and I hear managed to stand up while he was being given the news – but Cambridge have allegedly been sniffing around. He scored a few decent goals last season and can be quite skilful. But he remains injury-prone and his balance and ball control are too often below-par. SW will surely be looking for a big improvement there if MR finally opts to stay put.

Next day the scythe was wielded once more. Mark Beard, out! A journeyman who always did his best, except his best was never that remarkable. At least he can always treasure his tag as the worst player ever to wear a Sheffield United shirt. Darryl Flahavan, out! Possibly he got to fancy himself a bit too

much and showing off his crown jewels in public was never a good idea. He was becoming a liability at corners and free-kicks by not coming to claim balls around his six-yard box and, though still a good shot-stopper, I think we may have seen his best. Stephen Broad, out! Badly hit by injury, the latest being a dislocated shoulder, I rated him the most unfortunate of the axe victims. Too slow for a right-back, he looked much more comfortable alongside Leon. But his absences have let in David McSweeney and that, as they say, is that. McSweeney has shown further promise and deserved a new deal, but I must admit I would not have been surprised if Neil Jenkins and Stuart Thurgood, both retained, had been let go. Jenkins hit seven goals, yet his reluctance to use his right foot if he can play a square pass with his left frequently brings moves grinding to a halt. ST is a game trier and there is not much more to him than that. He would be well advised to remember it. I hope Steven Clark will stay and finally unleash the talent he has instead of constantly playing it safe. And Tes probably merited his two years of extra-time, though he owes us for all but wasting a season with assorted injuries and off-the-field misdemeanours that he needs to get out of his system pronto. The talent is there, though it is proving mighty slow to burst through.

We must hope Jay Smith's pelvic problem, which cost him an eight-week lay-off, will not hamper him for too long into the new season. He was badly missed. Kevin Maher has plenty of critics, but we would be in big trouble without him. And keeping Leon for 12 more months is a major plus.

THE key now is the new blood. Mark Warren was C** U's captain before an injury last season ruled him out for two months and he could not get his place back. The worry is that, without him, in those two months the worst team in Essex shot up the Second Division table under new boss Phil Parkinson. We must assume that to be made captain he cannot be that bad a player. Jamie Stuart, a former England Under-21 star who was an ever-present for Bury last season, has also been snapped up. It seems he just wanted to move back south and would appear to be a decent capture – as long as his 'dabbling' days remain buried deep in the past. Other buys are on the horizon and SW does seem to know just who and what he wants to transform our fortunes. We need him to succeed, as failure is simply not an option.

Certainly not when Ron has been on the radio claiming that if there is no Fossetts Farm, there is no SUFC. Charming. But as if to prove his point, he has been doing his own bit of Wignalling by handing P45s to Gordon Harrold and Chris Phillips with, it seems, further dismissals to come. As for the veiled threat, the Trust will be watching him like a hawk – a fact confirmed at the last committee meeting held on May 22.

The first matter in hand was to welcome new co-opted committee member Kathy Jeffreys, whose input from the ladies' side of the fence can only be invaluable.

Richard Coxell then gave us an update on the situation surrounding Oliver Trigg's grave. I hope you all saw the excellent piece on this project in the Evening Echo on May 8, featuring a picture of the highly photogenic Mr Coxell looking as if he has just run amok in Sutton Cemetery. In fact Richard, described ghoulishly in the article as 'an inveterate explorer of graveyards' was posing by the wrecked Oliver Trigg grave that the Trust aims to restore as part of its heritage mandate. Oliver, of course, was the man behind United's foundation and whose place in history is marked by the Trust's plaque on the wall of the Blue Boar in Victoria Avenue. Oliver's grandson, 80-year-old William Parker, who lives next door to 84-year-old veteran Blue Joe Sibley, has given us the OK to do what needs doing. This will involve levelling and reinstating the grave area as well as using steel rods to ensure the ornamental stone plinth never again falls from its base. We have had a costing of just short of £500 and the football club will also be contributing. Of course, if the grave had not been hit by a confused pensioner's car it might have helped. The old boy was almost killed when the headstone landed on top of the vehicle and had to be removed by a JCB! Anyway, excellent progress here and a super job by Richard, who has been relaxing of late on a break in kilt country and taking in the yawn-inducing Scottish Cup Final thanks to Mrs C's Dundee family connections.

The new Trust website's software problems are now reportedly cured and, with luck, we hope to be back up for viewing in the very near future. Keep watching this space.

KEVIN Feasey received another vote of acclaim for his PotY efforts before it was revealed that United will not sanction an auction for a Trust member to have a place in the dug-out next season. As only a manic depressive would have enjoyed it in there last time round, perhaps it is for the best.

A lot of interest has been expressed in the SUSCT polo shirts. These come in white, white or white and have the Trust motif on. If you want to order one – a snip at just £13 – contact membership secretary Paul Yeomanson on p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk or 01702-302373 and show pansy-haired Becks what being a fashion icon is really all about. Paul will also happily take your order for one of the Trust's new coffee mugs, fine value for £4 and ideal whether you are a latte type or simply a coarse granules and hot water person.

If you owe Dave Scriven any Quid A Goal money, please let him have it asap. This appears to have been a worthwhile money-spinner, even at short notice, and a hefty chunk of the money raised has already been earmarked for physio John Stannard to upgrade the treatment room further by the purchase of an infrarential and ultrasound machine – a snip at around £1,250 all in. The Quid A Goal will run again next season with, we hope, a much larger format.

Secretary Terry Jeffreys reported that in the light of the upheaval at Exeter, their Supporters Trust is now helping to run the club on a day-to-day basis. All they seem to need is £100,000 by June 19 or City allegedly go titties skyward. Now we have heard that before, but it has to happen one day. At least if they survive they plan to try to scrap a proposed pre-season friendly with MK Wimbledon and replace it with one against AFC Wimbledon. All power to them. Terry will be attending the Supporters Direct National Conference at Highbury on June 20 and then I shall be joining him the next day for the Football Supporters Federation parliament at the same venue.

Treasurer Craig Fillary was unable to attend, but reported no panics on the financial front.

Paul Yeomanson could not say quite the same when it came to membership. For although the current figure showed a rise in SJS and Trust numbers to 843, that was before a ruthless chop of around 50 who have ignored renewal blandishments. If you know your membership is due, please cough up your meagre fiver immediately you are asked for it. And if you know anyone who wants either to join or rejoin, just contact Paul on the addresses given earlier. Also contact him if you have been left broken-hearted by not been receiving your newsletter.

WE may get one or two new bodies following a letter from Paul FitzGerald sent to all United shareholders, along with an application form, outlining the work and aims of the Trust and reminding them what a good idea it is to sign up. We'll see how many come through.

Much more encouraging news, though, on the fund-raising front even apart from Quid A Goal. Alan Perry reported that we were up to 10 tables filled for the **SUSCT MUSIC QUIZ NIGHT at Boots and Laces on June 7**. That leaves two tables that could still be squeezed in so come on, ring Alan on 01702-476458 or e-mail alanperry4@hotmail.com and get your names down. We want another full house and it's never too late. It seems that Gordon Harrold, mentioned earlier as a victim of the Ron axe, is taking over the B & L franchise and may not be quite so agreeable in future to allowing us the favourable costings for the venue that we have enjoyed in the past. If this proves the case, we have some alternatives in mind.

The end-of-season draw cleared, overall, a brilliant £1,751.07 after all payments and expenses. A pat on the back for all of you who participated, either by selling your tickets or buying some. Now we are looking for some sponsorship for the brave band who have volunteered for the lower leg waxing to be inflicted on the pitch at half-time during probably our third home game of the new season. Committee

members Alan Perry, who has already attracted an amazing £300, Bashers and Joe Elliott (£120 in the pot so far!) are definitely signed and sealed for this festival of pain, with four other members also saying they are ready to give it a go. Sadly, the back, crack and sack option had to be rejected! The dirty deed will be done by second-year students from Southend College. Apparently all the girls will need is an extension lead for their electrical apparatus. And before you get all excited, that means something in which to keep the wax warm. More details to come, but certainly if you see any of our fearless three certs, stick your names down on their sponsorship lists. Or contact Alan on the above addresses for details of how you can contribute financially.

Chris Berry, who earlier in the evening had been calling old Huey as he battled a spot of e-coli, then gave his rundown on the season's Trust travel performance. We took 1,800 supporters to games on 59 coaches throughout the campaign, an average of 71 fans per match and 59 per non-subsidised fixture. 136 people became members on coaches and we hope they will stay with us. Our costliest journeys were to Swansea, Bristol Rovers and Shrewsbury, the latter because of the late postponement and immediate rearrangement. The bad news is that prices will most likely have to rise in 2003-04, but, rest assured, by as little as possible. We will also be looking at more discount incentives for regular travellers. It was generally agreed that Supreme had done a decent job for us, though there will be the usual casting around other companies before we decide who gets our business next time round. Late or no cancellations and no-shows were the biggest bug-bears. This was generally attributed to excessive alcoholic intake the night before matches, making a few more hours in the guilty parties' stinking pits a more delightful prospect than getting to their pick-up point on time – especially for long-distance venues. The lesson here is: If you can't handle the pop, stay off it. But there were plenty of people we could always rely on, especially our top 20 travellers whose reward is a free trip to our first away game of the new campaign.

The roll of honour is: Dean Allum, Phil Lamb, Graham Overall, Matthew Overall, Chris Wilson, Steve Wilson (all the maximum 10,190 miles), Phil Cox (9,648), Brian Cotgrove (9,330), Hazel Wayland, Peter Wayland (both 8,818), Robert Craven (8,794), Ben Herbert (8,510), Joe Elliott (7,840), Roy Keyes (7,776), John Coyle (7,656), Rebecca Keyes (7,394), Trevor Bashford (7,250), Nicola Stott (7,064), Tom Dossier (6,648) and Michael Roles (6,076). Fantastic loyalty by each one of you – and another tremendous season's work by Chris and all his coach 'helpers'.

TERRY Jefferies reported on the Liaison Meeting of May 21, where it was hinted that United's accounts were not looking as rosy as they might do. One to watch there then. It seems the Fossetts planning application is going to take longer than anticipated – surprise, surprise – and, naturally the football club will be looking to us when the crunch comes.

If you are one of those who have been abusing the availability of cheap seating in the West Stand family enclosure then be warned. A crackdown is coming.

Brian Dear is taking over in the Shrimpers Bar and will be changing the terms of the licence so away supporters can make use of the facility.

The 5 per cent discount for Trust members in the club shop is to stay – you will need to show your membership card or proof of membership – and will remain at 10 per cent for season ticket holders. You cannot combine the two.

Helen Giles has complained to Exeter about the farcical arrangements on match day at St James' Park. The policing was a joke, the game was supposed to be all-ticket but they were taking payment on the gate, there were supposedly assaults by stewards and some ticket-holders could not gain entry. If you have a ticket you could not use you can get your money back from Exeter. As for the complaints, with City in turmoil do not expect too much of a response.

Steve Wignall has agreed to do a Trust Question & Answer session either before the first pre-season friendly or before the first league match of the season. Watch all the usual spaces for further info on what should be a big occasion.

BLUES are also relaunching their weekly draw in the middle of this month. So if you are not already losing a fortune on the lottery – and I know a few people who are – you might want to take part. Anyone interested in becoming a local agent – and making a bit of cash on the side – should contact Brian Wheeler in United's commercial department.

Returning to the Fossetts issue, with the subject seeming continually to be yo-yoing between full steam ahead and this year, next year, sometime, never, the Trust committee is aware that some sort of fighting fund may at some time become necessary. The Trust has funds that can be called on immediately in times of emergency, but nothing like, say, the £100,000 that Brentford's Trust has just loaned to their club. If the position starts to look even bleaker than at present then stand by possibly to have a few spare quid handy. Then again, let's pray it does not come to that.

Ron gave his latest assessment of the current situation on a BBC Essex interview, where he put the underlying loss for the coming year at around a worrying £500,000-plus. That is a loss that can be born 'for the foreseeable future', ie not ad infinitum. He expects the result of the B & Q public inquiry, made necessary by Two Jags, in the autumn. Green light and it is all systems go. Red light and.....well, we won't go down that road. For that is what will sound what Ron called 'the death knell' for United. "There's no question of that," he added. But he remains optimistic, especially with the current enthusiastic backing of Southend's Tory council, it will not come to that. What he wants now is for Steve Wignall to lead us to at least the play-offs next season and so, hopefully, generate an even greater financial push forward. And so say all of us.

All in all it is stress, stress and more stress for every true Blue these days. And United could indeed be driving the faithful to an early grave. Research by a group of northern public health experts appears to reveal that fans who see their team lose at home on a regular basis run a 30 per cent greater risk of dropping dead from a heart attack or stroke. So after last season's 10 defeats, I think we can take it that some of our flock will definitely not be rejoining us for the new season! RIP whoever they are.

Then comes news that two-thirds of all supporters get depressed when the season ends and the lack of league action means there is nothing to fill their Saturdays, leaving them lethargic, unable to concentrate, lacking motivation, prone to mood swings, irritable and temperamental. To be honest, I would imagine two-thirds of Blues fans have felt like that while recent seasons have been under way!

A lot of Trust members will already be looking forward to seeing C** U given a football lesson in the 'friendly' at the Hall on August 2. But I wonder if the busybodies at Essex Police have woken up to the fact the fixture is taking place. Sadly, there has to be the possibility that the small shoals of plankton who follow both ourselves and those up the road might decide to renew acquaintances on the day and C** U's pre-season visit to Millwall, planned for the previous Saturday, has already been given the thumbs down by the local constabulary. We shall have to hope for the best. Remember the major first-team friendly dates at present are: July 15 home v Ipswich, 7.45pm; July 22 home v Gillingham, 7.45pm; July 26 home v Canvey Island, 3pm; Aug 2 home v C** U, 3pm. Remember, too, that the Meet the Blues day is July 20.

On the night of our Player of the Year awards, both ourselves and the old enemy on the A12 got a mention on Radio Five Live as being amongst those Nationwide League sides rated by listeners as 'mediocre' during the campaign as we neither really threatened to go up or down. Whoever voted for us could not have seen the lads perform very often.

Did you catch the recent BBC1 programme that looked at drug-taking within British football and the claim it is allegedly far more widespread than was thought? All I will say is that if any of last season's squad were using performance-enhancing substances.....they should ask for their money back!

Bad luck Mr G. This veteran Blues fan's optimistic pre-season forecast of a 16th-place finish, as revealed back in NUMBER 39, would have been right on the button but for Macclesfield's 90th-minute winner against Rochdale. If only his Lotto Extra numbers were as accurate.

Nice to see that fans can appreciate quality from the opposition. Everton have just banned for life a supporter who, despite having a broken leg, decided to hurl his crutch like a javelin at Manchester City's Nicolas Anelka as the Frenchman left the pitch after scoring twice in a 3-1 league win at Maine Road back in August.

REMEMBER Andy Harris? Who can forget his full-back flounderings. Yet he claims to have an IQ of 153. So having just been released by Orient, how come he cannot work out that he would probably now be much better off with a job outside football?

Interesting to see some other old Blues faces in the limelight of late. David Morley scoring with the sort of header he never produced for us to help Doncaster, sadly, into the league ahead of Dagenham and Redbridge. Andy Rammell belting in four late goals to help keep Bristol Rovers in the 'big-time'. Plus Stephen Kelly, Andy Thomson (QPR) and Spinner (Cardiff) in the Second Division play-off final. And at least justice was done in the Third Division play-off showdown as Lincoln were totally trampled by Bournemouth. That's what comes of only being able to operate on a ploughed field.

Talking of success on the pitch, well done to Trust committee members Jon-Paul FitzGerald and Joe Elliott, who were in the Thorpe Athletic side that won the Southend Under-16 Junior League Cup Final by beating Leigh Ramblers 3-2 at the Hall. The winning team's goals were all scored by United season ticket holders and the victors were then royally entertained with ginger beers all round plus the odd stronger brew at the FitzGerald abode.

Hull's purchasing of strikers has now reached 16 in 20 months as they desperately try to spend their way out of the Third Division. I am surprised they do not line up 1-0-10. Spud's latest gamble is on Notts County's Aussie Danny Allsopp.

DID you catch the European Cup Final (Champions League Final)? Can there possibly be a more wooden trophy presenter than UEFA chairman Lennart 'Ten Dinners' Johansson? He has the charisma of chipboard and always looks as if he cannot wait to get back to the nearest hospitality suite for a quick stiffener and five-course repast. Yet they wheel him out every time, accompanied by grinning sycophant Gerhard Aigner who hands him the medals. Nauseating.

Almost as nauseating as the government's failure to make its £1.5million contribution to league clubs as part of its financial commitment to youth development programmes. Because they have not coughed up, each club – including Blues – will receive just £13,800 instead of the anticipated £34,500. It's hard to believe, I know, because, well, yahh, Tony is such a big football fan.....

And on that bitter note, I will call it a day for another few weeks. Any comeback of any sort, please direct it to the usual place: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk Meanwhile, enjoy the break from the action while you can.

NR (1/6).

PS 1. But in case you have those withdrawal symptoms, the 2003-04 fixtures are due out on June 19!

2. Hope you bought your season tickets before the cut-off. I wonder if United will surpass last season's tally of 1,437.

3. Most online bookies have us at 33s to go up next season. Get on board!

4. David Stacey reminds all programme buffs that the 29th International Football Memorabilia and Programme Fair will take place at the New Connaught Rooms, Great Queen Street, London. WC2 (two minutes walk from Holborn Underground station) from 11.30am to 4.30pm on Saturday, June 7. £2 on the door, Under -16s £1.50. If you attend, remember to get back in time for the Music Quiz!

5. There are dozens of Hamsters jokes doing the rounds at the moment. Can't think why. So let's finish with this one. Q: What is the best thing to come out of West Ham? A: The A13.....