

SUSCT

NEWSLETTER 50

(GOLDEN JUBILEE

EDITION)

WE all do crazy things, don't we? For example, what could be more sensible than to drive away from the Honda dealership in Wickford after checking out a minor repair job with your wallet perched on the car roof? I cruised out of said establishment recently, motored round a roundabout and travelled about three-quarters of a mile further on up the dual carriageway before the full horror of this potentially costly act of lunacy hit me. Plus the certain knowledge it had by now fallen off. The prospect of losing an assortment of Switch, credit, pass cards etc plus £60 cash and a winning £10 lottery ticket was, of course, a worry. But one other concern far outweighed all that. For also tucked away inside was the betting slip from Mr Coral confirming my £10ew wager on Blues to exit the Third Division this season at a tasty 33-1. After we have taken the title by storm (!), it is going to be worth a grand total of £432.50. So you could imagine I did not want some nicking ne'er-do-well coming across that laying in the road. And whoever is up there watching over us must have felt the same way. For, having doubled back, parked up and begun legging it along the dual carriageway in what I was sure had to be a vain search for the lost article, I suddenly heard a car horn sound across on the other side of the highway. A Ford Focus Estate stopped, the driver beckoned me over and, as I flopped knackered alongside the passenger door, the bloke with him asked: "Have you lost something?" In his hand was my wallet, spotted laying on the tarmac as they went round the roundabout. Lucky or what? It is the sort of great good fortune Wiggers and the lads will need in the coming campaign. But if the supreme being really is a Blues fan, we must have a chance!

The key question, naturally, now hostilities have begun has been how would our new-look line-up perform in our initial competitive games, once the warm-up friendlies which really told us very little were out of the way. We kicked off with that potential league toughie against relegated Cheltenham, which proved to be 90 minutes of total warm glow from a match action viewpoint, before following up with Swindon and Doncaster, which.....didn't. Reports to come later.

Excitement levels post-Cheltenham were such that the SUSCT picked up a most unexpected £270.35 when, in the aftermath of the action and inspired by a few sherbets, Rob 'Shaven' Craven went ahead with his promise to have his 'curtains' cut down to the skull with all sponsorship funds raised going to the Trust. The deed was done in the 'garden' of the Spread Eagle and captured on Kevin Feasey's camera for possible inclusion on his end-of-season video. That is a fantastic piece of self-sacrifice by Rob, who, hopefully, has not had cause to regret his decision to baldly go where he has never gone before.

Sadly, not all was sweetness and light. Programme up 30p to £2.50 – pros: the classic Muddy Fox ad featuring a couple of stunning bikes, plus the fact all the Quid A Goal contributors, Trust travel and news from our latest Bashers impersonator Paul Napper is together on two pages; antis: wasted, and presumably costly, pages on other clubs' classic campaigns and allegedly 'famous fans'. Who gives a stuff about the Chuckle Brothers' love of Rotherham? Also you could not write very easily with a Biro on the

plasticky cover! Then again, for some bizarrely brilliant reason, the club had only printed 1,500 and had sold out by 2.30. Talk about forward planning.

YET much worse than minor nit-picking with the programme, which in fairness is now a genuinely professional production, was the absolutely *intolerable* level of noise from the PA system. It was impossible to hold a conversation with anyone even sitting next to you once the 'music' started and a lot of people were very unhappy – as I believe were Jennie Watkin and others at the C** U friendly. If I wanted to shove my head in a speaker at a nightclub or listen to Jeff Allen screaming his head off in my ear, I would make the necessary arrangements. Background music is fine and a nice bit of blast-off when we score adds to the atmosphere perfectly. But not so loud it makes your ears ring, especially that 15-minute dirge before kick-off orchestrated by that naff looking 'geezer' on the touchline in the dirty yellow T-shirt. It was so bad during the Cheltenham clash I even gave up the chance of a first look at the Blue Belles to take refuge in the Far Post at half-time, which must be the first occasion in donkeys' years I have left my seat during a game. It appears a lot of people who bought tickets to shoot for the car had no idea if they had won the money or a signed shirt because they could not hear the announcements! This issue, in the wake of assorted complaints, was due to be raised at the Liaison Committee meeting on August 20. But if United refuse to act because they are copping a wedge from a disco firm, then further steps may need to be taken. Sounds Unique? No. Sounds horrendous!

Nice to see some Cheltenham and Swindon fans in the Shrimpers bar before the match, all on their best behaviour, though the Shrimpers was not up to the standard on the décor front that we had been promised it would be for day one of the new campaign. Had the snail slime gone in the ladies' loo? The Trust stand was up and pumping, as it will be for every home game, with Trust travel booking, badges, books, polo shirts, mugs etc all up for grabs. Terry Jeffreys has added a 'News from the Press' board to the wall in the main bar and will gradually transform the front room into our Hall of Fame over the coming weeks. This will feature not just our heroes from on the pitch, but those from the Supporters Club set-ups of the past who did the business off the pitch. We would also like some scarves and pennants up over the bar area and are looking at producing a Trust pennant that could be presented to opposing Trusts and Supporters Clubs. Overall any improvements at all so far have really been down to us. Terry was so miffed he had even decided to give the place a Hoover. But when he finally dug out the Roots Hall Panasonic, he discovered the drive belt had snapped – indicating it was probably a bit of a while since the Shake 'N Vac had last been sprinkled on the Wilton. The real ale was off when it was supposed to be on and we will be pushing even harder from now on to get the quality of both food and drink right in the bar on match days. The Shrimpers has become YOUR pre-match venue, so obviously we want you to try to use it in preference to any other watering holes. Bear with us.

Right, further onwards into 'golden' NEWSLETTER NUMBER 50. Scraping the dust off the archived back numbers, I see NUMBER 1 went out to members of the then Southend United Supporters Club back in February 1999. They have been rolling off the production line at the rate of about one a month ever since, as we try to keep what are these days the worldwide faithful of the SUSCT up to date with all matters Trust and SUFC. Membership back then stood at 267. Today it is more than three times that and we know we need to keep our numbers as high as possible as we remain ready and vigilant for any contingency that might arise in the light of the still uncertain future of the football club we all follow.

Most galling at the moment is the fact we should be spending zillions on a host of world-class stars. I hear that Roman Abramovich specifically asked to take over the Blues and some dopey minion directed him to Stamford Bridge instead of Roots Hall. So instead of Red Rom we will have to continue making do with Blue Ron – and keeping our fingers tightly crossed.

HIS latest pronouncement on Fossetts in the Cheltenham programme did not really add anything. It still looks like we must sit on our hands and pray until the public inquiry in January 2004. Which is all the more galling in the light of C** U just receiving planning permission for their proposed new 10,000-seater arena (2,000 would probably have been big enough) at the aptly named Cuckoo Farm.

Yet while Ron continues to struggle to earn the devotion of the bedrock United cogniscenti, he has won backing from his fellow bosses and triumphed in a four-way ballot to become the Third Division's representative with the Football League. He replaces Orient supremo Barry Hearn, so let's just hope Ron doesn't leave us all snookered and can land a few important kisses on the relevant pink and brown when it comes to some sort of final decision on our new home.

Further to this issue, our vice-chairman Paul FitzGerald recently wrote to Delancey supremo Colin Wagman once again. The reason was to express our continuing concern at the current state of affairs, especially regarding Blues' ever-growing debt mountain as we wait for some progress over Fossetts. When the project was first mooted, this was the season we hoped we might be in! At least Wagman felt guilty enough to join Quid A Goal – and invited Paul and other esteemed members of the committee to a convivial tete-a-tete at his Portman Square offices on August 18. Full details of the musings will appear in NUMBER 51. Paul has also sent an update on United's current situation to the Supporters' Direct magazine, ending with the immortal words:‘We are preparing for the worst, because at this stage we can't see any alternative’.

But enough doom and gloom. On to Trust matters i.e. details from the committee meetings held on July 21 and August 11.

Our Titan of travel Chris Berry revealed that after the usual pre-season investigations it looked as if Supreme would once again have the honour of ferrying the Trust membership to their various destinations, though a late bid to grab the business had been made. Chris has also contacted representatives from all our Third Division rivals – bar, for obvious reasons, Swansea – to try to get free tickets for our SJS boys and girls and is awaiting responses. A coach price of £20 for adults and £15 for concessions looks likely to be the norm, apart from for the extra long-haul and close-to-home trips. There will also be a facility to reserve a seat for an extra quid. But please be warned. **IF YOU BOOK A SEAT ON A COACH THIS SEASON AND THEN FAIL TO APPEAR, YOU WILL HAVE TO PAY UP FRONT FOR ANY SUBSEQUENT JOURNEY YOU WISH TO MAKE.** No shows are no go for 2003-04.

TO book seats for the forthcoming jaunts to York (August 26), Oxford (September 6) and Hull (September 13), contact Chris on the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. Ticket prices are as follows: York – Adults £15 (seated), £12 (standing); OAPs and children £10 / £8. Oxford – Adults £14.50; Students £11; OAPs and children £9; Wheelchair users £6. Hull – Adults £15; OAPs and children £8. Thanks to Brian Cotgrove for taking over the reins for Doncaster, while Chris was doing a spot of family body-baking outside the area.

Sadly, a Trust member has recently received a three-year banning order from all League grounds. Suffice to say that he can now be regarded as an ex-Trust member.

Discussion on the future appointment of committee personnel brought a verdict that no new individuals would be appointed except at AGMs. However, it was agreed prospective members could attend a committee meeting and also be appointed to sub-committees.

While the allocation of Quid A Goal cash this season has been chiefly earmarked for further physio equipment for United, the Trust has also spoken to Frankie Banks regarding the provision of such funds that he would like to use to help special needs schoolkids and adults as part of the Football in the Community programme. Frankie envisages an outlay of around £1,500 a year for football coaching and equipment and the Trust will consider the issue fully once we have more details.

So far I am not aware that Ron has tapped us up following the very unfortunate break-in at the club on the night of August 14, during which a selection of Britain's burgeoning finest vandalised offices at the Hall, broke windows and made off with some computers. This is just the sort of extra financial burden that United simply cannot afford. With luck the incident was adequately covered by insurance. I know Vic

always used to insist on that. And if you get a whisper about the perpetrators, ring Southend Police on 01702-431212. Hopefully they will have been able to take someone off speed camera duties to investigate.

Paul Napper's Trust column is now appearing weekly in the Echo, though in the wake of a slight administrative hiccup was missed out on one occasion which we have been promised will not be repeated. As mentioned earlier Paul has also, with grateful thanks from yours truly, agreed to become the new Bashers and pen this season's Trust programme notes. So watch out for vital snippets of info, reminders etc there as well. Paul is also trying to get the column reproduced on the This is Essex website and in a variety of other local newspaper publications. The Echo additionally took a photo of our £100 cheque presentation via Steve Wignall to the Elizabeth Venture Play Scheme at the Meet the Blues Day on July 20, which I believe found its way into print alongside one of Paul's outpourings.

UNBELIEVABLY, though, the Echo 'forgot' to turn up to take pictures of the rededication of Blues founder Oliver Trigg's grave at Sutton Cemetery on August 6, so it was lucky another David Bailey happened to be present. Stand up Geoffrey King, whose snaps certainly looked up to scratch on the United website, in the Cheltenham programme and whose efforts hopefully made the Echo as well. Richard Coxell once again deserves major praise for his work in pushing this project through to its successful conclusion and he represented the Trust at the rededication, which was performed by the Rev Phil Andrews of Avenue Baptist church (a United fan). Also present were United's community rep Ray Davey, Oliver Trigg's 81-year-old grandson Bill Parker and his wife Elizabeth, Southend's head of cemeteries and master stonemason Richard Bedini, who put in all the key restoration work and will be adding some further lettering. One other notable presence was Joe Sibley, also now in his 80s, who played on the wing for Blues in the 30s and 40s and also for Newcastle alongside 'Wor' Jackie Milburn. This has been a major community triumph for the Trust, exactly what we are about, and has surely done us a bit of welcome good on the publicity front. Anyone who asks what the Trust ever does or suggests we are 'low profile', direct them here. And just in case anyone is in any doubt, this event would never have taken place without the Trust's initiative.

QUID A GOAL

YOU are never too old – or young – to come aboard. Just ask 20-month-old Benjamin Hutchins, who already knows enough about Blues' prospects this season to wager 50p a goal on the hopefully soon to be fully fit Jay Smith. The Quid A Goal Scheme is moving ahead quite nicely, with all those attracted to put up their money already able to see their names in lights in the matchday programme. Mark Gower's first-day double and Kevin Maher's Carling Cup strike promptly put me £3 down, but that is what it is all about. And just because the season is already under way, that does not mean you cannot take part in this innovative fund-raiser. Come on, don't be shy. Simply contact Alan Perry on alanperry4@hotmail.com or ring him on 01702-476458 to make your own very welcome commitment. The finances concerning the participation of the United players is still under review, though we hope for a successful conclusion. After all, the new physio equipment that the total take will purchase will be for their benefit. Thanks to all those board members who have finally coughed up – for last season!

A small setback on the leg waxing front has meant the day of pain for the six hardy Trust members involved has had to be put back to the Huddersfield game on October 4. Also ongoing are negotiations to try to get a Trust social arranged, while Alan Perry (leg wax take already more than £500) is working on a Football Quiz tournament to be held in the Spread Eagle at a date to be fixed.

The Meet The Blues Day went well for the Trust, with new members recruited, plenty of interest in our various events, solid sums of money raised and the players signing autographs for us as agreed. Beat the keeper, run by Jon-Paul FitzGerald and Joe Elliott, brought in about £130, polo shirt / mug sales produced around £260 and the Alan Perry raffle hauled in another excellent £320. Video, badge sales etc also did their bit. Raffle winners were: 1 Alan Walters, who, believe it or not, opted to take £150 cash

rather than the balloon flight he could have had; 2, M Price £15; 3 Linda Sevenoaks £10; 4 Dan Kirkland – Duval ale with glass; 5 Mrs Pat Manning – Music Quiz CD.

NEXT time Alan proffers a raffle ticket your way, bear this in mind. Helen Allen, £500 winner of our end-of-season draw, has just enjoyed a nice break in Amsterdam on the proceeds. Naturally, I was far too polite to ask her what she got up to.....

Treasurer Craig Fillary revealed that Trust funds now stand at around £25,000, with a fair proportion of that still in the shape of our travel lump sum.

Membership has once more taken a turn for the better, currently hitting a combined total of 863 (740 adults and 123 SJS) and, I hear, possibly even attracting one of the Roots Hall ‘glitterati’. Onwards to the 1,000! Membership currently equates to around 20 per cent of average gate, which is very good. Compare that to Leicester City, whose Trust has 3,000-plus members out of an average crowd of 20,000-plus. While we are after an eventual free place on the United board, City were offered one for £500,000. Needless to say, they could not find that sort of money, but they have made a sufficiently large investment to get themselves granted a Trust observer at each board meeting. He is treated like other board members, except not having a vote, is asked for his opinions and not excluded from any information. I think that would suit us for the time being, wouldn’t it? Aston Villa supporters group ‘Villa Fans Combined’ even plan to nominate two fan-approved non-executive directors to stand for election to the club board at next month’s annual meeting. So the restless natives are clearly on the march.

Just in case anyone loses sight of the Trust’s aims, bear in mind this quote from the book ‘Football Confidential 2, Scams, Scandals and Screw-Ups’ based on the Radio Five Live series. *‘In the coming years, if the game is to recover and to flourish more equitably, the fans have responsibilities too. The responsibility to understand who is running their football club and how, and to ask questions of these people. And to act when they see something they do not like or that is so obviously against their interest. This can only be achieved by bothering to extend the interest on the pitch, off it and into the boardroom’*. Remember.

The Trust has so far had four promised donations of shares – two sewn up and two ongoing. And secretary Terry Jeffreys is well on top of all the shareholders’ names, which he is building into a register. Our strength is growing apace on that front. Terry, as ever, is also a hive of general secretarial activity from numerous other angles designed to further Trust aims and ambitions, as well as dealing with more mundane issues like ensuring we get our £75 membership fee into the FSF and answering questionnaires from Supporters Direct.

NOT that wife Kathy has been putting her feet up. Her missive to our lady members for ideas on what would appeal to them from a Trust aspect has elicited a fair number of responses, all of which will be examined carefully and, if practical, acted upon. I shall, with difficulty, refrain from giving details for now lest any ‘quirky’ comment I may make leaves me open to accusations of unashamed sexist male chauvinism.

Meanwhile Paul Napper has been given safekeeping of the minutes maintained by late former secretary Ken Gill of every AGM the old Supporters’ Club held between 1932 and 1972, plus the minutes of the Club’s management committee from 1957 to 1972. This is a fascinating historical document and one which Paul will be attempting to put into wider circulation. Young whipper-snapper Napper has also coughed up £25 to purchase the autographed ball won by a London-based Swindon fan at the Carling Cup meeting as future potential auction material. True devotion to duty.

Well done to Trust member Lewis Crowe for standing up to be counted when United asked for volunteer to write their website match reports for away games. He fully deserves his free ticket to the games – and is now doing the home dates too.

Talking of websites, Dave Scriven has done a great job of updating the Trust’s. Unfortunately, Dave’s workload makes it difficult for him to keep the site ongoing. So we are working to try to find a way over

this, as the site offers a vital link on various items of Trust detail that need to be kept as contemporary as possible. Keep tuning in to see if progress is being made on www.shrimperstrust.co.uk

The next Trust Quiz Night, incorporating fish and chips blow-out, is confirmed for September 20 at 8pm in the Shrimpers Club. Earlier in the day we hope we will have asked too many questions of Carlisle. Now for the bad news. All 10 tables have gone already, so popular are these evenings led by our quiz inquisitor Guy Rickard, who is already grafting hard to ensure the night is another big success. Work is also continuing apace on the planned social evening due to feature a 'star guest'.

OK, time for a look at how the lads have performed, or not, since the big kick-off.

SOUTHEND 2 CHELTENHAM 0 (9/8/03): It was grilling in the East Greens. But so what. We were cookin' on the pitch – and that was all that mattered. As the heat beat down and the mercury level hit the 90s – some of the players lost up to 10lb in weight – Blues turned in the sort of sunshine show we have not seen at the Hall since we beat Brighton by the same score on the opening day of the season back in 2000-01. (After which we did not win again until September 23!) The team fully merited a standing ovation at both half and full-time. We got two and it could easily have been four – at least – while at the back scares were few and far between, despite Carl Emberson's continuing passion for getting our hearts in our mouths. Midfield, in particular, was transformed, with Mark Gower and James Corbett on the right and left flanks finally taking some of the weight off Kevin Maher and looking a danger almost every time they had the ball. The back four, with David McSweeney filling in at left-back, formed a pretty solid barrier, while up front perforated eardrum victim Drewe Broughton was a constant threat both on the ground and in the air and well backed up by Michael Husbands. DB was so unlucky to see a cracking 40th-minute header ruled out for a marginal offside. But by then Gower's lovely curling 18-yard right-footer had put us in front and he also warmed the hands of Town keeper Steve Book on a few occasions before tucking away an injury-time penalty as the visitors decided the only way to stop Corbett on another of his mazy runs was to haul him down in the area. Corbett earlier saw a right-foot drive rebound into play from the inside of a post. At times we were genuinely exciting going forward – and when could we last say that? So, a super start in front of 4,403, with probably about 400 present from the West Country. It certainly had to be better than getting a first-ball blob down at Shoebury Park, Mr G. Only another 45 of the same required (OK, 44 after Doncaster), so here's hoping this was not another false dawn.

SOUTHEND 2 SWINDON 3 (Carling Cup 1st rd, 12/8/03): Rip-offs come in many shapes and sizes, but the inadequate 16-page 'programme' offering at £1.50 compared to £2.50 for the regular 68-pager had to be one of Ron's better wheezes. Fortunately, the match was full value, with Blues simply outstanding for 15 minutes and taking a deserved lead through Kevin Maher's clever finish. Swindon's first equaliser was offside not just once, but twice – as the guilty linesman was informed in no uncertain terms. Drewe Broughton put us back in front, only for the dozziness that frequently overcomes us after the half-time cuppa – is it laced? – to afflict the lads once more as Town levelled at 2-2. The visitors then looked slightly the better side and, of course, it had to be Tommy Mooney who poached their winner and earned them a trip to Leeds. But we never gave up and it took two world-class saves from England Under-21 keeper Rhys Evans to foil Mark Gower and DB. If only Evans had signed for us. Disappointing to lose, but the crowd reaction seemed to be we had given it a good shot and that is all people ask for. Terry Jeffreys was happy pre-match, after flogging £28 worth of badges to the secretary of the Association of Football Badge Collectors – a Swindon fan who lives in Northampton. Takes all sorts.

DONCASTER 2 SOUTHEND 0 (16/8/03): No need to despair just yet, but this was a genuine disappointment. Wiggers will have wanted to do well on one of his old stamping grounds, after getting the heave-ho there 18 months ago. Sadly, though, it did not turn out that way as we paid the price for the wretched inconsistency which continues to afflict us. Grand one week, bland the next. Headed goals were conceded after 12 and 55 minutes and, I see, fumbling Embo's apparent continued distress at having to cope with the key aerial component of the game did us no favours. Don't say you weren't warned – by me and Joe Kinnear! We bucked up a bit at two-down, but what good is that? "Unacceptable", rapped Wiggers, who allegedly weighed in with a dressing-room dressing-down. OK, just make sure we have got it right in time to give the Stags, Minstermen and Shakers a severe stuffing.

Of course there was also a full pre-season friendly campaign, during which the following signings made since the last newsletter appeared were unveiled. Full-back Duncan Jupp, midfielder Jamie Fullarton and midfielder / forward James Corbett, who cost Blackburn £525,000 when he moved from Gillingham in 1998. Two broken legs and a major hamstring problem then led to Corbett spending more time in casualty than pressing for a first-team place. Hopefully, the Hall is where it will all come right for him and he has certainly made a fairly bright start. Five young hopefuls – Michael Husbands, Leke Odunsi, Ryan Robinson, Luke Nightingale and Che Wilson have also come aboard. And we have needed them, with Neil Jenkins out with a hamstring strain and Jamie Stuart starting the season in fine style with a four-match ban.

As for our old boys getting fixed up, Damon Searle seems finally to have landed at Chesterfield after snubs from the likes of C** U and the Islanders. Meanwhile Mark Salter is taking the plunge with Bath, while, incredibly, apparent dud Gavin Strachan has made it to Hartlepool and scored with a cracking free-kick in their 4-3 victory at Peterborough before adding the shoot-out decider in the Carling Cup victory at Sheffield Wednesday. Jason ‘Pineapple Head’ Lee is strutting his stuff at Falkirk of all places – though that was also once good enough for Richard Cadette – and Martin Carruthers will be facing us again for Macclesfield.

I attended only one of the pre-season kickabouts – the 4-2 defeat on a lush surface by Ipswich on July 15. Let’s face it, they tell you nothing – or, rather, very little. It was another scorching evening, so jamming hordes in the sweltering East Stand and keeping the South shut was certainly a great move.....for the club and for cattle! A lick of paint had been applied to good effect in various areas, though the urinal in the East Stand (there will be no referring to it as the On-Line Financial Management Stand) remained in a state of unadulterated, third-world fetidity. The scoreboard also never showed more than 10 bulbs lit all night. A surprisingly good crowd bolstered by about 500 Tractor Boy devotees was stunned as Blues took a 2-0 lead via a Mark Gower 10-yard volley and a Tes finish following an out-of-character burst of speed. In fact, we looked utterly at ease for 35 minutes. Sadly, Ipswich then decided to move out of first gear and two stunning left-foot drives from outside the box, an Embo cock-up and a free header from a corner sunk us.

After that I understand we were unluckyish to lose to Gillingham, it was the kids beaten 2-0 by Kingstonian, the 1-0 setback against Canvey was a major worry (Canvey were murdered 7-0 at home by the Gills three days later), beating Maldon 1-0 sparked street parties area-wide and C** U, as anticipated, was marred by the over-excitability of a small band of the feeble-minded. United have since cracked down with a handout of banning orders, concerning which the Trust is very unlikely to be able to do anything where intervention is concerned. Apparently we had the best of the 1-1 encounter on another sizzler and only Kemal Izzet’s late 25-yarder prevented us grabbing the bragging rights. But all this was just the hors d’oeuvres for August 9 – and you already know what happened there!

I must admit I never thought it would happen, but it was great to see the Office of Fair Trading fining 10 businesses a total of £18.6million for fixing the price of Umbro replica football kits for the likes of England, M***** U*****, Chelsea, Celtic and Nottingham Forest. JJB Sports copped an £8.4m smack on the bum, with Umbro themselves (£6.6m) and our old friends U***** (£1.6m) also landing a nice slice of the action. ASDA immediately announced they would be selling U***** shirts for around £25, rather than £40. Surely the next step must be a probe into Nike kit prices – notably those of SUFC! We all know they are not worth £39.99. ASDA have proved that. So GET ‘EM DOWN, RON! Yet, despite the fact the actual cost to make is between £2 and £5 in areas of the world where labour costs are rock-bottom, remarkably it seems we have sold more shirts for this campaign than for any other.....

Interesting that ‘promoted’ Falkirk were kept out of the Scottish Premier League on ‘stadium criteria’ grounds. The vote was 7-5, with Motherwell, who would have been relegated to make way for their rivals, strangely proving to be one of the clubs who voted against. This smacks of a closed shop – and if they are getting away with it north of the border, bet your life the fact has been filed away for future reference by one or two vested interests down here. By the way, Falkirk appealed and guess what – they lost.

I am afraid Paul Byrne's bid to make his league return is not going quite as well as he was anticipating. Apparently he has shed a STONE, but has been told by Carlisle boss Roddy Collins he is still 'nowhere near match fit'. Meanwhile, nice to see Nathan Jones has lost none of his 'quality', being red-carded during Brighton's Carling Cup win at Bristol Rovers for an outrageous over-the-topper.

SunSport's new 28-page Monday morning football pull-out promised 'more on your team' in the ad in the Cheltenham programme. In fact, our win got the usual seven pars. Swindon report? No chance. Feel free to complain, because I get nowhere. Meanwhile the News of the World tipped us to finish 21st, so they clearly know absolutely nothing. As for Teletext, the headline on one of their pre-season Blues bits declared: Newman – We Can't Wait to Get Going. Wakey, wakey!

HOPE all our season tickets holders out there have now received their little blue books. United sending them out by recorded delivery sounds a great idea – unless you happen to be out or fast asleep when the postie turns up. Then, as I discovered, it is a haul down to Post Office HQ to reclaim your goods. And as you have no idea what awaits you – it might be a parking ticket fine! – there is always the temptation not to bother going to investigate.

Thus the 50th newsletter comes to an end. And just to cheer you up even more, I can promise you I will have quit this job well before NUMBER 100 hits your doormats. Any comments relating to any of the contents, the address is as ever: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (17/8)

PS 1. NUMBER 49's report on the Music Quiz night lacked one key element – the winners. It was Kevin Feasey's brainboxes once again, though by only five points.

2. Sorry for the slightly later than scheduled appearance of this newsletter, but the envelope executives and senior distribution staff have to be allowed to go on their summer holidays sometime.
3. Get this date straight in your diary – the 2003 Trust AGM will be on Wednesday, October 22 in the Shrimpers Club.
4. What to do with my Mark Rawle shirt? Flush it down the b*g with your dodgy golf handicap, quipped one wag, who shall remain nameless to spare recognition of his sub-standard intelligence.
5. Sammy the Shrimp has a nice new shirt, which will look even nicer when reference to the Trust returns.
6. Any Trust membership enquiries or newsletter distribution problems, the man as ever waiting with baited breath for your call is Paul Yeomanson on p.yeomanson@bluevonder.co.uk or 01702-302373.