

**SUSCT AGM at the Shrimpers Club on Wednesday October 22, 7.30pm**

# ***SUSCT NEWSLETTER 51***

**R**EMEMBER the old Ian Dury hit 'Reasons To Be Cheerful'? Not a ditty that many Blues fans have been singing in the bath or shower recently, I suspect. On the pitch, off the pitch, wherever you look, the clouds over United look to be growing to a Hurricane Isabel hue of blackness as United continue to try to manoeuvre their way through a void of growing uncertainty. Tack on to that the fact our SUSCT coaches were scandalously stoned by the nutter scum of Hull and it has not been a good month or so.

The Cheltenham win that kicked off the season so emphatically has become a sweet and distant memory on the back of an insane 13 away defeats on the trot (that's before whatever happens at Scunny), four successive missed penalties – costing us, I estimate, four crucial points – plus a mix of goal-shy 'strikers' and defensive hara-kiri. Yet again the promise of forward momentum is fading and what is taking shape is another season of thrashing around in the lower reaches of the Third Division as we try desperately to avoid the horrendous prospect of dropping into the Conference.

Or perhaps dropping out of existence altogether, because the news from the business side of the SUFC set-up is hardly a glowing testament to our upcoming prospects. Yes, folks, there is trouble at t'mill and the club's ability to find a route out of our current predicament by way of a method that offers a brand new future i.e. Fossetts Farm or something very similar, seems about as viable at this moment as my 33-1 'Blues for the title' betting slip.

I don't want to sound like a Jeremiah. I leave that to my sage counsellor Mr G. But it is no good trying to cast a rosy glow over the stark evidence before our own eyes. I am already wondering just what sort of response there would be from the Trust's now 900-plus membership, should we indeed have to issue the rallying call, if the recent attendance at Alan Perry's football quiz night is any guide. The turn-out was a pathetic 11 – about 1.21% of our total number – and two of those dropped out after three of the five rounds because they thought it was general knowledge! We would have made a loss but for a generous £10 donation from Ken Jarvis. Alan makes a huge effort to raise funds for the Trust in many varied ways. The response on this occasion must have had him asking himself why he bothers.

I think he would say he does so because he wants the Trust to continue as a tool to aid the football club we all support should the sort of darkest hour afflicting the likes of Notts County and Oldham ever dawn over Roots Hall. And if you do not think that could happen, then see how you feel after reading the following details provided by our vice-chairman Paul FitzGerald of the meeting that he, secretary Terry Jeffreys and membership secretary Paul Yeomanson had with Colin Wagman of Delancey Estates at his London office on August 18.

**P**AUL, who valiantly ignored the fact that the building was less palatial than you might expect of such a major player as Delancey and that the office walls were festooned with paintings that 'you are sure one of your kids could have done better', reports:

*'The purpose of the meeting was to gauge Delancey's views on how their 'investment' is performing and what their short and long-term plans are for our little club. Additionally, I was curious as to how SEL (owned 50% by Delancey and 50% by Martin Dawn) could proceed with the apparent conflict that must be inevitable when two parties want different things i.e. Delancey want out, Martin Dawn want to remain.*

*Delancey will keep financing the club for another year but would commit no further. They are looking to exit and would look at any serious offers (they have had a number of unrealistic offers). Colin would not cross over from a purely business view to running a football club but Ron Martin has. Delancey would sell to someone who had the right money, plus the cash to take the club on for a couple of seasons. He didn't tell us what the right money was, but it sounded like £5million. Colin does not want to sell to someone who would let the club fold, as not only did he not believe that was right, but also Delancey would get the blame and their reputation is worth more than a few hundred thousand pounds. However, he did admit that if a*

developer came in with a large amount, then, to be fair to their shareholders, they would have to look at it seriously. He felt it would be very difficult, but not impossible, to make money from the Fossetts Farm and Roots Hall development as it had gone on much too long. None of the parties involved, including Southend Council, expected the B&Q development to be called in by the Secretary of State.

Whilst being frustrated by Lansbury's tactics, he also stated that they are simply successful business people who spotted an opportunity and therefore hold all the trump cards. They have a good name in the borough and have brought employment to the town. In terms of alternatives to Fossetts Farm, Colin felt there is NO land available in the Southend area for a football stadium. The council have also not come up with any alternatives. He rates Southend Council not cash rich and therefore unable to help in any significant way financially.

He thinks Ron has boundless energy, is a very determined individual and a fighter. He admits his failure to buy Fossetts Farm was a big mistake, but that no one is more upset about this than Ron (and us!). Colin expressed surprise that, despite the many cost savings and fine tunings the management had carried out, the club simply refuses to break even. He admitted some of the recent cuts should probably have been made earlier.

One of my personal hobbyhorses over the last 12 months has been to try to get the rent and outstanding interest written off. If we are never going to pay it anyway, what is the point in us accruing it in the books and making the financial situation appear worse than SEL claim it is? Unless, of course, it is not in their interests to change it, though wouldn't that go against what we are being told?

On this Colin had proposed a Rights Issue to Ron just before the last agm. The action is with him. This would effectively enable the club to remove its debt. As SEL are the main shareholder, they would be the main party taking up the rights. i.e. they would pay £5m for the rights. However, as SUFC owes £5m, no actual money would move. This would also have the effect of diluting other existing shareholders' stakes if they didn't take up the rights.

The whole meeting lasted about an hour (including Colombian coffee for the visitors and herbal tea for the host – ed). We also discussed some of the history, the personalities and the costs, some of which we agreed to disagree on.

Out of the meeting, I think I got comfort from the fact that Delancey still believe Ron is the right man to proceed (well, for a year anyway) and that they are prepared to fund, if necessary, the coming season. It was also clear they would not deliberately harm the club. However a season is not very long and a lot of that time will see apparent inactivity as we wait for the planning appeal at the end of January. So on the uncomfortable side we have masses of debt, no ground, no lease, no assets and no guarantee beyond this season. Also whilst Delancey may be honourable, the reality is that they have shareholders to answer to and may have to forget their honourable intentions if a better deal comes up.

I don't suppose for one moment that nothing will be done in the background over the next few months, while we wait for the planning application. Whether we hear what it is will be interesting. But if I was Ron, I know what I'd be doing.

We felt the next steps after the meeting, in no particular order, were to:-

- Arrange a similar meeting with Ron
- Find £20m and some spare land

If you can help with either of the latter, please get in touch with us urgently!

**S**O now you know and thanks very much to Paul for putting us in the picture with such erudition and clarity. The mooted meeting with Ron is on, but at a date yet to be fixed. Evidently, though, we all have to be on the alert with the future so uncertain. And all of you out there must have plenty of views on the situation to be aired, with the opportunity shortly to make them known at the.....

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Go on, get the date in your diary now and promise yourself that you will get up out of that armchair, turn off the telly – even if there is football on – and be there on the night. Every Trust member should regard it as critical that he or she attends. Once the AGM part of the evening is over, which should be about 8.15pm, we were due to have a

**Q & A session with Ron Martin and Steve Wignall. But our star guests still have to be definitely pinned down, so the format there remains a little up in the air. You can check for the latest info in Paul Napper's Echo column, his match day programme notes or on any of the usual website outlets. But note that whatever happens on the evening, it will be MEMBERS ONLY. Anyone attending the AGM must be on our current paid-up members list. To get into any extra item i.e. quiz Ron etc, you must be a member or hand over £5 on the night to join the Trust.**

*All Trust members will shortly be receiving an AGM agenda and relevant Trust financial details, along with books of tickets to sell for this year's Christmas Draw. Let's have even more sold this year than last, remembering there are prizes of £100, £50 and £25 for those who sell the most. It really does not take that much effort. The draw for the £1,000 – won last season by James Welham – £500 and £250 bonanzas at stake, plus an assortment of lesser rewards, will be made at the Oxford game at the Hall on December 28.*

All the current Trust committee have agreed to put themselves up for re-election for another 12 months. They are: Trevor Bashford (chairman), Paul FitzGerald (vice-chairman), Terry Jeffreys (secretary), Craig Fillary (treasurer), Paul Yeomanson (membership secretary), Alan Perry, Paul Napper, Nigel Rickard, Richard Coxell, Jon-Paul FitzGerald, Kathy Jeffreys, Joe Elliott, Dave Scriven, Kevin Feasey, Brian Cotgrove and John Everett. Ex-officio: Chris Berry. So you can back 'em or sack 'em.

**O**K, let me try and lighten up a bit, especially with the mostly depressing news of the Blues' recent combat activities to come. So who won that Alan Perry quiz for starters? Well, after a night at the Spread Eagle where concentration levels were at their most intense and you could feel the brainwave electricity crackling in the air, victory and the £25 first prize went by a point to David Dawson. His tally of 70 out of 100 just pipped my good self and 'Smiffy' on 69. Despite leading by two points after three rounds, yours truly had a 'mare in round four and paid the ultimate price for crossing out two correct answers and inserting two incorrect ones in the final shoot-out. Doh! Next came 'Mark' on 62, 'Littleman' 59, 'Leeboy' 58, Paul Napper 56, Kevin Talbot 34 and Martin Todd 20. 'Steph', who had 0 after round one but 26 after round three and Eddie Robson, 29, were the 'quitters'. All in all it was a good bit of fun, raised the massive sum of about £7 for the Trust, was a credit to Alan and deserved a hell of a sight more support. If you stayed at home to watch Doncaster 0 Hull 0, it serves you right. A big 'well done' in addition to marker-in-chief Terry Jeffreys.

The plan now is to hold such quizzes on the coaches to away games, £1 entry with a prize to the winner. Go for it.

At least a bit of faith was restored at the latest SUSCT Quiz Night at the Shrimpers Club on September 20, in the wake of the Carlisle letdown. Once again, the lure of affable mein host Guy Rickard's teasers induced 10 packed tables to attend and produced a magnificent profit on the night of around £570. And that without an auction.

Once the small problems of a leak in the ceiling and the quiz master having to dash all the way back to Thundersley because he had forgotten his box of questions had been addressed, the evening proceeded smoothly. The only interruption came so the assembled throng could guzzle the regulation high-quality fish and chip supper. At the end of the night the first prize bottles of wine went to the Feasey / Napper squad, whose victory came courtesy of their sadly sound knowledge of the layout of a Monopoly board. Paul Yeomanson, known to like to come from behind, simply ended up at the rear on this occasion as his line-up bagged the consolation prizes for last place. Alan Perry's raffle was another winner and thanks once more to the Trust's oldest member for taking time to put together a much appreciated little produce basket as one of the prizes. The marking went unquestioned, Brian Dear had the Shrimpers bar running like clockwork and, all in all, another good night seemed to be had by all. The next one is planned for November 22 (after we have pasted Rochdale!) so contact Alan on [alanperry4@hotmail.com](mailto:alanperry4@hotmail.com) or 01702-476458 if you want to secure a table.

Right, on to more mundane matters – like the Trust committee meetings held on September 1 and 22 at the new venue of Boots and Laces. The Blue Boar had simply become too noisy and the initial Trust connections are no longer present.

The most serious matter discussed has been the disgraceful 'farewell party' after the game at Hull, where the minds of a small minority of home supporters clearly work along the same lines as Martin Keown's. The route of our coach travellers back to their vehicles was blocked by a collection of dements bent on trouble and, with no stewards interested in resolving the situation, it was a case of run the gauntlet. There were no police around, as they have been dispensed with at the new Kingston Communication Stadium. A Boston coach was hit by a brick at

the previous home fixture, while one of our two – already each charged a scandalous £20 for ‘safe’ parking – was struck by a stone that shattered a window as terrified women and children cowered on the floor. The response from Hull so far has been the complete ignoring of any of our missives, as if any such problem is nothing to do with them, while the police’s reaction is making tardy look swift. Overall the sort of spineless, gutless comeback you expect when the easiest thing to do is nothing. Trust chairman Trevor Bashford, as well as already having let Hull FC supremo Adam Pearson know in no uncertain terms what he thought, is also writing to the Football League and the Football Supporters Federation. We have no intention of letting this matter drop until we get some answers as to how the outrageous behaviour inflicted on our small band of travellers could have been allowed to happen. United back us fully and are making their own representations.

**A**NY Quid-A-Goal debtors from last season, prepare to be chased for money you owe. Far better to come forward and pay up to avoid that embarrassing hassle – or being named and shamed! Alan Perry reported this season’s entrants now total 102. Hardly surprising that one fan approached to sign up by Alan recently asked: “Are you a Jehovah’s Witness? Every time I see you you are trying to sell me something.” Keep up the good work Mr Fund-Raiser-In-Chief.

The SUSCT leg-waxing experience remains set for half-time v Huddersfield on October 4, with Alan, Joe Elliott, Bashers, Ben Herbert, Daniel Davis and David Dawson ready to squeal – and bring in another superb contribution to funds.

The howls of anguish from Trust members and ordinary fans fed up with having their eardrums assaulted by the pre-fixture cacophony of noise against Cheltenham seem to have borne fruit. The PA volume does appear to have been set at a much more sensible level on match days, though we shall continue to keep it monitored.

The Shrimpers Bar is now lively pre-match, with Terry Jeffreys reporting soap in the at last lockable gents’ toilet (though the 50p bar from Wilkinson’s was nicked from the ladies’ against Mansfield, where the snail trail was still evident!), a dribble of real ale plus plentiful pies and a stack of Pot Noodles. Only trouble with the pies and Noodles has been that few people are buying them. Then again, a Pot Noodle, along with orange caviar, is definitely the most disgusting thing I have ever eaten, so I can understand any purchaser reticence. We are currently trying to resolve the ‘signing-in’ policy that United insist we must have as a ‘members bar’, as we do not see it as our responsibility and it is a major hassle we do not need. We are also trying to get Sky Sports 1 rather than 2 screened so the assembled throng can watch the Saturday lunchtime action.

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By the way, if you want to raise any issue concerning the Shrimpers Bar in its present modus operandi then contact Terry ([terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com](mailto:terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com) or 01268-523974) and he will pass it on officially to Brian Dear. But it is no good expecting the Ritz as Geoffrey King has announced there are no funds for major refurbishment.

The food bars are continuing to bring in complaints and the plan now is to invite a couple of directors to share the match-day ‘experience’ with the fans in certain relevant areas so they can see for themselves just what the long-suffering Blues watchers frequently have to endure to get a bite to eat.

Much more tasty could be a possible curry house social evening at a local Indian establishment. This is currently being investigated.

We now have the first six ‘Hall of Fame’ player profiles up in the Shrimpers Bar annexe, again courtesy of Terry, with more to come. This man never sleeps when there are Trust duties to perform.

**H**E has also perfected his ‘Doomsday’ contingency plan from both the publicity and financial aspects. The hope now is that Ron can ensure we never have to use it. If you want to see how badly off we are rated, check out the ‘Clubs in Crisis’ website run by Brighton supporters.

I am afraid we still do not have our Trust website updating fully resolved at this moment, but we are doing our best to get this sorted as it is absolutely vital that this key fans’ outlet is kept as up-to-date as it can be – especially from the travel aspect.

Treasurer Craig Fillary reported our financial situation remains on a solid footing, while membership secretary Paul Yeomanson announced a stunning membership surge to our best-ever tally of 908. In the light of Blues' current plight this is a staggering figure – and we need to keep every single one of them.

I trust anyone who gets their newsletter by post received NUMBER 50 OK. Without my holidaying fellow packer Mr Coxell, it was a 1hr 43min solo effort to envelope and stick down the 310 to be sent out. For the first time ever I was three short from the printer's. So lucky Alison Cole, Alan Stivey and Pamela Old received individually crafted editions via my faithful Epson. If you are not receiving your newsletter for some reason, either by post or e-mail, contact Paul Yeomanson on [p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk](mailto:p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk)

Next, if you can stand it, on to details of United's latest few performances, with contemporaneous comments. Those of a nervous disposition should perhaps ignore the following.

**SOUTHEND 0 MANSFIELD 3 (23/8/03):** From the sublime of Cheltenham to the ridiculous. When Lord Hutton has finished his current inquiry, he might like to probe this disaster. Far from being 'sexed up', Blues were almost totally impotent from the moment we fell behind after entering our familiar sleep zone either side of half-time. Having nailed Mansfield to the wall for three minutes, a costly sloppy pull-back by Mark Gower in the wake of a piece of pure magic sent them hurtling straight downfield for Iyesden Christie to head in competently from eight yards. The Stags' Wayne Corden let those in the East Stand who had been giving him some stick know the visitors were in front and it made you laugh to see how many who like to dish out the abuse cannot take a bit of a dig back. Embo then produced another flap-happy party piece to gift Town a second and that was game over. Jamie Stuart's apparent lack of match fitness – or let's hope that is what it was – began to leave us totally exposed down the left and we were lucky not be further behind by the time Christie completed his treble with a deflected shot on the turn just as hundreds of horrified paying home punters were heading for their car park or bus stop. A ghastly performance overall, with only about two clear-cut chances created. Where is our penalty area predator? Sammy and Elvis looked resplendent in their new shirts – with SUSCT emblazoned proudly on the back once more.

**YORK 2 SOUTHEND 0 (26/8/03):** Bank holiday, blank holiday, rank holiday. 11 straight away defeats and I could swear I have heard the first cries of: Come back Newman / Little / Martin. OK, maybe it is still far too early to panic to that degree – give it another couple of weeks – but the Wiggers script has definitely gone awry. From soaring like eagles on day one, we are sinking faster than the Hood went down as we hit 22<sup>nd</sup> spot. York, on the other hand, were many people's tip for disaster simply because they had appointed the League's youngest manager. Well, this victory put them temporarily top with the only 100 per cent record left. Sounds like a disaster we could cope with. I noted from the 'highlights' on telly that Embo was waving his arms around a lot again and once more he hardly looked a human Fort Knox for the Minstermen's opener. Watching the action unfold on the results programme on Sky, what made the home side's second even more depressing was that just seconds later up popped news that C\*\* U had taken the lead against Bristol City en route to picking up their first points. Still, I gather from one of our 162 fans at the game that at least we perked up a bit second half.

**SOUTHEND 1 BURY 0 (30/8/03):** The roar that greeted Leon Constantine's 89<sup>th</sup>-minute winner was as much one of relief as delight. By then Glynn Garner had made four great saves for the visitors to keep us out and Mark Gower had cost Quid A Goal £8 by joining our long and not so illustrious list of penalty cock-up merchants. Despite Wiggers' 'Things Will Turn Around' pledge, it was looking like two more points dumped. And it could have been three but for, wait for it, a fine Embo full-length save from Andy Preece's free-kick. LC will obviously have sniffed a contract after his decisive strike. But can we really operate successfully with him and Drewe Broughton up front? And then what happens when Tes returns? Well done to Kevin Maher on his 200<sup>th</sup> league appearance for Blues. He gets lots of stick but, though some of you might not agree, I think we would miss him. Still plenty of pies and Pot Noodles left in the Shrimpers, but a lot of business was being done around the Trust Stand – both new members and travellers. Excellent.

**OXFORD 2 SOUTHEND 0 (6/9/03):** As defiant roars of 'There's Only One Greed B\*\*\*\*\*' echoed round the impressively spacious Kassam Stadium on the final whistle, Mark Rawle was probably smugly humming 'We Are Top Of The League, Said We Are Top Of The League' and thinking 'Blimey, what a lucky escape'. From the moment I boarded one of our two coaches of the faithful at Hadleigh Church – well done Brian Cotgrove, bang on time – you could sense almost an air of resignation that that club record 12<sup>th</sup> away defeat on the trot was not only on the cards but guaranteed. And we weren't disappointed. As I suspected, playing two big men up front meant

that until about 20 minutes from time our main tactic was bomb it forward and look for the flick-on to the Invisible Man. But once Leon Constantine departed, we started to use the flanks far more sensibly, began to get round the back and occasionally look dangerous. Only problem was it was too late – again. Embo, who had a nightmare first half-hour of butter-fingered bumbling and was caught like a rabbit in headlights for their opener, is currently having the same effect on supporter confidence that a virus has on a computer. I cannot remember a dodgier Blues keeper in the air since Brian Lloyd first arrived late in 1969. But at least Lloyd improved so much that, after leaving us for Wrexham two years later, he went on to play for Wales. Sadly, I cannot see Embo featuring on Sven's 'must have' list in the near future. At least he can say he had no chance with Oxford's second, a bolt out of the blue from 25 yards during our all too regular post-half-time snooze session. Still, the trip was not without a bit of colour – the magnificent rainbow on the M25 on the trip home as we listened to England scrambling past mighty Macedonia. A number of youngsters also owe Chris Berry a major thank-you for providing tickets at just £4 a head after he negotiated a cut-price deal from £9 with the Us backroom brigade.

**HULL 3 SOUTHEND 2 (13/9/03):** The Blue Army on the road, at home or, like me, in the office, had to suck on these delusional ramblings from the Reliant Robin of fixed odds tipsters Andy Totham, crazed by years of following C\*\* U, in his Saturday 'column' in SunSport's betting pull-out The Favourite. Still smirking pitifully from backing Oxford to beat us a week earlier, this man for whom the definition 'saddo' was designed, declared to the nation: "Biggest mugs in Britain right now, and every punter's friend, are Southend in the mire at the tail end of Division Three. Steve Wignall's flops from south Essex have the backbone of a jellied eel on their travels, having lost their last 12 aways. Defeat No 13 should be chalked up at Hull come 4.45pm today. The visitors must win sometime, but you can't really see it happening on September 13, 2003." So what do we do? Gifted the perfect opportunity to ram these inane rantings down the throat of this loser from the capital of Essex trailer trash, we MISS ANOTHER PENALTY and we THROW IN TWO MORE GOALS. Leon Constantine gave us a somewhat lucky third-minute lead against Spud's big-money brigade, but then young Ryan Robinson showed he has been studying injured Embo a bit too closely and we were 3-1 down with eight minutes to go despite a much more encouraging performance. Equally sickening, David McSweeney was sent off following a linesman's gaffe, though at least Chris Kamara pleaded the case for the defence on the next day's 'Goals on Sunday' on Sky Sports 1. Tes came on and nodded an 82<sup>nd</sup>-minute onion bag bulger only to then fluff that crucial spot-kick. Why did he take it with his record that now stands at four misses in a row? Haven't we anyone who can do the bizzo reliably from 12 yards? Is it really that difficult? Should we be on suicide watch? We are down to 22<sup>nd</sup> again and desperately need to shove it right up Totham and Co – fast.

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**SOUTHEND 0 LINCOLN 2 (16/9/03):** When devotees like Dave Scriven are going on holiday in campaign time and publicly admit to being grateful to be doing so, you know we must have a problem. A big problem. A crowd of just 2,874 forsook the dubious delights of M\*\*\*\*\* U\*\*\*\*\* on the box to take in the even more dubious delights of another Blues catastrophe. Not only did we not threaten the Lincoln goal in the first half-hour, I don't think we threatened their area. Two big men up front, this time Drewe and Tes, again DID NOT WORK. Jay Smith and Mark Gower were played hopelessly out of position in a midfield that hangs miles too far back whenever we attack. The back four is currently well out of sorts and keeper Ryan Robinson tried gamely but inspired similar levels of confidence to Embo. City caught us cold at a corner, just like last season, and then after Duncan Jupp had become our latest hapless spot flop the visitors nipped straight downfield and lashed in their second after Leon Cort fatally missed his tackle. That is 10 penalties missed out of the last 13 – totally unacceptable from a 'professional' outfit. This is not what you promised us, Wiggers. You can only say 'I'll turn it around' for so long, chum. I am really not sure which took the p\*\*\* more. This performance or some of the stuff I saw in the Tate Modern earlier in the day.....

**SOUTHEND 2 CARLISLE 2 (20/9/03):** Family Fun Day, though I don't know many Southend fans who got a lot of enjoyment from this show once Kevin Maher had squandered our fourth penalty in a row. At half-time we had complete control. By full-time we were just about a complete shambles. The penalty was bad enough, but equally infuriating is the number of goals we keep conceding just before or just after the break. If we could only get games to be played 40 minutes each way, we would be in the Premiership. Sort it out! The first 45 minutes produced our best home football since Swindon, though Carlisle's defence gave us considerably more space in which to perform than, say, Lincoln four days earlier. David McSweeney ended his 72-match wait for a goal with a 25-yard belter and when Leon Constantine lobbed our second within a minute we waited for the floodgates to open and happy

days to be here again.....and we waited.....and we waited. Good chances were missed, half-time seemed to scupper our concentration again and two points were chucked away that we desperately needed as another poor Leon Cort challenge led to their opener and then a chaotic scramble saw our partners in struggle make it 2-2. If the lob that hit Andy '14 Clubs' Petterson's bar had gone in, well, I dread to think.....

**Coach Stewart Robson has been made the fall-guy for our slide to 23<sup>rd</sup> spot – It could easily be bottom by our next home game – and his star has been on the descent for a while. But whether his departure and the ability of Wiggers now to do his own thing totally will bring the turnaround we seek we can only wait and see. And pray!**

Ex-Steps songstress Lisa Scott-Lee headlined the acts at the Fun Day. Oh dear, I missed her, though I am sure her warblings gave great pleasure to the young squealers present. The crowd was up probably 1,250 on what it would have been, so credit to United for that – though now we want some of those youngsters to return before they catch Beckhamitis or M\*\*\*\*\* U\*\*\*\*\* disease. Other entertainers were promised – if only we could have got a 90-minute performance out of the 11 blokes in the navy blue football kit! Also, who said Southend is cultural backwater? Tenor John Innes took time off from his compost company to sing Nessun Dorma (from Puccini's Turandot). Pity United's website once called it Nessun Dorma, while The Yellow Advertiser opted for Nessa Dorma. Oops! By the way, John, where did you hide that orchestra? Well done, too, to SJS members Kerry and Grace Jeffreys (12 and 8) for proudly handing over the SUSCT Player of the Month trophy for August to Lisa to give to Drewe Broughton. And, even better, they had their picture taken with the showbiz babe.

**A**NYONE else catch Soccer AM that same morning? The 'soccerette', named Candice, came from Benfleet. But like the young lady on a few months ago from Shoeburyness, Candice was not sporting an SUFC shirt. No, she claimed to be a Charlton fan. She apparently works at Basildon Crown Court. Send her down, m'lud! She also had very long legs and a very short skirt and I would be most grateful if anyone could confirm that my eyes did not deceive me during the programme and that she did in fact expose a little more of herself than she had perhaps intended in the course of one shuffle on her seat. The stunned looks on the faces of Sheffield United's Michael Brown and fellow guest England rugby star Matt Dawson suggested they had also spotted something unusual getting a breath of fresh air.

Figures recently released reveal there were just six arrests during league games at the Hall last season. Only four other clubs had better records. So a pat on the back there.

We prefer trouble-free away trips, too, with Darlington (at the new Reynolds Arena on Sept 30) and Kidderminster (Oct 11) next up. Bookings, as ever, can be made from the high priest of Trust travel, Chris Berry, on his usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. By the way, we are staying with Supreme all season again as the competition simply cannot match them for flexibility.

Chris, renowned for his love of art, has recently made some far-reaching alterations to the exhibits at Berry Towers. 'Rusty Transit', which has given no end of pleasure to his neighbours for some months, has now been removed. This elicited such delight from one set of nearby residents that they came round with a bottle of wine. But just to show he is not resting on his laurels, Chris has now erected 'Pile Of Bricks', which should have the aforementioned Tate Modern sniffing around with a large cheque at any moment.

I mentioned in NUMBER 50 that there was now a 'zero tolerance' policy in operation when it came to 'no shows' on away journeys. First victims are Adam and James Malpass, who for some reason known only to themselves did not front for the journey to Doncaster. So I am afraid, Adam and James, that if you want to book a coach seat in future you will have to make arrangements to pay up before departure. The one travel AWOL for York, Stuart Martin, will find the same penalty will apply.

Cut-price away tickets are a good idea – as long as you can buy them trouble-free. I tried to purchase a reduced ticket for Oxford from the club shop before kick-off against Mansfield. Couldn't. So attempted to buy one from the ticket office. Couldn't. They were selling them only post-match – even though there was a spare unused window. After what the Stags did to us, it then took a supreme leap of faith to bother to return at 4.45 and hand over my £14.50. Put the customer first, please. Oxford on the day was £17.50, for which you obviously should have got an armchair and waitress service.

The Quid A Goal details keep disappearing from the United programme, but nice to see John Stannard singing the Trust's praises for the funds we have handed over so far to enable him to purchase new equipment.

**K**EVIN Maher has revealed that his favourite film is Dumb and Dumber. Perhaps he should see more films, though at least he did not nominate Escape to Victory or When Saturday Comes, the two laughable stinkers of football portrayal on the silver screen.

The Nationwide League has been crowing about a 26 per cent increase in Third Division gates in the first month of the season. OK, well done Hull and Darlo – though the latter's 11,600 for the first game at their new ground was down to 4,600 by the second. Sadly, we seemed to be bucking the trend. Blues average gate for their first three home games was 3,804 – down 3.64 per cent on last season's average of 3,948 – and already plummeting further as we continue to fail to get our act together.

Bring on Bristol Rovers in the first round of the LDV Vans Trophy on October 14. And, errr, that's about all there is to say on this long-awaited fixture – except that half the ground will be closed on the night.

Surprise, surprise. The FA are cutting the prize money paid out in the FA Cup. But not to those who make the third round onwards, natch. No it is those who lose in the early rounds who will get less. Well, it makes sense doesn't it. The fat cats need the dosh and we know damn well that David Davies and all those other smug, self-satisfied non-entities allegedly running *our* game have no idea there is football outside the Premiership.

Why is the current United programme full of Reds rather than Blues? Kinnochio v Mansfield and spinmeister Alastair Campbell v Bury. What about something on Sir Teddy as our famous fan – and SUSCT president? Anyone agree with me the programme could also now do with cutting in half – along with the price?

**L**EO Roget's short fuse looks like it has earned him the heave-ho from Brentford. He had my sympathy as he scythed through a Plymouth rival who was blatantly obstructing down by the corner-flag while time-wasting in the run-up to the final whistle on September 6. But, of course, the ref sent him off and he responded with some 'gestures' to Bees fans upset by what he had done. Now Bees boss Wally Downes has said 'Thanks Leo and goodnight'. Matt Lockwood of Leyton Orient was dismissed for a similar offence the same day and I believe there will be plenty more going that way unless the League get a grip on what has become a time-wasting disease once the ludicrous 'added time' board is held up by the spare part fourth official.

Talking of farewells, goodbye Luke Nightingale. Regrettably, his lack of any apparent threat in front of goal made him a bit of a dead duck when it came to boosting our front-line power.

And there, once more, you have it. Any comments you wish to make on any of the content, or if you have a snippet you think worth including, contact me as ever on: [nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk](mailto:nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk)

NR (23/9).

PS 1. Sorry. My reference to Ken Gill as former Southend United Supporters Club secretary should have read Frank Gill. Ken Gill was the somewhat 'left of centre' leader of what is now the Amicus trade union back in Britain's banana republic days of the late 70s.

## **SUSCT AGM at the Shrimpers Club on Wednesday October 22, 7.30pm**

### **BOB EVANS**

Trust member Bob Evans died recently in tragic circumstances. United have lost a loyal and fanatical supporter and the Trust sends its condolences to his family.