

SUSCT

NEWSLETTER

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WHEN Ron Martin rose from his seat with 10 minutes left of the Boston fright night and descended from the rear of the directors' box for 'a word' into the Blues dugout, it was clear he had not gone walkabout with the intention of offering the isolated figure of Steve Wignall an on-the-spot contract extension.

In fact, as the West Bank offered us the dulcet tones of their rendition of 'We Want Wignall Out, Said We Want Wignall Out', slim odds were already being offered on our latest boss once again joining the lengthy queue at the clearing house for out-of-work managers before many more moons were up.

But Ron is not one to act in haste. Especially not if it might cost money the club does not have. He has declared: "I have proved in the past I am not afraid to make changes." Yet could his refusal to react precipitately on this occasion be the right one after all? For the troops reorganised and a victorious performance was conjured up at Macclesfield which the early News of the World report described as 'superb'. Then, within minutes of that, our leader is rubbing his mitts in anticipation of a full-house, FA Cup first round sell-out for Blues v Canvey Island II. Well, not quite a full house. Thanks to the 'genius' behind the Sunday switch, my seat will be empty.

What a turnaround, though. We may still be 22nd in the Third Division and up against one of the most desperate situations SUFC has faced since Anton Johnson was raiding the Christmas Club cash back in the halcyon days of the mid-80s. But, as ever, we battle on – a mere three months off Two Jags' verdict on Fossetts Farm!

Wiggers keeps saying he will turn it around. Let us just hope we can finally stop asking 'When?' and cease having to suffer the grim fare placed before our disbelieving eyes far too frequently of late. Unbeaten in four away, Monsieur W claims the players have become scared of playing at the Hall. Why, when everyone is willing them on to do well? Just cut the excuses and show us what you can do – week in, week out. Because if 22nd is it, God help us.

The Kidderminster win was supposed to be the galvanising force for the upward push we have all been praying for. Instead we got the exact opposite and gifted three points each and a massive lift to two of our bitterest rivals in the Third Division mire. The marvel of Moss Rose really must become the true turning point.

THE SUSCT will certainly keep plugging away, doing its level best to keep fans behind the side and trying to hang on to the record number of members it has worked so hard to attract. Yet a successful Trust relies heavily on a successful team. Nothing else will do.

And what an added incentive the lads now have. Despite their sad reluctance to get properly involved in Quid A Goal on a realistic basis, the opportunity is there for the squad to land a nice little earner by the season's end. All they need to do is start showing us the form of which they claim to be capable and hit the positions in the table that

will mean an escape from the clutches of Division Three. And I don't mean 23rd or 24th! For a group of committee men who should be of sounder mind and know better have cobbled together £300 that was plunged on Blues each-way at 1000-1 prior to the Orient agony for us still to finish 1, 2 or 3 this season. After the Boston nightmare we could probably have got 5,000-1, but no matter. If the business was done and the title taken, there would be a cool £180,000 in the pot. Half for the bet brigade, 25 per cent for the Trust and 25 per cent for the players. So there is a £45,000 carrot for the lads (though only £9,000 for second or third) to begin showing us what they are really made of. Because if the majority of what we have been seeing of late is it, then the big derby we end up looking forward to next season will not be against C** U, but.....Canvey Island in the Conference!

Talking of cash, I take it everyone received their AGM / Trust Financial Statement / Christmas Draw tickets pack. By the time you read this (assuming you do) only the draw tickets will still be relevant. And, as always, I am simply going to chant the same old mantra. Please EVERYONE – and that does mean YOU – do your best to sell your tickets and return the stubs to Terry Jeffreys (either in person or at 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR) or Richard Coxell (either in person or at 20 Redcliff Drive, Leigh-on-Sea, Essex. SS9 1AY) well in time for them to be entered in the drum for the £1,000 first prize at half-time v Oxford on December 28. This is a major Trust fund-raiser and lets you to do your little bit and feel even better about yourself than usual. Selling around 15 raffle tickets – or buying them yourself – should not be too much to ask of each of our number. You might even end up wanting to sell a few more of the 12,000 available. The leading salesman so far (not Alan Perry!) already stands at 150-plus.

Next on to the last committee meeting held at Boots and Laces on October 13.

The initial talk was of travel – good and bad. I'll get the bad out of the way first. Certain youthful Trust members who like to sit in the rear rows of our coaches appear incapable of dealing with their crumbs, half-eaten sandwiches, crisp bags and assorted other detritus in any other way than to drop or throw the lot on the floor. As we do not have their mummies around to clear up after them, and nobody else on board intends doing it, it means the guilty parties are immediately required to change their anti-social ways and use the waste bags provided. However, if they cannot act in the same responsible manner as the rest of our passengers and things do not improve, the first step will be an increase in fare for those deemed to be not pulling their weight. And if that fails to work, an invitation to travel away by other means will follow. Chris Berry has already issued a notice to this effect on the coaches and, hopefully, this will be the last time the issue has to be raised.

Far better to hear from membership secretary Paul Yeomanson about the excellent reception our party received at Kidderminster on October 11. We had been promised post-victory access to their social club to watch the Turkey v England game, only to discover the club did not have Sky. Ergo, a quandary. In the end the SUSCT set were allowed to watch the game in the Kiddie boardroom. Bashers declared: "They could not have done more for us." It was agreed we should send them a letter of thanks for their excellent hospitality. What a pity that one of their directors let slip the reception they get at the Hall has not always been the most welcoming and that popping in for a pre-match drink in the Shrimpers Club might be preferable to the boardroom on February 14. Paul also reported we had 41 booked to travel on the day and, while only 35 went, the six who did not hit the road all phoned to say they could not make it. A big thank-you to them for helping to make our travel team's life a bit easier.

Chris Berry is now sitting by his phone to take your bookings for all the forthcoming away fixtures – Swansea (his favourite, LDV Vans, Nov 4), Yeovil (Nov 15), Torquay (Nov 29), Swansea (again, Dec 13) and Cambridge (Dec 26). Get in quick on the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698 (no texts). Ground prices for Yeovil are: seats £12 adults, £10 concessions; standing £11 adults, £7 concessions, £4 under-15s. For Torquay: seats £12/£9/£5 children; standing £11/£8/£5. For Swansea: seats £15 (no concessions!); standing £11/£6. Herr Berry apologises to anyone who sent him an e-mail during his recent seven-week computer crash. When he finally managed to breathe new life into his inbox, he found 26,000 waiting for him! Chris will also be less visible on the coaches up to Christmas as Rosemary has ordered him to get his extension finished (that's the one on the house!).

NEXT on the agenda was the Shrimpers Bar and the thorny issue of the signing-in book. Trust vice-chairman Paul FitzGerald has been particularly unhappy about this alleged requirement of the licence, following the change to allow away fans to have access. It appears it is not a licence requirement, after all, but was recommended by the police and magistrates in the wake of the alteration and Brian Dear likes the idea. Overall, it was agreed that we would man a signing-in table for now. Any Trust members who would like to help us out pre-match by doing a half-hour stint on the door should contact our secretary Terry Jeffreys on

terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com or on 01268-523974. Failing that, just go up and have a word with him! (Contact Terry also if you are having newsletter receipt problems or wish to switch to our e-mail list).

Paul Napper reported that Matthew Holt from Supporters Direct was hoping to be down for a pre-match talk/chat in the Shrimpers before the Northampton game on November 1. Did he make it? Paul is also branching out with his Trust column into the realms of the Southend Times series of newspapers. The more reading it the better.

It was agreed that an increase in the membership fee should be proposed to the AGM. For full details, see the attached AGM report.

Feedback from Hull on the attack on our coach and subsequent broken window was regarded as less than satisfactory. Their chairman Adam Pearson seemed to feel Hull were absolved by the fact the problem occurred outside their premises and claimed it was also partly our fault because of a particular alleged obscene gesture from within the coach involved. Supreme have made no complaint about such behaviour. The League are 'monitoring' the situation at Hull, which is about all they ever do, though there was one consolation. We got the £40 car park charge refunded. Paul FitzGerald has written to Pearson and Humberside Police and we will keep pushing.

Now another date for the diary. DECEMBER 8, when any Trust member who likes a curry can assemble at The Raj on London Road, Leigh-on-Sea (near The Elms) and enjoy an evening of quality grub and football chat. We will be trying to get a guest along, but anyone interested in attending should let Paul FitzGerald know on pfitz666@aol.com If we get 50 for the feeding frenzy we can have the restaurant to ourselves. Cost? A paltry £10.

Kathy Jeffreys has been working on various potential projects for the ladies and a distinct possibility via Mrs Bashers is an aromatherapy night – massage, scents etc. But before any red bloods, especially Mr Bashers, get too excited, it will be lady members only. More details as they become available.

QUID-A-Goal is still bringing in the money, despite Blues' 'goals for' tally not exactly having the statisticians working overtime. Latest updated potential income figure is just on £700 and anyone can still sign up by contacting Alan Perry on 01702-476458 or by e-mail on alanperry4@hotmail.com

The leg-waxing went very well during the Huddersfield match. At least, thanks to the heroic victims, we got one laugh during the action. They were only 'done' below the knee, which must have been a huge blow once they saw the three college nymphettes – Sara, Faye and Ellie – applying the sauce. But, seriously, a huge 'Well done' to Alan Perry, Trevor Bashford, Joe Elliott, Ben Herbert and Daniel Davis for agreeing to suffer on the behalf of the Trust and various agreed charities. One other victim 'forgot' to front and shall remain nameless. This event will bring in in excess of £1,000 – a brilliant effort. If you owe any of the participants sponsorship cash, please pay up asap.

Alan P's next proposed money-spinner is the setting up of a '100 Club' involving weekly draws with a subscription likely to be set at around £5 a month payable by standing order. The more members we involve, the larger the prizes will be in the draws planned to be made weekly and also, naturally, the more the Trust will benefit. With 100 participants the anticipated prize is £50, at 350 it would be £300. It is intended that this should be up and running before Christmas, so watch all the usual outlets – newsletter, Echo column, programme, Trust website etc – for information on how to get involved in this latest exciting Trust project.

After the Hall of Fame, the Hall of Infamy. For £20 you can sponsor a player of your choice in either category. Send your cash to Terry Jeffreys at his address given earlier and 150 words on your player of choice to Jon-Paul FitzGerald on jphfitz@aol.com He will apply them, plus a picture, to his template and add it to the burgeoning collection in the Shrimpers Club annexe. You will notice other memorabilia is going up in the main club room, such as our FSF membership certificate and assorted pennants. Paul Napper also recommended we try to make use of recently released Blues material from British Pathe.

The November 22 Quiz Night is the latest to sell out, with a new world record 13 tables. The quiz master is currently burrowing over his books and sorting through his CD collection, or so he tells me. Sadly, Alan Perry cannot make it. But he will take food orders, or you can let Chris Berry have them as he will be 'in charge' at the Shrimpers on the evening in question. If you want to check on late table availability, contact Alan swiftly.

For the latest membership details, see the AGM report. Don't forget, too, to snap up one of the soon-to-be-available Shrimpers Trust car stickers.

MOST of secretary TJ's time of late has been spent sorting out the AGM / Christmas Draw tickets packs – and a great job he did, too. Terry is also the main man on the 36-mile sponsored walk from Roots Hall to Brisbane Road's centre circle on February 21 and is now in training. Bashers, Paul FitzGerald, Jon-Paul FitzGerald and Paul Yeomanson hope to join him on this exhausting venture, though PY stresses he will be doing the 36 miles solely in the support vehicle. Set-off time for the stroll of about 10 hours is 4.30am. If you feel you would like to partake of either all or part of the walk, ring or e-mail Terry or Alan Perry (details as above) and they will give you the vital info on how you can get involved in a way that suits you (sir!) and sponsorship details. They would also like to hear from anyone prepared to be part of the support team.

LIAISON MEETING (September 24). Issues not covered elsewhere in the newsletter included:

1. United programme sales brought in £14,000 less in 2002-03 than 2001-02.
2. Frank Van Wezel and Derek Wilshire are willing to undergo the Trust's 'Matchday Experience'.
3. £500 of physio equipment cash has recently been handed over to the football club.
4. The Wagman-style meeting with Ron Martin is due to be arranged in the very near future.
5. Banning orders on five fans were lifted until the outcome of court cases are known.
6. Geoffrey King is looking into complaints of some poor quality in this season's replica shirts.

Right, on to the gory details of how the lads in navy have been performing – or not – on the green sward of late.

SCUNTHORPE 1 SOUTHEND 1 (27/9/03): At last. A point away from home after 13 disasters on the trot. Darryl, back in the fold and hopefully with his buttons permanently done up, must have wondered what he had come back to as a Mark Warren gaffe left him in no man's land for the home side's early doors opener. When Carlisle went ahead at home to Swansea, we actually went bottom of the league. But that sad state of affairs lasted a mere 22 minutes. Swansea levelled and, with the dead hand of Robson apparently lifted as Wiggers takes overall charge of coaching, Blues bounced back to salvage something thanks to Leon Constantine's quality 25-yarder. Sad to report there were EIGHT no-shows for the journey who can look forward to the usual retribution should they wish to book a Trust coach seat in future. Cash first, seat later. The guilty parties were Scott Peters, Darren, Mark and Michelle Fletcher, Lee Manard, Amy Boughton, Tom Stead and Robert Craig.

DARLINGTON 0 SOUTHEND 0 (30/9/03): How we did not make the 264-mile trip home from the Reynolds Arena with all three points I will never know. Well, of course, I will. We simply lacked that vital cutting edge, that goalmouth assassin who when those critical chances come sticks them straight in the opposition onion bag. Mark Gower and Tes (twice) had just such opportunities and failed even to force their keeper to get his knees muddy. A real shame, because this was more like it. Blues looked a lot more solid all round and better organised, especially at the back. Darlo rarely showed the guile needed to break us down and if only the lads could have struck it would have capped a highly enjoyable 10-hour round trip for the vociferous 130-odd faithful who made the journey north and gave the team unstinting backing. Those on the almost full SUSCT coach noted that bang-on-time Cotgrove had been replaced by 25-minutes-late Berry. His excuse was it took him that time to select the journey videos from Blockbuster. Sadly, he came up with Two Weeks' Notice, an easy-on-the-eye romantic comedy starring Hugh Grant as himself and Sandra Bullock. At least she was better than in Speed. On the way back we got Welcome to Collinwood, which would have been better left on the shelf. Apart from that there was the added entertainment of the first on-board quiz, all arranged pre-departure by Alan Perry and superbly won by Gerry Smith with 24 correct answers out of a possible 25. It left myself and the two or three others on 22 well and truly routed. The question he got wrong? From which club did Arsenal sign David Platt? The answer is in the PS section at the end of the newsletter. By the way, if ever you are thinking of stopping at Grantham North services, don't. What a rip-off. Packet cheese sandwich - £3.50. They are 'avin' a laugh! Home in Hadleigh at 2.45am, though not as early as Bashers. Not content with his own personal pick-up point on the M11 (though he had flown back specially from Edinburgh!), he then blagged his own chauffeur to return from Grantham by car. Deservedly docked miles on the SUSCT travel table.

BUT what of the Arena? A superb 25,000-seater venue, which, containing just 4,369 for the match, could muster not much more than the atmosphere for a pre-season friendly. Shame. Our reception was totally unlike the hostility of Hull. We were directed towards 'Bar 66' for a pre-match drink and I thought the girl behind the counter had made a mistake when she asked for just £3.70 for two pints of Foster's. Meanwhile lucky

Darlo supremo George Reynolds, inside mingling with fans, was immediately waylaid by Bashers for a rundown of stadium costs and how, in our dreams, they might one day possibly compare with Fossetts. He paid £1.5million for the land and about £17million to build the stadium – and added that our big problem was having property developers involved rather than a stand-no-nonsense, one-man band like himself. Surely not. George, of course, is something of a rarity – a crook who reformed before he came into football, rather than a businessman who became a crook once he got into football. Where is the philanthropist to take us to the promised land?

SOUTHEND 1 HUDDERSFIELD 2 (4/10/03): A result to make grown men cry. If they awarded points for pressure, we would have had three sewn up. Sadly, they don't. Sticking the ball in the net is all that counts and we just do not look capable of doing that often enough. Once again, after taking a 43rd-minute lead through Leke Odunsi's neat 18-yarder we allowed the visitors to level right on half-time. Then, after a spell of late second-half pressure which saw us do just about everything bar score, they hit us with a devastating break. Kevin Maher failed to catch scorer Danny Schofield, who avoided our skipper's last-gasp bid to trip him and tucked the ball past Darryl. A massive blow to morale, both for Blues players and fans like Mr G and Mr I on their return to the home of their first love. The fact the team was applauded off showed the faithful knew the lads had given it their all and did not deserve to lose. We know we are better than second-bottom, but that is where this result dumped us. Plus, the facts do not lie. Top dogs Hull have scored 30 goals, while at this point we have just nine. Town fans, overjoyed at stealing three points, were also delighted by their pre-match welcome in the heaving Shrimpers Bar.

KIDDERMINSTER 1 SOUTHEND 2 (11/10/03): For those who missed it, like working me, allegedly one to say 'Wish I'd been there'. Joy abounded after 15 previous away dates without a win and, by all accounts, the victory was thoroughly deserved. Leon Cort had one header disallowed, but there was no stopping Mark Warren's free-kick thunderbolt or 'headache' victim Tes's six-yard volley right at the death from Leon Constantine's nod-down. An 84th-minute John Melligan strike – he likes scoring against us – gave us a nasty scare, only for the gods to smile on us for once. Oh, and England made it to Euro 2004.

SOUTHEND 2 BRISTOL R 1 (LDV Vans Trophy, 1st rd, 14/10/03): The need to earn a crust kept me away, though reports indicate this was a bright Blues show that brought a merited win despite us needing extra-time to achieve it. After falling behind 10 minutes from the break, Leon Constantine required only three minutes before stroking us level. Then Mark Gower dug out one of those pieces of brilliance we would love to see him conjure up more often to seal our passage with a 110th-minute 20-yarder curled sweetly into the net. Can we keep this up?

SOUTHEND 1 LEYTON ORIENT 2 (18/10/03): Errrrrr, no. What a birthday treat. First we get the 'dream' draw of Swansea away in the LDV Vans Trophy second round and then the faithful are dished up a performance that can best be described by any one of the following adjectives – appalling, inept, leaderless, shambolic, unacceptable, depressing. Easily the biggest cheer of the day came in a jam-packed Shrimpers Club pre-match when Will Greenwood burst over for England's try against South Africa in the rugby World Cup. Blues genuinely were as BAD as I can remember of late, against a side just dumped out of the aforementioned LDV mega-tournament 4-1 by mighty Dagenham and Redbridge. And it is no good pretending otherwise or attempting to come up with excuses. We had a 6,000 crowd, yet one more chance to impress the casually curious, and, yet again, blew it. I know Martin Ling used to play for us, but there was no need to add lustre to his Brisbane Road job application. Leon Constantine's 90th-minute strike raised hardly a whimper, let alone a cheer, following as it did hard on the heels of the laughable own-goal by poor old David McSweeney. That alone had hundreds hurling themselves towards the nearest exit. 'Offside' was the familiar cry for the O's opener. It looked close on the TV replays. Yet perhaps we should be asking instead why their scorer was left totally unmarked to nod the ball past a stranded Darryl? First half their keeper could have sat in front of the 1,500 Orient following in an armchair. He was totally untroubled by our feeble diet of hopeful long-ball punts and, apart from the efforts of Mark Gower, our dire lack of any width. 4-5-1 may be OK when you are trying to pick up a point away, but at home it smacks merely of fear. What made it worse was that for the second half we were playing only 10 men, after Lee Thorpe was sent off for elbowing Duncan Jupp. Jay Smith should have put away a close-range header and sub Michael Kightly at least tested Lee Harrison. But that was about the limit of our threat over 90 minutes of sheer torture. Before kick-off, operatic tenor Lawrence Robinson gave us a rousing rendition of 'Jerusalem'. He could have returned on the final whistle and hummed 'Siegfried's Funeral March'. Back to square one.

SOUTHEND 0 BOSTON 2 (21/10/03): I inquired of Mr G: "Are you coming to the Boston game?" His reply was a curt: "I am not paying another £15 to watch that s***e!" As ever, he proved what a shrewd analyst of the beautiful game he is. I thought this was a bit better than Orient thanks to the reversion to 4-4-2, but plenty of

others disagreed as we failed to score and watched three more points disappear down the Swanee on what was presumably another 'bad day at the office'. We may as well try 1-0-10 next. As expected, many voted with their feet after the Os misery and there were just 2,463 of us left on the night, including about 150 followers of a Boston side boasting the up-front 'potency' of a certain Graeme Jones. Fears for the worst set in soon after Drewe B had headed a cracking little 19th-minute cross from Mark Gower – again our one genuine performer – wide from all of four yards. By half-time bellows of 'Rubbish' and 'Absolute c**p' were echoing round the East Stand. The one bit of colour on a bitter night was provided by the Blue Belles in a selection of vivid skimpiers tighter than an England rugby jersey. Wiggers' half-time call to arms got the familiar response – precious little. He threw in Michael Kightly for 45 minutes, though, sadly, it was his misplaced pass which led to the visitors' opening goal. Fifteen minutes later an innocuous-looking lob forward totally caught out our defensive cover, a Boston boot was stuck out and the ball looped lingeringly over Darryl's flailing right paw into the corner of the net. Game over. Plus there was the added farce of us being reduced to 10 men when Jamie Fullarton 'did his groin' after we had just thrown on our third sub. Mr Coxell, shamelessly sickened that he had forgotten his 'student' card and so was unable to gain access for a mere £6, fondly remembered the time when those in the East Stand were allowed to greet such an unedifying 90 minutes with a barrage of cushions. Oh happy days. As we departed the yells had changed.....to 'Resign!' Keep smiling.

MACCLESFIELD 1 SOUTHEND 2 (25/10/03): We needed a big response – and, thankfully, got it. Aided by Macc being reduced to 10 men midway through the first half for a twin yellow card, Blues played the ball around neatly at times and took a 51st-minute lead as Leon Constantine made it seven for the season with a bobbly volley. Eight minutes later we got yet another penalty and, wonder of wonders, actually put it away. Jay Smith forgot his previous failures to end the nightmare run of four successive misses – plus four blown points – and see us safe. Even then we typically handed the home side a consolation strike right at the death as concentration lapsed. A manager did get the bullet – but it was Macc's David Moss! Our next concern looks like an injury crisis.

PRESUMABLY Ron must have been among those voting at the recent get-together of Football League chairmen for a 10-point deduction for all clubs going into administration for 2004-05. Does our esteemed leader know something we don't?

If you want a joke Christmas gift for a friend, allow me to direct you to www.spekkles.com, where you can get a genuine pair of sunglasses with 'Southend United' done in a fine blue and white mesh across the front. I can guarantee they are a real conversation stopper and, of course, the last word in style. Thanks Guy.

As well as Darryl, leading scorer Leon Constantine has landed a year's deal. Meanwhile Steven Clark has been at Macclesfield for a month. A truly wasted talent. Then we have Andy Petterson. What was all that about?

As for Sir Stan, the impression is if he does make a comeback he would prefer it to be in somewhat loftier surroundings than those we currently occupy. Pity, because anything resembling his old potency is exactly what we need. But remember there has been a darker side to The Man – as this little encounter on one Radio Five Live phone-in pre-Japan and South Korea reminded us all.

CALLER: Hello, Stan. Sven should take you to the World Cup. **STAN:** Why? **CALLER:** Well, you're an expert on beating Swedes. **STAN:** Get him off!

I have confirmation that Candice from Benfleet – see NUMBER 50 – did indeed allow her 'front bottom' to be accidentally exposed on Sky's Soccer AM. And to think it was 10 hours BEFORE the watershed!

Don't you always enjoy listening to Alvin Martin pontificating about the game as a pundit on TalkSPORT or Sky? What he always keeps very quiet, though, is just what a spectacular disaster he was as manager of Blues between July 1997 and March 1999. So disastrous, in fact, that a poll on internet website Football365 has him at No.4 in a list of the worst managers in England. He lost 48 of his 95 games in charge, taking us into the Third Division and within six points of the Conference before doing us all a favour and falling on his sword. He signed 37 and used 52 players – mostly dire Frenchmen who were originally only popping over on the ferry to do a spot of shopping!

SUFC security appears to be modelled on our back four at present – prone to breaches. First the club offices, now the club shop. If you know anything about either of these dastardly crimes, get in touch with United.

OK, finis. Any comments, praise or criticism to my usual location – nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (29/10)

PS 1. At Darlo it was alleged a ‘high-profile’ Blues fan with a habit of attending matches using complimentary tickets scrounged off players – in preference to paying like the rest of us! – was also *selling* such tickets. This is illegal and we advise all members NOT to have anything to do with these antics. We are also informing the club of what appears to have been happening.

2. David Platt joined Arsenal from Sampdoria.

3. Please remember, the lone, genuinely official SUSCT website is the one and only www.shrimperstrust.co.uk

4. The Trust was sorry to hear of the death of Frank Banks’ father. Our condolences to Frank and his family.

SUSCT AGM - 22/10/03

THERE were acrimonious exchanges over who was responsible for the breakdown in communications. Accusations of bad faith flew in both directions. One side said they had made their position crystal clear. The other insisted they had been misinformed. Both parties felt statements were necessary to try to put across to worried observers and vested interests who was right and who was wrong. Committee minutes were quoted, misunderstanding mooted. But blame for what had happened was carefully avoided by all those involved.

Right, enough on the breakdown in the latest phase of the Northern Ireland peace process. Though it is hard not to draw parallels with the whys and wherefores of the absence of Steve Wignall and John Stannard from putting in their much-trumpeted appearance at the SUSCT AGM held in the Shrimpers Bar on October 22.

We all knew a month ago that deputy chairman Geoffrey King could not attend. And it also transpired that Ron was not going to appear because of yet another potential ‘holiday’ commitment or some such. But we felt we had an understanding that there was no reason why Wiggers and United’s Trust-sponsored head of groin strains should not attend on the night for a bit of a post-meeting Q & A session on our current ‘parlous’ position and what it is really like to get to grips with Kevin Maher’s thighs. Sadly, this view was not deemed to have been handed down as gospel by our esteemed head honcho. Instead, it was taken as read by the Trust in the light of minuted discussion over the best part of six months at assorted liaison committee get-togethers. In the end, Ron seemed to feel it was crucial that any Q & A should feature his good self in attendance – even one simply on playing matters and purchasing physio equipment with Trust-provided funds. You get the feeling there was also a touch of cold feet at the prospect of Wiggers going into bat on a very sticky wicket with no ‘hand-holder’ present. He was hardly likely to be hailed as the Sven Goran Eriksson of the Third Division in the wake of four days of hell at the Hall culminating in the Boston debacle. I am positive he could ably have stood up for himself. But it was decided Messrs Wignall and Stannard should stay away – and needless damage was done to Trust-SUFC relations.

The Trust took a bit of pull-out stick from the usual suspects, who at the time had to be oblivious of all the facts. Yet the Trust committee believes everything possible was done to ensure the attendance of our guests and that, on this occasion, we could not have done more. Time now, surely, for all to put this matter to bed and move forward.

Derek Wilshire attended as a board ‘observer’ from United and helped swell the audience to 45 brave souls, who ignored the sad lure of Rangers v M***** U***** on the telly to do their duty as SUSCT members.

OUR chairman Trevor Bashford kicked off the evening with his overview. He pinpointed the continuing gloomy outlook for almost all clubs outside the tawdry cash fest of the Premiership and the hope that the Franchise FC philosophy never rears its ugly head anywhere else. He noted Fossetts Farm has gone quiet for now, for obvious reasons, but highlighted what ambition can mean even to a club like Darlington with their new 25,000-seater ground. Filling it, of course, is another matter. As for Blues, we continue to ‘flatter to deceive’.

And while Trust links with the club have probably never been 'closer' (prior to the AGM anyway), the key is supporter representation on the board asap. (Thirty clubs have it, we want it too. As the sixth Trust in existence, we are lagging behind and may press the issue at the next United AGM). There was a eulogy for the committee, who Trevor stressed are all *volunteers* often putting in hours of work for the Trust each week in their spare time. (To read a little about each member and what they do, go to the committee page on www.shrimperstrust.co.uk).

Trevor noted that last year the Trust was heavily involved in the Save Our Southend campaign, will continue to push for that board seat and will strive to push our membership over the 'magic' 1,000 mark. Our current membership on an average gate at present of 3,956 is already some achievement. We will keep liaising with other Trusts and the Football Supporters Federation and keep trying to widen our appeal. We will continue, too, to attempt to raise funds to strengthen our backing for SUFC and the community.

Treasurer Craig Fillary's accounts revealed an excellent surplus of income over expenditure for the year to June 30 of £10,215 – up from £1,729. The only significant fall in casual income came on donations. Fund-raising income soared by nearly £7,000, the vast bulk of which was due to the efforts of Alan Perry, whose hunger for finding schemes that will benefit the Trust's coffers knows no bounds. Membership revenue was up by £1,400. Costs to the Trust, though, have increased, especially on the packing, postage and insurance fronts. £2,000 was handed to United in sponsorship and £1,500 in physio equipment. Travel lost only £205, down around £2,000 on 2001-02, in the loving hands of Chris Berry. Overall, solid progress. The accounts were approved unanimously.

Membership secretary Paul Yeomanson reported that since the last AGM our number had risen by 148 to a best-ever 929 adults and juniors (806/123). Without the 100 lapses, we would already be over the 1,000 mark. He requested renewals always be carried out as swiftly as possible. From January 1, 2004 a scheme will be put in place offering a 'gift' to anyone who signs up 10 or more members to the Trust. Next came the potentially thorny issue of the membership fee. This has stood at £5 since the inception of the old SUISC under Tony Hall back in 1998. But the committee had agreed that to meet the additional costs threat, this should rise to £7 for adults, UNLESS they sign up for two years or more or agree to pay by standing order when the charge will remain at £5. The fee for Under-16s would remain at £5. After a short debate and the consideration of a couple of interesting alternatives, the new fee plan was approved unanimously by the meeting, again to start from January 1. *Now it needs our full membership's approval and you will find a small form at the foot of the newsletter which you can return to Terry Jeffreys by November 15. Or vote by e-mail.*

THE election of Trust officers followed. Those elected were.- President: Sir Teddy Taylor MP. Chairman: Trevor Bashford. Vice-chairman: Paul FitzGerald. Secretary: Terry Jeffreys. Treasurer: Craig Fillary. Membership Secretary: Paul Yeomanson. PR/Club liaison Officer: Dave Scriven. Fund-raising Officer: Alan Perry. Committee: Chris Berry, Brian Cotgrove, Richard Coxell, new boy Robert Craven, Joe Elliott, John Everett, Kevin Feasey, Jon-Paul FitzGerald, Kathy Jeffreys, Nigel Rickard.

The one major issue discussed under 'Any Other Business' concerned the Trust's 'contingency plan' should Delancey exit and Martin Dawn plc decide SUFC is no longer a viable entity. Paul FitzGerald, who relishes keeping our overlords on their toes, replied that what is important to Delancey is that eventually they see a return on their investment. The longer we go with no Fossetts Farm or similar such plan, the more likely it is their shareholders will ask 'Why have we got this non-performing asset called Southend United?' Should they say enough is enough, then the focus will be on Ron to find an alternative way out. While the Trust has a small cash asset, it would be nowhere near enough to run the football club. Should that ever be necessary, then outside funds would have to be sought. But Paul had to admit: "There is no Plan B. Without Fossetts Farm we are in trouble." Jerry Moss asked about a possible ground share, to which Trevor replied that the Ron plan is to keep in the borough of Southend. "There would be lots of costs involved in a share and we have heard of no such plans."

Then Derek Wilshire bravely stuck his head over the parapet to announce: "There is no question of the board seeking to move outside the area. Relegation has also not been discussed. We hope that in a few weeks' time that prospect will have disappeared. Ron is already looking for another suitor and doing his damndest to find one." The murmur this brought was palpable. Paul FitzGerald acknowledged: "Ron is a fighter and wants to stay."

At the moment, we must just keep our fingers crossed. As Kevin Feasey stated 'All we can do at present is to watch what clubs like Oldham and Chesterfield get up to, maintain our membership and keep finance coming in.' (Oldham's Trust has raised £200,000 to help keep the Latics alive and is seeking a board place for their efforts).

Trevor also pointed to the fantastic rescue act the York City Supporters Trust has pulled off in the last 12 months. He made it clear that should SUFC approach the point of no return, we would have to try to galvanise the town of Southend into action and say: "This is the situation, what are you going to do?" The key, of course, is the response that question would receive..... Thanks a lot to all those who took the time to attend.

SUSCT MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTION

I agree / disagree (delete as applicable) that SUSCT membership should rise to £7 for adults / concessions from January 1, 2004. However, membership should remain at £5 for those paying for more than one year or by standing order and for SJS members.

NAME..... MEMBERSHIP NO.....

Send to: Terry Jeffreys, 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR. Or e-mail terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com