

F.U.F.U.

NEWSPAPER 53

POSTAL strikes, an axed boss, FA Cup glory live on the telly, a legend is lost for ever, the Trust gives birth to the 100 Club and.....we still do not have a new hand on the first-team tiller (as at December 2, anyway). Yes, life is never dull for we diehard affiliates to the world of United – as has been rammed home with a vengeance since NUMBER 52 dropped through your e-mail inbox or, after an untimely delay, on to your doormat.

Let's start at the top. Wiggers is no more and originally it all looked so simple as to who his replacement would be. Ron was planning a gamble which would have won him the undying admiration of every poker pro in Las Vegas. Stanley Victor Collymore was being recalled to the colours. Or that, presumably, was the idea. It certainly seemed so within minutes of the momentous FA Cup first round replay triumph over Canvey Island. The name of Sir Stanley was echoing around Park Lane and Ron promised on-camera an announcement within 24 hours now that the seconded Webby, presumably with bank balance suitably enhanced, had revealed the end of his fourth stint in charge. Any problems and there was always Ian Atkins to fall back on. After all, had he not been seen at the Hall? Or Glenn Hamster, perhaps. He was said to be interested, even if not necessarily wanted.

But the time span has turned out to be Ron time, a unique non-Einsteinian entity in the world of physics which stretches 24 hours over days and days. And, sure enough, instead of the new managerial appointment being made efficiently and for all the right reasons, suddenly, things have started to fall apart as, in typically vintage SUFC fashion, the whole caboodle boils over into chaos.

First, Stan the Man-ager (at £4,000 a week?) was off the menu having looked a cast-iron cert. He had no experience of running anything, as far as I am aware. But he did know some nice wine bars in Paris should we ever get into Europe (dream on) and had proved himself with a fire extinguisher in case of a dressing-room blaze. So what did for him? Was it Steve Walsh pulling out as No 2? Was the prospect of taking on Lee Sharpe as alleged No3 / disco-dancing and nightclubs consultant too much for the board? Was the Man really expecting us to pay his £250,000 debt to Real Oviedo? Was he to be followed by a circus-style TV crew desperate for him to lose it again? Did he want to recruit Ulrika as team masseuse, bringing a whole new meaning to the post-match rub-down? Ron insisted the reason was much simpler. He declared that Stan had wanted to give something back to the club, but that this was "not the moment". He added: "The role should fall to a person with considerable experience in man-management and tactical awareness and also a through knowledge of players in the Football League we may need to strengthen the squad now and in the future." Fine. But that being the case, why on earth was the finest player I have seen in the blue shirt ever even considered for the hot-seat? At least the memories of 92-93 will never die, when, so I am told via Barry Fry, Stan was on £525 a week. Top whack went to Chris Powell on £550.

So, come on down Ian Atkins. Well, not quite. Oddly enough, Oxford went top of the table and all of a sudden he was not allowed permission to talk to us. Hadn't he already, though? Strange. Is he a loss? As a football manager, possibly – despite being tainted by a traitor. As a person, well, I wanna tell you a story to quote the immortal catchphrase of Max Bygraves*. But that will have to come some other time – probably in Number 54. (* Max Bygraves, for younger readers, was a comic entertainer / duff singer at his peak in the late 50s and 60s).

Glenn Hamster? He promptly ruled himself out, Barnet's Martin Allen was never in and, yes, the cupboard was now looking decidedly bare other than for Tilly and failed ex-Orient chief Paul Brush keeping us ticking over.

BY five 24 hours after Canvey, Bashers was left telling the November 24 committee meeting: “The club has made a complete shambles of the whole thing. After building up the fans hopes concerning Stan, they are now keeping everyone in the dark.”

Webby did the right thing by backing out to go back to his ‘business’ ventures. OK, great results at Swansea in the LDV Vans and in the FA Cup clash in the back of beyond (full report to follow). But if he couldn’t hack it full-time just 25 months ago before letting in Rob Newman, why should anything have changed?

I suppose Wiggers did his best before Ron, proving once more he is ‘not afraid to make changes’, invited him to report back to the dole queue. The Northampton nightmare proved the coup de grace. He said after that game: “I’m getting fed up of feeling gutted, to be perfectly honest. I have never known so much bad luck. It’s a case of us knuckling down and continuing to turn things around. And we will turn things around.” If only we could have had a tenner each for every time he promised to ‘turn things around’. We could all have retired. Sadly, it never happened and we ended up finding ourselves ‘gutted’ as he left us handily placed just above the relegation zone on goal difference! Ron ‘didn’t see the passion in his eyes’. Nor did we – and he never did attend a Q & A session.....

The last word goes to Wiggers himself. Apparently he goes to the same barber in Colchester as a colleague of mine – not Shot Totty – and his final verdict on his time at the home of Essex football as revealed during a recent wash, cut and blow dry was allegedly: “The chairman is a complete w****r who does not know what he is talking about.” Now who could he possibly have in mind?

The ‘excitement’ since NUMBER 52 has been almost too much to bear. And, without more ado, my humblest apologies to all those non-e-mail recipients whose newsletters did not appear until after the posties had returned to duty. The strike began on October 29, the day before the newsletters were collected from the printer and enveloped up for despatch. Those headed for destinations outside Southend, Westcliff, Leigh, Hadleigh and Thundersley – about 180 of the total of 342 – had to take their chance in the post box. Some of the Southend, Westcliff and Leigh lot were given out in person outside the Shrimpers Club pre-Cobblers. Richard Coxell, Craig Fillary, Brian Cotgrove and Paul Yeomanson all did sterling deliveries by hand in their respective areas of influence, while recipients in Hadleigh, Thundersley (except those living down Bread and Cheese Hill!) and the Thames Drive environs, about 20, may have seen me riding The Black Russian* to their respective addresses to slip the monthly missive through their letter-boxes. Crazy. The final batch went into the Short Street sorting office in Southend on the Monday evening, November 3, only 90 minutes after I had heard the Wiggers axe news in a gloating call from the C** U clot. So sorry to everyone about that unavoidable exclusion from the content. (* 10-speed bike, circa 1990, prone to promote a very sore a**e despite gel seat-cover.).

Talking of crazy things we do for the Trust, Terry Jeffreys says to himself each day “I must be insane” as he prepares a little harder for his 36-mile walk to the Leyton Orient centre-spot on February 21 and the dry run that will precede it. The estimated duration of the stroll is a mere 10 hours, meaning a 4.30am start. If you fancy joining him – and other volunteers have already applied – or you would like to help out in a support vehicle, then just contact Terry at the usual (01268-523974 or terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com) or Alan Perry (01702-476458, alanperry4@hotmail.com) and they will fill you in in the nicest possible way.

Remaining on the subject of slightly off the wall, what about the ballot for the 700 FA Cup first round replay tickets? Fair’s fair, the game had to be played at Canvey. I mean, one instance of caravan gridlock in the Southend area is more than enough in any single year. As one of the lucky winners, I was fine with the draw. If I put my money up front for a season ticket, I feel entitled to a perk in return. But would it not have been easier to give all season ticket holders, say, two days to register with the club the fact they actually wanted a ticket. They could then have been given up until the Saturday before the game to collect and then any left over could have gone swiftly to non-season ticket holders. Certainly encompassing the likes of the super 16 who took the Trust coach to the LDV Vans date at Swansea and the other 21 true Blues who made their own way to the land of leeks. These are fans who truly merit rewarding by the club. Without that sort of loyalty and commitment to the cause, outfits like Southend and their ilk would already be a speck in the memory. Had that plan been put into action, the ‘not bothered’ season ticket brigade who ended up being awarded a ticket when they had no intention of claiming it could have been totally forgotten. As it turned out there were enough to spare for anyone who wanted to go – and messrs Berry, Bashford and Yeomanson had already ensured that the most deserving cases were ‘sorted’.

THE clash was supposed to be live on Sky Sports 2. That made it impossible to show to a potential massed audience in the Shrimpers, as Geoffrey King insisted United would not foot the costly subscription for that channel. Then shortly before match day, it was switched to Sky Sports 1. A missed opportunity for sure.

Anyway, to return to the committee meetings of November 3 and November 24. After kicking off the former with a welcome to new boy Robert Craven and a Wiggers exit talk-in, chairman Trevor Bashford declared his satisfaction with the way the AGM had gone and thanked all present for their efforts ahead of another uncertain year. It was agreed a Trust press release on the newly departed boss should be issued next day.

Concern was once more expressed at the club's habit of picking up e-mails from message boards critical of United and for some reason regarding them as having come from the Trust. The club, Geoffrey King in particular, has been re-informed that the official Trust website – www.shrimperstrust.co.uk - is the ONLY internet location where agreed Trust policy and views are disseminated. What was also agreed was the importance of ensuring that the Trust site is kept up to date at all times.

Trust member Graham Jolley has produced a limited edition polo shirt for 'Southend United Beer & Cider Drinkers'. Graham agreed all profits could go to Trust funds as long as we advertised the kit on our website and collated orders. This has now been done, so get on the www if you would like to purchase one.

Next up was our latest Alan Perry-inspired fund-raising scheme, probably the most ambitious to date:

THE SHRIMPERS TRUST 100 CLUB

For this we need the participation of, believe it or not, 100 members and non-members. A small number below that would mean reduced prices, but an increase in the figure would mean much larger prices. So you know what we are after. Basically, those taking part would agree to pay £3 per month (£30 per year) to the Trust by cash, cheque or, preferably, standing order. With 100 members involved, income would be £3,000 per annum. Out of that there would be 51 weekly prizes of £30, plus a one-off Christmas prize of £300. The remaining cash would go into Trust contingency funds. Each entrant will be given a number for the weekly draws and payment by cheque will be made on the day of each draw – as long as the winner is paid up to date. If not, a second number will be chosen. Draws during the season will be held in the Shrimpers Club on match days, covering one or two weeks depending on fixtures, and post-season at committee meetings (no chicanery!). The overall man in charge of financial arrangements is our bank boss Trevor Bashford, so if you want to sign up then see him before any games, contact him on 012945-368768 and he should also soon be available on e-mail. Alternatively contact Alan Perry on alanperry@shrimmail.com or ring 01702-576458. You will be supplied with the necessary forms to fill in and any other information you require. This is a great idea that needs 100% backing. So get involved if you possibly can. It is planned to kick this off from the first Saturday in January.

It was getting a bit difficult to hear in the Spread Eagle by now at meeting one as some bloke was practising his Jimi Hendrix and Lynryd Skynryd riffs in an adjacent room. But we kept plugging away.

AS well as pondering the 100 Club, please do not forget to continue selling your SUSCT Christmas Draw tickets. A £1,000 prize for the winner is not to be sneezed at, so do your best as we are relying on you all. Sales are going well, but that does not mean we can slacken off. If you need more tickets contact Alan Perry (final overall leg-waxing take a magnificent £1,102.50) or Terry Jeffreys as above.

Secretary Terry has been beavering away as ever on a mound of Trust correspondence, while also doing further work towards the contingency plan and his walk. Treasurer Craig Fillary's accounts showed we made a profit of nearly £1,800 on income over expenses in the four-monthly period from July 1 to October 31, though there was a loss for October alone.

The date for the post-Wagman meeting with Ron has still to be arranged. As for our correspondence with Hull, that has now concluded, with both factions agreeing to disagree over events.

Frank Banks does a huge amount of work for the community and that is where the Trust likes to do its bit as well. Frank needed funds for a Special Needs initiative for children and adults and required sponsorship for the required provision of professional coaches, footballs and bibs for a year at a cost of around £1,500. We will be providing Frank with this money for 12 months at least, for which we shall get publicity in the programme, Echo etc which we hope will further raise the profile of the Trust in a most beneficial way.

The ladies' 'aroma' night is being pursued and we have now added Fair Havens to our preferred charities list.

Membership secretary Paul Yeomanson now has the 250 Shrimpers Trust car stickers available for immediate fixing to rear windows. Hand him your £1.50s at the Trust stall from the Lincoln game. And if you have some Xmas gifts to buy, what better than a Trust mug or polo shirt. Visit the stall or order by e-mail (p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk) or on 01702-302373.

Quid-A-Goal currently stands at nearly £1,250, while don't forget that £20 will give you the chance to enter your very own player in the Hall of Fame / Infamy. For details on that, Jon-Paul FitzGerald is the person with whom you should touch base on jphfitz@aol.com

KORMA AND HAVE A CURRY!!! There are still a few seats left for the curry orgy on Monday, December 8 at The Raj on London Road in Leigh-on-Sea. Paul FitzGerald (pfitz666@aol.com or 01702-478373) has the details there. We are not far off a full house so get in quick.

By meeting two, PY was able to report an increase in membership to a cracking new best of 936 (818 adults, 118 SJS), despite minor culls of the not-paids. Remember, if your membership is up for renewal, please send in your £5 (£7 from January 1) as swiftly as possible. Don't forget, too, the incentive scheme now under way that will see a £10 token for Trust merchandise, travel, membership etc awarded to anyone who introduces 10 new members. Any membership problems, contact Paul. Any newsletter receipt difficulties, contact Terry Jeffreys as above.

Travel meister Chris Berry reported we would take a substantial hit on the LDV Vans trip to Swansea, but we are mandated to provide travel and that is what we will continue to do whatever the fixture. To book your coach seats for Swansea Mk II (Dec 13) and Cambridge (Dec 26), get in touch with Chris on the usual hotlines – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698 (no texts). Watch the regulation outlets if the Lincoln Cup date needs a replay. It should still be the Supremobiles, despite the Berry boy's anger over their unhelpful attitude following the Island mayhem.

We took 199 passengers on the Trust's three buses to Canvey and not, as everyone knows, without mishap. SJS member Rhys Lawrence copped a cut eyeball and eyelid after glass hit him in the face when the Arriva SUFC vehicle was struck by a nutter-propelled brick at our post-match pick-up point. Thankfully, he is OK and we have tried to hasten his full recovery with a free little package of Trust 'goodies'. But it could have been worse and that particular window was not the only one shattered on the night by scum, who, contrary to the beliefs of the Rayleigh-based police officer in charge, had nothing to do with Canvey Island FC. Bashers backed this up with his quotes in the Echo. If the boys in blue had turned up at 9.45pm instead of 9.55pm, it might also have helped.

Dick Spooner, the Essex Police liaison and football intelligence officer and a Southend fan for 43 years, made a timely guest appearance at the November 24 committee gathering to put us in the picture on current football policing policy.

He explained the categorisation of matches into A, B, B-plus, C and police-free, with A, bizarrely being the least risky of the ratings. ACPO (the Assoc. of Chief Police Officers) and the government (you know, the ones who *lurv* sport) are keen for all clubs to start paying for their policing outside grounds as well as inside, which will break some sides. One to be opposed at every opportunity, though even Dick admitted that not all the police want this to happen. Stewards can do much of the security work currently required and Dick declared: "The Southend United stewarding is of quite a high standard compared to some – far, far better than it was." He also revealed the police have a 'very good working relationship with the club', unlike in the Vic era. The final word from Dick was: "We go for a three-year banning order for anyone arrested in a ground." Remember that.

One other matter of interest concerned our coach travel. And following on from some of Dick's comments, we are considering insisting that ALL Under-14s should be accompanied by an adult in future, unless a parent has signed a disclaimer absolving the Trust of responsibility for their little darlings. Thanks to Dick for attending and passing on some most worthwhile information.

The latest SUFC Quiz Night on November 22 was another great success, despite the unfortunate late drop-out of two tables which does not help us at all. More than £440 was raised, an excellent total, with the winners a group of Alan Berry associates who were simply less stampeded than the rest by a range of questions set by quiz king Roy Richard (personal greetings) covering everything from the number of aims in the Trust's mission statement (just two tables got that right) to why hangover copulation is so damned painful (no table on the ball there). Thanks to Ellis Berry for taking over organisation/food from holidaying Alan, Berry junior for selling the raffle tickets and the master of mental maths for getting the scores right. More opportunities to loose your brain in the new year.

The most recent liaison meeting saw discussion on a variety of issues, chief of which were:

1. When it came to a Trust representative on the board, we were again informed by Geoffrey King that in the current financial climate it would not be a good place for us to be. All we ask then is: Why the divine Miss Vine?
2. Bans have now been slapped on two fans from the Carlisle game and one from the Colchester friendly. It seems the hospitality boxes are a lot more trouble than the 'terraces'.
3. Southend Hospital's board has been awarded Fossetts Farm as the site for a new £100million diagnostic centre. The new complex will concentrate on X-rays, ultrasound scans, assorted other tests and have a large outpatients department. Significantly, so far there has been no mention of any facilities for treating groin tweaks or hamstring pulls. Nevertheless, this will have no bearing on the SUFC planning application for Fossetts. (More news as and when we can circumvent the confidentiality clauses.)
4. The Hall food bars should now be open for longer on match days.
5. There will be no area at the ground reserved for singing, drumming and general vocal team backing – and no relaxation on the repressive rules on standing.
6. Carry on sucking in those carcinogens and that tasty tar. No ban on smoking in the East Stand is likely.
7. GK generously agreed that the club would buy the tables and chairs on offer from Orsett Hospital. But we need to get in quick.

On now to a review of recent Blue performances on the pitch – the good, the bad and the ugly.

SOUTHEND 0 NORTHAMPTON 1 (1/11/03): We wanted a big banger for Fireworks Night. Instead, apart from Richard Coxell and his drum in the East Blacks, we got another damp squib. Any rockets flying around should have come from Wiggers and been directed at strikers who could not hit the target from two yards. It was cobblers against the Cobblers, who had little to offer themselves despite blowing a close-season fortune. The only bloke who packed his shooting boots was the one who had Brian Wheeler in a sweat as he almost won the Ford Fiesta at half-time. The writing was on the wall, though, once I heard the five words that strike terror into the hearts of fans nationwide – 'Joe Ross is the ref'. Sadly, the man who brings human form to sheer incompetence was the man in the middle. And, as ever, he departed on the final whistle to howls of derision from the home support after red-carding Kevin Maher for daring to contest the refusal to award a last-gasp foul committed against Tes Bramble seen by everyone present bar the evidently visually-challenged Joe. He should change his name to Joe Dross. He is not fit to whistle for a taxi. Yet Dross, with his infuriating grin and thumbs-up signs, could shoulder only a fraction of the blame for this result. Tes (twice), Leon Constantine, Mark Gower and Jim Corbett blew five gilt-edged first-half chances. And in the end Darryl, who made one stunning double save before the break, was left flat-footed by a flighted free-kick that bobbed past him from 25 yards after he was left in two minds about going left or right by a Town player's darting run at the ball. Oh, and we missed another penalty. Jay Smith this time put his fiercely-hit right-foot shot far too close to the keeper and then the follow-up header weakly into the rigging custodian's welcoming arms. That is five points our five missed spot-kicks so far this campaign have lost us. What they could end up costing us by May 8 does not bear thinking about. A big 'allo, allo, allo' to the Plod mastermind who coned off Prittlewell Chase pre-match up as far as Southend High School claiming 56 Northampton coaches were expected. Clearly, there were more Simple Minds around this particular weekend than just those appearing at the Cliffs Pavilion. Overall, not a great occasion on which to mark Kathy Jeffreys' ??th birthday.....

SWANSEA 1 SOUTHEND 2 (LDV Vans, 2nd rd, 4/11/03): Webby works his usual miracle in his first game in temporary charge as we come up with the unlikeliest of victories and march on to a third-round home date with the Hatters. Tes struck on 70 minutes and Jim Corbett at last opened his account for us eight minutes later. We surrendered the inevitable last-gasp goal against and the one disappointment has to be this was not worth three points. As mentioned earlier, Blues had a total of 37 heroes roaring them on. We salute you.

SOUTHEND 1 CANVEY ISLAND 1 (FA Cup, 1st rd, 9/11/03): One consolation for having to miss this game because the late switch to Sunday meant I could not get a day off swap should have been that I could at least listen to the action on Essex FM as I headed for London. Only problem is once you get past the Dartford Tunnel, reception is garbage. So I just had to use my imagination on hearing on Radio Five Live that Blues had taken a second-minute lead through SUSCT Player of the Month Mark Gower and then blown it courtesy of more fragility at a corner just five minutes later. The crowd of 9,234 was down a fraction on last time, but will still have put a much-needed few extra bob in the coffers. Canvey boss Jeff King took plenty of stick and had a good moan about it, making some rather unpleasantly disparaging remarks about Southend followers. Personally, I have no problems with

millionaires like King. What I do have trouble with is fat, ignorant millionaires like King! A replay for the chance to go head to head with Lincoln City was not really what we wanted. Then again, if we cannot see off teams from the Ryman Premier League we should be questioning whether we are really Nationwide standard. The Cup draw was made just as we were kicking off – so much for a promised return to tradition.

WOLVES 4 SOUTHEND 0 (15/11/03): Took a rare Saturday off work and, with the harsh barbs of the once dependable Mr G and Mr I ringing in my ears, boarded the Trust charabanc at 9.10am – dead on time. Sat through ‘Mike Bassett – England Manager’ on the video (low budget with the occasional amusing line), refused to pay the scandalous prices at Fleet Services, caught a glimpse of Stonehenge and then we arrived. Huish Park is a featureless new stadium in the middle of nowhere and featured the largest number of dead spiders I have ever seen in one gents’ toilet. At least it was nice to be back on a terrace, though there was precious little pre-match atmosphere as we tried to count up the number of coaches United had trotted out on the day to get the lads in the mood. Steve Tilson, Terry Baker and newly recruited Paul Brush did their best. But somehow you sensed that if the Glovers hit anything like the form they showed in their Cup clash with Wrexham the previous week then we were dead meat. Sure enough, once they struck with a deflected drive after 20-odd minutes there was no way back. We fell asleep at the rear to gift them a second, their third came from a great free-kick which should never have been awarded and the penalty for handball against Mark Gower was a linesman-inspired joke. End result, though, a trouncing and a slip back to 23rd. The dejection of the return trip was broken by the video Too Fast, Too Furious which really should never have been released as it was Too Ludicrous, Too C**p (though the cars were good). Sickening next day to see Mark Rawle banging in one of his 20-yard volleys to salvage a last-gasp point for Oxford.

CANVEY ISLAND 2 SOUTHEND 3 (FA Cup, 1st rd replay, 19/11/03): One of THE great nights. When Jay Smith’s last-ditch winner hit the back of the Islanders’ onion bag, the sheer outpouring of ecstatic joy from all 650 of the Blue Army as the adrenalin rush hit us had to be seen to be believed. There cannot have been too many moments like it since Gigg Lane ’91 and there must have been plenty of dancing, too, in living rooms up and down the country as those of our number watching on telly got to see the action live on Sky. OK, we were only playing a non-league outfit two divisions below us – a club, by the way, with a far higher wage bill than ours. But according to the bookies, the ‘experts’ and almost anyone else with an opinion to venture, we were set up for a crashing fall. And, b*****s to the lot of them, we refused to accept the script, as we found our pride and fighting spirit at last to come back from behind twice, survive Mark Warren’s daft red card, and not only win with 10 men but leave the obese King of Canvey looking a bitter and twisted loser. Yes, this was one we would NOT have swapped for three league points. The cowardly local inbreds, who felt the only way they could retaliate was by hurling missiles at the Trust’s fleet of buses, smashing four windows and injuring SJS member Rhys Lawrence, served only to revive the case for compulsory electric shock therapy.

We started almost as slowly as the traffic that flowed down Essex Way – 20 minutes top to bottom. And when Darryl once again hesitated fatally over coming for a routine free-kick cross on 10 minutes to allow the home side a simple headed opener, there were giant jitters among the travelling horde. The lads could have gone one of two ways – t**s up with barely a whimper or battling back all guns blazing. It is a relief to report it was the latter and Tes, having his best game for ages, was on the spot on 22 minutes to touch in Leon Cort’s fearsome header and spark mass mayhem in the United fan ranks along with further vocal tributes to the supposedly present Sir Stanley. For 20 minutes the Gulls were penned in their half and a Mark Gower drive was one of two of our efforts that rebounded away off the woodwork. Into first-half injury-time and, inevitably, we crack. Warren gives the ball away, it is fired back via a flicked header and suddenly Jeff Minton is clear to dodge a caught-in-two-minds Darryl and make it 2-1. Half-time was not an occasion to be trapped in the palatial Portakabin urinal or the BSE burger queue. For within 20 seconds of the restart, Jay Smith unleashed with his right foot from 22 yards. Standing almost directly behind the ball as it fizzed netwards, I thought to myself ‘That’s in’. And it was. Cue delirium all round as we really started to believe the wheels might just be about to come off the caravan. Darryl made a good block almost immediately after, Jay again struck wood with a header and, with Sqdr-Ldr Trevor Teapot proving time after time he has no competition in the running to be named the white Joe Ross, it looked like extra-time. Then came Warren’s moment of madness. Some applauded him off, others felt he had probably cost us the game. But we had reckoned without that sweet right foot of Smithie. With 30 seconds of the added three minutes left, Leon pumped the ball forward, Jim Corbett produced a lovely little bit of trickery to lay the ball back and Jay struck a precise sidefooted effort goalwards. Time seemed to stand still as we watched the ball arc right to left round the groping left arm of the Canvey keeper and descend perfectly just under the bar. YEEEEEEEEEEEEES! COME ONNNNNNNNNN BLUE BOYS! The away end went ape, a seething leaping mass of unrestrained joy. Believe me, it was just as good as it looked on your TV screens. Victory was ours. Bring on the Imps.....

SOUTHEND 4 ROCHDALE 0 (22/11/03): Under Blues manager in the programme line-ups it said simply: TBA. Well, TBA did a cracking job as we sunk Dale in the style which should have seen a few other similarly poor teams who have escaped from the Hall with points this season routed. In one game we upped our home 'goals for' tally by nearly 60 per cent! With the Blue faithful already on a high following England's rugby World Cup triumph over the Aussies, this performance capped a memorable day of sport. A too precise Jim Corbett miss and a fabulous Neil Edwards save from a Neil Jenkins header kept us out before two bits of Tes opportunism in three minutes set us up for victory. Of course, it would be incredible if we did not invite the opposition to score their usual goal on the stroke of half-time. Luckily for us, Lee McEvilly did a Jonny Wilkinson and thrashed the spot-kick awarded for David McSweeney's handball into the South Bank's upper tier. Jim C then showed we might at last have a penalty-taker of our own as he made it three, Dale lost a man to a red card after a crude lunge at Kevin Maher and Leon Constantine came on as a late sub and made his mark with a well-taken strike in the wake of a defensive gaffe. Job done, our first four-goal haul for 11 months and, like three days before, much more like what we know we can produce. Honourable mentions for Tes and Mark Gower, deservedly rewarded with standing ovations for fine performances as they were replaced near the end. The dizzy heights of 21st.

TORQUAY 3 SOUTHEND 0 (29/11/03): This is getting b****y ridiculous! The NoW first edition match report said we were 'outstanding' until we let in the Gulls' opener. And when was that? Obvious. Right on half-time. We have now conceded either then or at the death in SIX of our last 10 matches – Leyton Orient (89 mins), Macclesfield (90), Swansea LDV (90), Yeovil (40 and 43), Canvey replay (45) and now Torquay (45). This is as potentially fatal as our penalty blunders. So sort out the concentration, lads, before it is too late. Torquay bagged two more in two minutes early in the second half and that equalled game over. Tes rattled a post at 0-0, but so what? Another kick in the wotsits for our brave band of marathon jaunters, who were hardly amused when the coach's throttle cable snapped 15 miles from the seaside. Lucky a reserve vehicle was at hand for the return trip. Thanks, too, to Darlo and Kiddie for blowing two-goal leads or we would be worse off than 22nd.

Time to look back in anger. If you ever listen to Radio Five Live's Drive programme between 4pm and 7pm each weekday, you will know every presenter on the programme from Peter 'Smug git' Whateverhisnameis to Jane 'I love myself' Somethingoother and Ms Traffic believes they are a 'celeb', someone on whose word the whole nation hangs. On November 7, about 5.45pm, I happened to be listening to their ramblings. Suddenly, on comes the arch-prince of prats, the man exposed in the NoW a while back as being lambasted by his ex-wife for having the world's most tightly locked wallet, the person who was once the proud possessor of the most repulsive lump of facial fungus between his nose and top lip. Yes, I am talking Mark Lawrenson, an 'expert' in just one thing when it comes to football – imparting inanities and banalities in the most supercilious, arrogant, self-important and overbearing way imaginable, be it on radio or TV. This nauseating character, still living on his Liverpool heyday and glossing conveniently over his disastrous record as a manager – four wins in 24 games during a 'golden' seven-month spell at Oxford in 1988, plus a distinctly average 14 months at Peterborough in 1989-90 – now makes his living as a 'pundit'. In other words, a freeloader who sponges off any media outlet desperate enough to think they have something valid to say about the game today. The discussion on this occasion concerned the FA Cup. It was the usual bland leading the bland stuff until Southend v Canvey Island was claimed by Jane Whoeversheis to have been 'postponed'. At which point Lawrenson smarmed: "It must be lack of interest." Had he been within arm's reach, I would have taken great delight in chinning this pompous cretin. And clearly I was not the only one. For within 15 minutes, Peter Icankickmyownbackside was on again with a spluttering, squirming apology to all the fans of both clubs who had contacted the programme furious at Lawrenson's condescending garbage and explaining that, of course, the game had simply been moved from Saturday to Sunday. Clearly, they knew they had dropped a monster ricket. A massive 'Well done' to all those who stuck it to this odious example of PC broadcasting. As for 'Lawro', sack the hack now! Better still, stamp on his preposterous pince-nez specs!

One other little Canvey tale for you, courtesy of a Hamsters website. It seems the Canvey v Southend replay was shown live across some parts of America on Fox Sports World, via Sky. As the camera was panning around the ground, one of the Hamster fan's American colleagues, watching the game in their office, expressed amazement that there were so many executive boxes for such a small ground. He had to be rapidly informed that, in fact, they were locals trying to watch out of their bedroom windows.....

JON Child in commercial does a sterling job putting together our grossly padded-out £2.50 programme for each home date. But the Cobblers catalogue had the Division 3 stats in twice, 'Silkmen 2 Blues 1' on the match report and, unforgivably, an obituary to excellent early-70s central defender Brian Albeson that

referred to him throughout as 'Brian Albertson'. Who is doing Jon's proof-reading? Shades of Booby Moore.

Also, when it comes to 'stats' the same programme told us Blues had committed an average 10.94 fouls per game. Who cares? It told us we had averaged 3.13 offsides per game. Who cares? The only 'stat' that counts is how many times more we get the ball in the net than the opposition. Nothing else matters. The one fact worth answering is what sort of a saddo is it that sits in the stand noting down (or making up) such worthless trivia.

Say what you like about the Blues squad, but they have a heart. Recent charities selected by our Trust Players of the Month after receiving their £50 donations have been: Fair Havens (Drewe Broughton), Southend Hospital Childrens' Ward (Leon Constantine) and Great Ormond Street Hospital (Mark Gower).

Two players at least from the lower end of the Nationwide League have apparently given recent positive drug samples. Tests on the Blues squad are understood to have indicated nothing but the presence of occasionally massive doses of anti-depressants.

Sad about Leeds, isn't it? No? OK.

Paul Yeomanson passed to me in the last few days this request from a recently signed-up member. 'Can Nigel do anything about that idiot Andy Totham continually slagging off our Blues in The Sun'? Needless to say, I raise his ludicrous ramblings with the fixed odds fraudster on an almost daily basis. But this genuinely is the only way this deranged member of the C** U Barside clan gets his kicks – apart from pretending that the sorry squad he follows are worth their current 'lofty' position. I cannot give you his e-mail address direct, but try to imagine one very similar to mine and then you might be able to communicate your concerns personally.....

OK, 'finis' once more. Any follow-up comment, views, snippets etc, zap 'em to nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (2/12)

PS 1. Thanks again, Net, for your invaluable help.

2. Terry Jeffreys strikes again. From the next edition, you will be able to find the Trust address in Yellow Pages.

3. We understand there was a bunch of Southend fans on Soccer AM on November 1. What we are trying to discover is does anyone know who the hell they were?

4. All Trust members will want to send their condolences and best wishes to stalwart committee member Richard Coxell, following the recent sad death of his father, and to United's community officer Frank Banks, after the passing away of his mother so soon after the loss of his father.

5. My humble apologies to Paul Napper for inadvertently leaving him off the list of committee members elected to office at the AGM.

6. Happy Christmas, y'all.