

S.U.S.C.T. NEWSLETTER 54

(NEW YEAR'S HONOURS EDITION)

NUMBER 24.....Southend or Scarborough.....will play.....NUMBER 14.....Watford or Chelsea. A collective groan must have echoed around United's boardroom and the borough as we contemplated what could have eluded us in the FA Cup fourth round by our failure to despatch the Conference upstarts at the first crack.

Cort v Crespo, Hunt v Mutu, Maher v Lampard, Broughton v Terry (OK, maybe not). The prospect of Roman Abramovich's millionaires at the Hall in front of the 3,500 faithful, 1,500 waverers, 2,000 visiting Bridge boys and up to 6,000 fans for a day / hangers-on is mouthwatering. So Ron must be on the brink of a right wobbler at the prospect of a guaranteed cash jackpot of a minimum of £400,000 slipping through his fingers if we fail to do a Canvey in the replay out in the wilds of East Yorkshire. Always assuming, of course, that Claudio Ranieri's superstars keep their side of the bargain in their second go at the Hornets. The £30,000 coming our way for the televised replay highlights on BBC look very small beer compared to the guaranteed £265,000 that Sky will cough up to televise live Blues v the Roman Empire (we hope), kicking off at 12.30pm on Saturday, January 24. If we miss out, I suspect Drewe can forget about retaining his place on Ron's Christmas card list – at least. Yet the reward for a glorious replay victory is there to be snatched – and now it is time for the Blue brigade on and off the pitch to do the business. No one will want to look back and lament: We had our chips at the McCain Stadium when we should have been looking forward to caviar at the home of Essex football!

United swiftly announced subsidised coach travel for the January 14 journey – muchos gracias – leaving the Trust's long-distance dynamo Chris Berry to sort out the nuts and bolts. This, as ever, he has been working on furiously. And it appears, following the further interest generated by the appearance of the Chelsea rabbit out of the hat, that we will have a charabanc fleet on the road of at least five vehicles and an overall following of around 500 fans at the match. The cost to join the Trust convoy is just £5 a head and if you wish to take advantage then contact Chris NOW on the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 07703-898698. For Trust members who work in the City, we will arrange a one-off stop for one coach at Upminster station around 12.45pm – though there will be no special drop-off points on the way back outside those scheduled.

M.B.E. Three little letters that signify you have made something of a contribution to the community out of the ordinary and been deemed worthy of recognition by being awarded this highly prestigious medal in the Queen's New Year's Honours list. And this new year, the Trust is proud to announce that one of our number, Len Forge, a former chairman of the Southend Borough Combination, has landed the seal of royal approval for his services to the beautiful game. Len Forge M.B.E., many congratulations from us all.

THE Trust's big showpiece of the festive season was the annual Christmas Draw. So with another year over and a new one just begun, as the late John Lennon warbled, let's move swiftly on to the result. There was a £1,000 first prize up for grabs, more than enough for a good session of post-holiday retail therapy, plus £500 and £250 for second and third along with a cluster of minor rewards for fourth to ninth. You had to be in it to win it and a lot of breath was bated at half-time during the Oxford game on December 28 as the hundreds of ticket purchasers wondered if it was their lucky day.

Well, it was certainly lucky for the following: JOHN PAULTON, of Eastwood, who netted the £1,000. John will be handed his windfall before kick-off against Doncaster on January 17.

The £500 went to J HOLDEN from Chelmsford, with the £250 landing in the lap of DEBBIE NEWMAN, another from Eastwood. Her ticket was sold by Jon Whybrow, who appears to share the same address. Will he be getting a bonus, we wonder? SUFC kindly donated a replica shirt, which went to MARK FOLWELL, while

A BURTON collected a signed ball. Bringing up the rear were four bottles of classic wine, which saw **M WHITE, P BAKER, JULIA KEMPSON** and **TOBIAS** (?) sniffing the bouquets. Any winner who has not yet claimed their prize should contact Secretary Terry Jeffreys (01268-523974 or terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com).

Well done in particular to Terry and Richard Coxell for doing most of the ticket collecting and Alan Perry for leading the charge to get the tickets sold. Tickets dispensed totalled 4,087 and we were left with a profit of close to £2,000, a fraction down on last year. Steve Stone offloaded most tickets (390), with Alan Perry (311) and Ken Bailey (90) making up the £100, £50, £25 1-2-3. But a huge thank-you to all those who did their bit by either flogging or purchasing tickets in whatever number, even though more than 99 per cent of those taking part obviously ended up with nothing to show for it except a warm glow of pride for doing their bit.

Did you make any resolutions for 2004? Seeing as how we have scored in only one home league match since the middle of October, a determination to provide more of a cutting-edge from our front men would be nice. But while, sadly, Drewe's showing after coming on as a sub against Scarborough did force a frustrated Mr G to hail his performance as bringing 'a new definition to the word ineptitude', I can announce good news on the United striking front. Blues have signed a new young goal-snatcher who has a record the like of which Ruud van Dutchman and Terry Henry can only dream about – 154 goals from 64 games! And that was before it was decided he should revert this season to a midfield role. Yet now comes the bad news. He is currently performing for SUFC's Under-9s, so is probably unlikely to play much of a part in the current 'Operation Revival'. Yet if young Adam Johnson was that devastating at eight, imagine what he might be like in 10 years' time. My advice is to get down to your nearest bookie and back us for promotion in 2013-14 – whatever division we are in.

Perhaps we might be better placed if the managerial situation was resolved. I cannot believe anyone thought it was going to take this long. Tracking down Saddam Hussain and locating the bits that are left of Beagle 2 have been a doddle compared to deciding on the identity of our new boss – and we are still in the dark. Tilly and Herr Brush (get it?) have done their level best and deserve every credit, but working day to day has now drifted over a period of seven weeks and you sense even Tilly has just about had his fill of the uncertainty.

SIR Stanley came and went, Nicky Law was allegedly never in with a shout, Steve Cotterill has been seen lurking around, but still Ron refuses to make the big appointment and continues to insist he will not be rushed. I just pray his tactics will be proved justified come the middle of May.

To be fair, Ron's statement on why he opted not to install Sir Stanley in the seat of power looked to me entirely reasoned. His points were well made and, overall, indicated a merited triumph for 'due diligence' and balancing the 'risk / reward ratio' in the wake of the tale he revealed concerning The Man's interest in the vacancy. Maybe if Stan's agent had not apparently been so keen to keep sticking his oar in (and upping the financial ante), things may have been different. But Ron's approach certainly did not seem to be that of someone trying to get himself a bit of easy publicity – as numerous club supremos in his position may have been tempted to risk by taking the plunge. He rightly recognised that a two or three-month managerial probation period could have been a total disaster in our present position. No idea who the Italian-based star was that Stan apparently fancied importing. Del Piero? Buffon? Nesta? Anyway, let's hope whoever we eventually get can show he has all those attributes Ron wants in his manager and that Wiggers-style 'cracks in the veneer' will never show their ugly face around Roots again.

A Trust luminary has pointed out that between 1906 and 1960 United had 10 managers. Since 1997, if you count all Webby's stints and Steve Tilson, we have had.....11! How's that for continuity.

Stan's antics at the Hall should make a good chapter for his forthcoming book, a tome mentioned in a recent chat he had with the committee's Dave Scriven. Our next move will be to offer Stan the chance to do a bit of book flogging, flesh-pressing etc at a Trust 'Evening With Sir Stanley'. Continue watching this space.

I kept seeing king Colly's name mentioned as one of the likely 'stars' of the next series of 'I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here'. Or should that be 'I'm A Non-Entity, Get Me Out Of Here'. But it seems both he and fellow former 'troubled' ace Gazza may no longer be on the guest list. Still, mammoth-mammaried 'model' Jordan, the equally behemoth-bosomed Linsey Dawn McKenzie, Johnny Rotten, the bruised and battered Mrs George Best, some crooked Lord no one has ever heard of, Kerry the ex-Atomic Kitten, former Boyzone 'hunk'

(plank?) Shane Lynch and 'singer' Peter Andre allegedly remain in the frame so no need to despair just yet. At least with Jordan and Linsey Dawn around they would never be short of a hammock out in the Aussie jungle.

Might I suggest that the first thing our new overlord investigates when he is eventually appointed is why we are so abjectly dire at putting the ball in the net from that little spot 12 yards out and addresses it before our penalty blunders end up being the difference between us possibly nosediving into the Conference or not.

The News of the World annual gives us the unwanted league record of the most successive penalty misses – seven in 1990 and 1991. But this season has been almost as bad – seven blown out of an incredible 10 awarded for a total of 14 duds from the last 19. By my calculation, those cock-ups since August have cost us EIGHT points, enough to have lifted us to the relative comfort of mid-table. Six of the seven have been at the Hall and these days you are praying for the ref NOT to point to the spot. I think Tes has missed four on the spin, Kevin Maher three and Mark Gower two. Who next to drink from the poisoned chalice? Anyway, see for yourselves the 2003-04 on and off targets – and pray the new boss gets the message that this is a joke that has gone too far.

AUG 9 v Cheltenham (W2-0, H) – Mark Gower – Scored. Aug 30 v Bury (W1-0, H) – Mark Gower – Missed. Sep 13 v Hull (L3-2, A) – Tes Bramble – Missed. Potential score: 3-3. Points lost: 1. Sep 16 v Lincoln (L0-2, H) – Duncan Jupp – Missed. Potential score: 1-1. Points lost: 1. Sep 20 (yup, three in a week!) v Carlisle (D2-2, H) – Kevin Maher – Missed: Potential score: 3-1. Points lost: 2. Oct 25 v Macclesfield (W2-1, A) – Jay Smith – Scored. Nov 1: v Northampton (L1-0, H) – Jay Smith – Missed. Potential score: 1-1. Points lost: 1. Nov 22 v Rochdale (H) – James Corbett – Scored. Dec 20 v Bristol R (L0-1, H) – Mark Gower – Missed. Drewe Broughton – Missed. Potential score: 2-1. Points lost: 3.

Now on to what the committee has been up to at its meetings on December 15 and January 5. But first.....

IT'S A FAIR COP

In Newsletter 53, I made reference to D.C. Richard Spooner attending the Trust committee meeting on November 24 in his capacity as the liaison and football intelligence officer attached to Southend United on behalf of Essex Police. During my brief report on the valuable information he imparted, I erroneously stated that a police constable is paid £45 for a duty attendance at Roots Hall on a match day with higher ranks on progressively more. In fact, if the club is charged at all, that £45 sum is around the amount United would be charged per hour for a PC to be present and not what the PC would earn. My apologies for the mistake and for any embarrassment my misinterpretation caused to D.C. Spooner and others.

Peace has broken out once more between Supreme and the Trust. After the low of Canvey, the emergency return from Torquay has seen faith restored and now is the time to contact travel tsar Mr Berry, again on the usual numbers, if you wish to make the journeys to the following fixtures other than Scarborough: Mansfield (Jan 24 – unless we have bigger fish to fry), Bury (Jan 31) and Leyton Orient (Feb 21 – unless you are walking!).

Further consideration has been given to the issue of transporting unaccompanied Under-14s to away dates and it has been decided that in future no Under-14s will be allowed to travel by Trust coach unless accompanied by a responsible adult. This is designed to protect both them and the Trust in these pathetically litigious times.

The various strands of the Shrimpers Club 'signing in' issue are also undergoing further expert checking. But the success of the Shrimpers since the Trust stepped in has already highlighted difficulties. We were delighted to welcome around 100 Scarborough fans to the venue before the FA Cup clash on January 3. But the lack of bar staff and working tills led to chaos around the bar area as people struggled to get served. We are happy with the bar's pre-match atmosphere, but certainly do not wish to see anyone leave because it is physically impossible to get a drink. Terry will be writing to the relevant powers to instigate an urgent review of present matchday arrangements. Remember, Trust members get 'free membership' of the Shrimpers. Please also try to have your membership card on you to show at the door. If you have lost or mislaid your card, Paul Yeomanson will happily provide you with another. A new Trust logo should also be visible shortly over the entrance.

Frank Banks ought to have had his Trust sponsorship cheque for the first year of his Football in the Community project by now and we look forward to that proving a solid success.

THE issue of Trust representation on the board will not be allowed to go away and Paul FitzGerald has written a most erudite letter to all the current board members seeking their personal views on the issue. All replies received will be studied so we know where we stand as we try to move this key issue forward.

Fossetts Farm is right back on the agenda, with the January 20 planning appeal crunch for B & Q. The Trust will be represented and, obviously, we will act accordingly all depending on the outcome. Certainly that proposed Paul FitzGerald meeting with Ron will be a must as the next steps to be taken are mulled over.

The SUSCT curry night was rated a solid success, though of the 43 present it was as disappointing as ever to see that most were committee representatives and friends rather than a cross-section of members. For more intimate details see below. The evening raised nearly £250 for funds and, as we refuse to let occasionally below-average support get us down, there are already plans in hand to follow up with a Chinese night in the not too distant future. Paul Yeomanson has volunteered to do all necessary research.....

The Shrimpers Club has benefited hugely from the extra tables and chairs that Terry Jeffreys has been able to bring in. His contacts have also enabled another department within United to land an unexpected and highly beneficial facilities lift on the health and fitness front.

Kathy Jeffreys plans to write to all our female members re the proposed aromatherapy evening. Please give her every support you can.

Take-up on the 100 Club has not been quite as rapid as Alan Perry would have liked. Remember for just £5 a month you will be entered in a weekly draw that, with 100 members involved, would bring a weekly prize of £50. There would also be a Christmas special draw for £500. To remind yourselves of the rules and regs in detail, simply refer back to your copy of Newsletter 53, which you will no doubt have filed away for just such an occasion. This should be a real Trust money-spinner, so to sign up contact Alan on alanperry4@hotmail.com or 01702-476458 or seek out 100 Club overlord Trevor Bashford on 01245-362762. Banking arrangements are currently being investigated. Alan, of course, spends almost 24 hours a day thinking up fund-raising schemes for the Trust, with another 10-pin bowling night, a possible Race Night, a Magic Night and two more Quiz Nights (the first set for February 28 and already filling up fast) on the cards.

Just talking of Quiz Nights allows me to update correctly the details of the winners of our last Shrimpers Club showdown back on November 22. The triumphant table was made up of Trust members Rob McMulland and Paul Collins, season ticket holders Chris and David Mallam plus friends. And, be warned, they will be back to defend their crown at the next battle of the brains.

TERRY Jeffreys and his accompanying cohorts are still pumping furiously towards the sponsored walk to Orient on February 21. Essex Police have rated the project 'hazardous' and would rather it did not go ahead. Could they have a risk assessment plan, asked their contact? But the Met, whose jurisdiction starts within the M25, can see no problems and have already offered alternatives for those parts of the route which are rated 'no go' for pedestrians. So Terry and Co are pressing ahead undaunted. For sponsorship, assistance on the day information etc, hail Terry at his previously mentioned reference points. He deserves no less for this monster effort, with Trevor Bashford, Hugh Cumberland, Simon Smith (presumably minus his amazing dancing bear) and David Tubb currently due to accompany him.

Quid A Goal currently stands at a total of around £1,870. We want it through £2,000 by 9.35pm on January 14.

Paul Napper now has his column nicely tucked into the Southend Times as well as the Evening Echo, so look out for his pieces as further invaluable ways of keeping in touch with what the Trust is up to from week to week. Plus you can always log on to the updated Trust website – www.shrimperstrust.co.uk

Membership has hit a new peak of 964 (852 adults, 112 SJS), though the November / December renewals have still to come in or not as the case may be. Whatever happens, though, we cannot be complacent and need to push on to get past that magic 1,000 mark. Don't forget you can do your bit by enticing new members into our web.

Get 10 and you will be rewarded with one of the new Trust £10 gift vouchers, which can be used towards travel, merchandise etc. Remember, too, that adult membership is now £7 per annum. You can visit our membership secretary Paul Yeomanson on any match day at the Trust Stand in the Shrimpers Club or contact him on 01702-302373 or p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk concerning any membership problems, new recruits etc. Newsletter receipt difficulties, post or e-mail, should be directed to Terry Jeffreys. And a quick appeal here. As our numbers continue to grow, so do our costs when it comes to sending the newsletter through the post. So if you can take it on e-mail, i.e. for free, PLEASE let Terry know.

IF you wish to help decorate the Shrimpers further with a player profile at the cost of just £20, contact Jon-Paul FitzGerald on jphfitz@aol.com. An assortment of shirts have also been donated for display, for which we are in the process of doing some frame costings, plus we have benefited from the superb work of Peter Barker. Terry would also like to hear from any members who have any sort of football memorabilia they would like to donate to the Trust either for display or auction.

We plan to give those directors anxious to share your match day experience, Derek Wilshire and Frank Van Wezel, the opportunity they have been craving very soon.

Right, on now to a review of recent ups and downs on the green sward.

SOUTHEND 3 LINCOLN 0 (FA Cup, 2nd rd, 6/12/03): Another step closer to the Millennium Stadium. Blues once more revealed their current league position is a travesty with a second successive dominant home performance against a side of 'big lads'. The performance was a complete transformation from the league surrender against the Imps back on September 16 and merited better than copping Scarborough in round three. Some neat football, with not too much up and pump, was rewarded by excellent strikes from Tes, Mark Gower and Jim Corbett – all of whom had fine games. And when did we last score three from outside the box? Honourable mentions, too, to Michael Kightly, who deserved to be knackered after 80 minutes of all-action effort, and Leon Cort, now starting to get back to his best alongside Lewis Hunt. Another good supply of Lincoln fans in the Shrimpers pre-match, with a donation of a montage of miniature Southend programme front pages from down the years. All hail to Paul Yeomanson for doing his duty pre-match before departing to get on down with Status Quo at Wembley Arena and to one of the Berrys Junior for handing Jay Smith his well-deserved SUSCT Player of the Month Trophy for November. Jay's £50 charity award will be going to Diabetes UK. Just one tearjerker – Jim Corbett's late, late strike cost the syndicate £40 after we had lumped £4 on 2-0 at 10-1. Some you win, some you lose. And talking of losing, Jim C is out for another five weeks with an ankle injury. That we could have done without.

SOUTHEND 3 LUTON 0 (LDV Vans Trophy, Southern Section, Quarter-final): This Cup football, what a doddle. The Second Division visitors were well and truly put in their place (so working me was told), with Blues unlucky not to win even more convincingly. Crowd congestion allegedly delayed the start – though with only just over 2,000 in the ground, that sounds as if it must have been difficult to arrange. Leon Constantine rattled one in after just two minutes to settle the jitters, the still 17-year-old Michael Kightly popped in his first senior strike (and has been deservedly rewarded with a new 18-month contract) and Drewe Broughton (at least we know he can find the net) bounded off the bench to head our third. Tilly declared: "The lads worked their socks off and there was no fault to be found." I look forward to reading that same view expressed after the bulk of our remaining league games. Next up it's a real toughie – home to a quality QPR side on January 20. But the final beckons – and what we wouldn't give for two legs against the a**e-end of Essex from up the A12.

SWANSEA 2 SOUTHEND 3 (13/12/03): Surely one of the most astonishing games and performances in Blues history. And how many of us will forever regret we were not part of it? I was a nervous wreck in the NoW office following the action on the Sky videprinter as the clock incredibly ticked past 5pm and praying we had clung on to 2-1 despite having three sent off. I could not believe it when a colleague monitoring the news agency wire services called over: "Hey, you've scored again!" What, down to eight men? At last came the relief of the final score, with Swansea somehow squeezing in a second before the end of the more than six minutes of extra time added on by another referee to go down in the annals of shame for this season – George Cain of Merseyside. With a special honourable mention for the steward who decided he had to have a run-in with Paul Brush. Quite how these jobsworths in fluorescent jackets and Madonna mikes are allowed by law to switch from being Joe Soap during the week to God Almighty every second Saturday beggars belief. But I digress. Having won at Vetch Field in the LDV Vans, it looked as if the Swans – fortunately, minus banned Lee Trundle – were about to

correct that aberration when they went in front on 14 minutes as the scorer's marker went AWOL. Blues, though, have suddenly found that much-needed backbone and roared back to lead by the break thanks to Leon Constantine and Mark Gower. Not even losing David McSweeney to the first daft red card of the afternoon looked to phase them. Five minutes from time, though, it really all kicked off. Jay Smith, silly dissent, second yellow. 87 minutes, Mark Gower, untimely abuse of linesman, second yellow. 11 v 8, ruffled Brush sent to the stand, backs to the wall. Yet with the 87 members of the Blue faithful present urging the lads on in a frenzy, justice was done. Back up to 22nd, just five points off mid-table. One extra bonus from the youth side: Southend Utd YA 1, C** U YA 0. Oh and, joy of joys, our heroes cost SunSport's fixed odds faker Andy 'Shot' Totham £442 as his Super Six tip was blown out of the water by the Swans' defeat. You should have seen his big smile!

SOUTHEND 0 BRISTOL R 1 (20/12/03): Charles Bronson may be dead, but any of the Blues' first team could star in a remake of Death Wish on this evidence. Never have two penalties been more horribly wasted and three points that should have been ours even without the spot horrors so needlessly squandered. This was our chance to get back in the pack. Instead, only Darlo's awfulness, for which we should be truly grateful, prevented us returning to the bottom two as we totally blew all the good work done seven days previously. It had all started so well. Trust Christmas Draw tickets were being returned in the Shrimpers by the dozen. Terry Jeffreys was so overwhelmed that he tried, unsuccessfully, to disguise himself. Paul Y was enjoying a 'run on mugs' at the Trust Stand and even yours truly managed to flog a Bob Sills book. The weather was rubbish, yet all seemed to be buzzing and the visiting Gasmen would surely end the afternoon crying into their beer rather than supping it. Sadly not. Blues appeared in their red away shirts – which history tells us is never a good omen at the Hall. Rovers looked dangerous on the break and after one brilliant early Darryl block we got caught down the right on 16 minutes to fall behind. After that it was all about a litany of pretty decent United approach play let down by sheer wastefulness in front of goal. Mark Gower's penalty was a soft shocker, Drewe Broughton's stroke wide even worse. I suppose it was Sod's Law that the previously successful James Corbett was out crocked. Leon Constantine missed three sitters, Michael Husbands frittered away another with his first touch as sub. Tes had one other clear-cut penalty rejected, a Leon Cort header brought a brilliant second-half save out of their keeper and you just knew we were never going to score. Jay Smith must also learn to cool it. Following his tantrum in Wales, here he took out his half-time frustration by kicking the ball into the crowd – hitting a little boy in the face and reducing the lad to tears. Not clever.

CAMBRIDGE 0 SOUTHEND 1 (26/12/03): The perfect Christmas present for Blues – three more precious points in the sack. Unfortunately, our three nearest rivals also won – Kidderminster at Yeovil? – but at least Darlo were dumped so the smiles on the faces of the faithful could remain pretty broad. An excellent following at the Abbey Stadium, minus one sadly obliged to earn a crust, saw the points sewn up on 38 minutes by a precise Leon Constantine finish from a pinpoint Tes through ball. United old boy Paul Clark claimed on the radio it was the 'most complete performance you could hope for'. We'll settle for that.

SOUTHEND RESERVES 0 OXFORD UTD 1 (28/12/03): Another Bonanza Day, unless you were a home fan. Ratkins and Rawle were on parade and, wouldn't you know it, the traitor popped up with the second-half winner as he produced a bit of pace up front that we could never match to lob Darryl, seal the points and condemn us to a staggering eighth home league defeat. To his credit, though, he declined to lord it. Our ban and injury-hit line-up, with Tilly and three kids on the bench, did its best. But this match was lost at Vetch Field through sheer indiscipline and not here. Despite that, we were probably worth a draw and Oxford were nothing special. One league defeat all season? Yet with no width whatsoever, we were left too often to resort to the old 'pump it' plan to Messrs Broughton and Constantine, which proved no less of a total failure than it has in any other game this season. Leon Con hit a post and when Leon Cort had a header hacked off the line those involved knew for sure that a prospective £3 coup at 250-1 on a 3-2 Blues win with a Cort first goal had disappeared down the gurgler. A bit of pre-match panic on the Shrimpers Club door when we heard the anonymous licence man could be on the prowl. As if trying to get the Christmas Draw finalised was not enough to worry about, with at least £400 of tickets coming in at the last minute.

SOUTHEND 1 SCARBOROUGH 1 (FA Cup, 3rd rd, 3/1/04): Ticket prices were up £2 for adults and concessions from the £10 bargain basement of round two, but it was hard to complain. Unfortunately, there was a bit of short-changing in certain areas of the pitch that cost us dear after the first 20 minutes indicated a relative cruise into round four and £50,000 more FA prize money in the United coffers. Messrs Stewart and Jenkins had 'mares down the pace-free zone of the left flank, from where I do not believe we got a single cross into the box all second half, while poor old Drewe's finishing hit a disastrous and costly new low. ShrimperZone

have produced some fascinating figures about our Drewe. We have lost 12 of the 17 games he has started to this point, drawn two and won three. Of those three, we scored the winning goal in two of them only after he had been substituted. Those 17 games have produced 11 goals. Without him the record is: P 13 W 7 D3 L3. Goals scored: 24. Tell you anything? In the end we were lucky Jay Smith hit a great strike and frequently did the work of three men in midfield. The Professor of American Poetry, one of our long-distance members over from the States and taking in his first Roots Hall action for around 30 years, had to admit it could well be 2034 before he bothers returning. He put Drewe's continuing problems in front of goal down to a 'lack of a tactical synapse'. Having consulted a dictionary, I can reveal that synapses are nerve-endings in somewhere like the brain that when joined together create a charge of chemical activity. Yes, it is hard not to agree that there were rather too many occasions here when not a lot 'positive' was going on between the ears of some of the team. Better luck up north! Finally, well done to nine-year-old SJS member Josh Hegarty, at last able to make a Player of the Month award at about the fourth attempt. He handed over the January trophy to Kevin Maher before kick-off.

PILAU TALK: The man who slipped up to the counter of The Raj Pavillion restaurant on London Road, Leigh-on-Sea at about 9pm on December 8 had a slightly sheepish look to his person. Had his takeaway gone astray? Had someone burnt his bhajees? No, the reason for any nervousness was clear once recognition kicked in. For it was he, the great leader, Ron, arriving unheralded at the SUSCT Curry Night and presumably wondering if he was about to have his ear bent by all and sundry as to why we still had no manager. But he need not have worried – well, not too much. The assorted collection of Trust gourmets and bon viveurs welcomed him into their midst and organiser Paul FitzGerald invited him to take a seat and feed his face in the same style as the other £10-a-head revellers. Anything to try to keep that Trust / SUFC relationship on a firm footing. I can just see Arsenal's David Dein or W*** H*** Terry Brown braving such an occasion. For those of you who failed to front – about 925 – you missed an excellent night of top-notch nosh, slightly strange-tasting Indian lager and the obligatory Alan Perry fund-raising raffle. Believe me, it beat any soap or couch-potatoing in front of Coventry v Sunderland – especially with that horrific broken leg. Chins were wagging furiously on every table. Conversation on mine ranged from Terry and Kathy Jeffreys extolling the delights of breeding – rabbits, that is – to winsome United company secretary Helen Giles revealing she has a monster record stash and is a sucker for the talents of Doris Day, to me explaining why I once had to write a stinking letter to TV's morning chat show smoothie Phillip Schofield. It may sound pure Alan Partridge, but you simply never know what secrets will be unlocked by a half of Cobra. So make sure you do not miss the next big Night. It's a vinda-hoot.

Tes and Titus. What a pair. Remember Tes and his recent motor offences prosecution? Well, not to be outdone, Titus, 22, has got in on the act. He was recently hit with a seven-week ban and £2,000 fine for driving his BMW at 102mph on the A14 last January whilst breaching the terms of his driving licence. The court heard he passed his test in 2000 but did not have a valid licence as he had not sent off his test certificate. Doh! The Newcastle centre-back did not attend Ipswich magistrates for what was not the first hearing of the case. Because of confusion over the court letter he was sent as to whether or not he had to attend the initial hearing, the case was rescheduled – just as I am positive the great British justice system would have arranged it for you or me! Never mind, I expect Uncle Bobby has already put his arm round the young man's shoulder and told him not to be a naughty boy again, otherwise next time.....he will put his arm round his shoulder once more and give him the same old ineffectual kid glove treatment rife in the Premiership. Bobby, what he really needs is a good roasting!

I hear some Trust members have been finding themselves bombarded by 'spam' and blame logging on to the United official website. That probably means a tawdry invitation to dose up on a job lot of cheap Viagra, increase the size of your organ or sample on screen the 'delights' of someone who already has. I know, as that is the sort of garbage that reaches me at work, where I am logged on to only one official website – yes, United's. And it is the reason why I refuse to log on to United's site at home. So why don't the club do us all a favour, tell FLPTV, or whoever runs the current SUFC website, to sling their hook and start up their own independent site again where you would get only what most people really want – news of the Blues and nothing else. I expect to be able to go to United's website to find out, for example, the new date for the York game. What I don't expect is to have to give my life history before I can get access to the information – thus allowing all manner of undesirables to get access to me. Or is that what counts today as serving the best interests of your customers?

DARLO'S November wages mysteriously went walkabout instead of arriving in their players' accounts by the due date. So no shock they have now gone into administration. Great ground, no fans. Sounds like George Reynolds might have to dust off his safe-breaking tools again!

I see a former United player has been dragged into the Rio Ferdinand case. It seems full-back turned midfielder Adam Locke partook of the weed now and again and tested positive for marijuana while with C** U back in 1995. Nothing happened as it was kept 'internal'. Rather like the ganja, I suppose. From what I remember of most of his performances with us, a few doses of 'whizz' would have been more beneficial.

Did my eyes deceive me? United fans have shown firmly where they stand on the Rio ban-wagon. In a poll taken by the News of the World at every ground before kick-off on December 20, a number of supporters were asked if his eight-month sentence was too harsh. Of those spoken to at the Hall prior to the Bristol Rovers game, 80% said 'Yes' and only 20% 'No', one of the most pro-Ferdinand results of the day. Shame they did not ask me. I would have upped the anti without question. Overall the polling was 46% 'Yes', 54% 'No'.

I know most people think only kites fly out of Roots Hall. But apparently the first flight ever from Southend was by a Bleriot monoplane which took off from the sacred turf back in 1910. The pilot was surely the Blue Baron.

Tip for mug punters. Keep an eye on this nag – Saafend Rocket. It won the 1.40 at Ludlow on December 18 at a tasty 5-1. A major blow that I did not find out at work it was running until 3.30!

Hang about while I fall over. The Football League is getting bolshie under Brian Mawhinney, as regimented a Tory politician as you could get while in office in the governments of Mrs T and The Grey Man. Everyone – well, bar the Premier League and Barmy Blatter – reckons the transfer window is a disaster for the lesser English clubs, as it reduces the time allowed for lifeblood cash transfusions among them to just two months of the year. So now at last the League is fighting back and has 'warned of its intention to withdraw from the collective bargaining agreement in respect of rules governing the employment of players as part of its continuing battle against the imposition of domestic transfer windows'. Pardon? Still, something to keep an eye on.

AND hang about while I fall over again. Gordon Brown announced in his pre-Budget statement that he is considering taking action to give tax breaks to Supporters Trusts like ours. This could be especially beneficial if it came to extending the gift aid scheme, where you get tax written off against donations. Andy Burnham MP, chairman of Supporters Direct, declared: "Supporters Direct will now engage with the Chancellor's team to create a tax advantage for mutual values and community ownership of the game." Sounds like a bit of political speak there, but at least someone is making an effort. If Trusts do get some benefits, though, expect something else to suffer to pay for it! In fact, like Supporters Direct, now facing a cut in government funding. What a surprise – not. Ask the stealth-taxing pensions plunderer about that, Andy.

Leo is back in the Brentford fold and faced Plymouth on December 28. He lasted 42 minutes before, guess what? He was sent off again.

United get the occasional 'slating' in the newsletter, but praise where praise is due. Over the past year, in partnership with the Prince's Trust and YMCA, the club has been doing its bit in various ways to help certain disadvantaged young people get their lives back on track. SUFC has supported 39, the best in the Third Division and more even than Premiership Arsenal (36), Everton (35), Fulham (31) and Birmingham (24). It is the perfect way to enhance the club's community programme and reflects nothing but credit on all those involved.

Robert Craven reports that the red Blues shirts are available in the club shop. Get in quick if you want one. Perhaps wear your purchase to the rearranged home date with York, now set for January 27.

So there you have it for yet another month or so. Any comments, queries etc, it is the usual address to which they should be sent: nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (7/1)

PS. 1. For those of you anxious to hear the unedifying Ian Atkins tale mentioned in Number 53, which I am afraid also does no credit whatever to a popular former Blue, I have had to carry it over to Number 55.

2. Tessa Jowell, PC MP and Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (how?) has joined the Dulwich Hamlet Supporters Trust. What heinous crime have they committed to deserve that?