

SUSCT

NEWSLETTER 57

THE effect was rather like popping a balloon. One minute we had something bouncy and buoyant, the next something as flat as a pancake. The time was 1:01pm and 14 seconds. The date, March 21, 2004. The venue, the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff. The occasion, the LDV Vans Trophy Final v Blackpool. The moment.....when United went one-down.

To say hearts sank would probably be an understatement. Even that early, sadly, you sensed we might not get the outcome our massed ranks so wanted. And by the time the final whistle blew we had to hold our hands up and say the better team won. The post-match perspective seemed to be 'Well, we did a great job getting there'. I would have preferred 'We did a great job winning there'. But it is done and dusted, the clock cannot be turned back and I have yet to find anyone who will admit it was not a day they will remember for the rest of their lives.

We'll return to the ups and downs of the game, the support, the flights (or not as the case may be), the train journeys, the coach trips et al shortly.

But before we go any further I just want to say, hopefully on behalf of every single Trust member, another monster 'muchos gracias' to Chris Berry and Paul Yeomanson for the heroic efforts they made to ensure the Trust travel to the principality would be such a huge and virtually problem-free success. The amount of time and trouble they put in following the semi-final sinking of C** U was immense. Plenty of others, with Terry Jeffreys to the fore, did their bit. But top of the tree were The Beaver and the Titan of Tardiness, especially for the way in which they shifted around 1,100 people away from Roots Hall in about 45 minutes on match day. A truly fantastic job, which, with any luck, has also put just a few extra potentially vital bob into the Trust's bank account. John Bridge of Supreme has agreed to help give them and their families a little trip of their own as a thoroughly deserved reward. And, as Chris said, 'If only we had run the plane as well'.....

Normal service was swiftly resumed, too. 5.30am from Asda at Shoebury for everyone's favourite long haul – Carlisle on March 27. Most fainthearts, like myself I am ashamed to admit, felt there might be a bit of a reaction to the defeat in Cardiff. Instead we pulled a fantastic result out of the hat and now we – the powers that be, the team management, the players and every United supporter – just need to knuckle down for the final run-in and ensure we finish as far outside the Third Division's bottom two as possible.

THE consequences of failure, though thankfully almost now dispelled for Blues, are unthinkable – a message which has clearly also hit home at many of our rivals in the dogfight at the foot of the table. And still nothing is yet guaranteed as far as United's future is concerned should we (once we) succeed in staying up – especially as I hear some old friends of a pecuniary persuasion could be contemplating sniffing around again with evil intent. At least the pilferer with their hand in the club's lottery fund till has been dealt with. When is the AGM by the way?

Talking of raising money, you will find enclosed (or you will be sent them if you are perusing this on e-mail) your SUSCT end-of-season draw tickets. PLEASE offload them as soon as you can to your friends, enemies, brothers, uncles, wives, mistresses, mothers-in-law etc and return the stubs to Terry Jeffreys, 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR or Richard Coxell, 20 Redcliff Drive, Leigh-on-

Sea, Essex. SS9 1AY This is another excellent Trust fund-raiser and we want as many people as possible to be a part of it before the big draw is made at our final home game v Torquay on May 8.

But there is no doubt what the big occasion of the past month has been, so without further ado.....

BLACKPOOL 2 SOUTHEND 0 **(LDV VANS TROPHY FINAL, MILLENNIUM STADIUM, 21/3/04 – ATT: 34,031)**

Build-up began the day before, as they wheeled out the silverware on Sky TV's Soccer AM. They had two sets of fans on from each of the participating clubs. Who Southend's eight were I have no idea. Once again, did anyone recognise them? They were certainly totally hopeless when it came to showing off their shooting skills and handed the Seasiders' followers their first victory of the weekend. A bad omen.

Coaches were due out of the Hall from 6 to 6.30 on Sunday morning, Bashers' Basildon fleet was scheduled to go at the same time, the bullet trains were leaving Southend Central at 7.37 and 7.55, while 633 Squadron were scheduled to leave Southend Airport about 9.30. Meanwhile plenty of our throng, including the Craig Fillary cohort, were already enjoying themselves in various parts of Wales after opting to make at least a weekend of it.

I quit my pit nervously at 3.45am – 15 minutes before the alarm was due to go off – and yelled my first 'Come On You Blue Boys' at 3.45am and 10 seconds. After making a cuppa, there was no doubting what the first job had to be. Setting the video to record what would surely be our entire glorious build-up, victory and post-match party! Rickard Jnr hit the doorbell at 5 and we were in the Hall car park at 5.20. We expected to be among the first arrivals. Instead it was already a mass of humanity, with Messrs Berry and Yeomanson sporting haute couture fluorescent workmen's jackets as they waited to usher the first coaches into the lower car park and Paul Fitz trying gamely to keep the queue at the starting stalls in check. The original plan was to try to flog some Trust final pennants plus a few club caps and scarves, but there simply was not time. Anyone that desperate was buying from one of the vultures hanging around.

Those of us in charge of coaches were finally allowed through the Brandenburg Gate by the programme hut, Richard Coxell's Coach 16 was parked and waiting for passengers and it did not take long before they were pouring on board. More vehicles arrived, more assigning was done and then suddenly, reflecting the pale morning sunshine, there stood a vision in all gold – the New Horizon Travel coach that was to become my, and another 49 others', Number 8. Eye contact was made with the 18-strong Rebus party and they were on like a shot, probably attracted by the regal royal blue sheen of my commemorative SUSCT final shirt – a snip at £25. Finding another 31 seat-grabbers took no time at all. Handshakes all round followed with drivers Harley and Fred, a quick pep-talk over the microphone was given centring on 'no booze on board' and 'no sucking in any nicotine' and then, at 6.15, it was 'Wagons roll, Cardiff here we come'!

Meanwhile, over at Southend Central, the two Trust expresses were pulling away from the platform heading direct to the Welsh capital via Barking. And down at Southend Airport a gathering of 130 loop-the-loopers, including Mr I and Mr W, who had coughed up £200 a head for what they expected to be a slick 45-minute hop to the heart of the action, had.....another think coming.

The problem was wind. Not gas in the guts but the 40 to 50mph howler that had been affecting the nation for the best part of four days. Now aircraft do not like such conditions. Unseen vortexes and wind shear can be created which can have catastrophic consequences on take-off and landing. Hence, presumably, the reason why Capt Biggles Von Richthofen of 'Europe' Airlines looked out of his window and decided: nasty gusts, 130 passengers, full fuel load, shortish runway, might clip the nearby church steeple – don't fancy it!

His chosen option was to take off with a maximum of just 58 passengers on board, including, much to the chagrin of those left waving goodbye, SUFC's master of ceremonies. They would all arrive in time for kick-off. The skipper then cruised back from Cardiff Airport for 48 more, who, as it turned out, made it just in time to enjoy the second half. As for the other 24, their best bet proved a jaunt home or to the nearest hostelry to watch the game on the box!

Full refunds all round, so I understand, for the unlucky 72. What is concerning one or two of them at present, though, I believe, is exactly when the money will be distributed. Whilst everyone accepts the blame could not be laid at United's door, they have promised the cash back and are honour-bound to cough. I think Stansted would be a better option next time. I am told by Mr I that a herogram is in order for the young female United employee also left behind who found herself having to cope with a bunch of very unhappy Algies and Gingers.

THE coach may be slow in comparison and less fashionable. But at the time the air journey to Cardiff had become a flight of fancy for many of the prospective boarding party, our charabancs were pulling into Reading Services amongst others and looking mighty impressive. The area was a heaving, seething mass of blue, most of whom found themselves in huge queues for whichever service they required from tea to toilets.

Coach 8, having 'refuelled', departed on down the M4. Some on board chose to catch up on some kip, others took in the topless Blue Belles, spectacularly captured by SunSport's erstwhile United snapper Nicky Hayes, while the rest, already feeling a little extra aggression thanks to a screening of the Vinnie Jones video 'Great Balls of Fire', settled down to watch 'The Core'. Not one of the cinematic greats, I hasten to add.

The mayor's car passed us, decked out in a couple of flags and, presumably, with a few sherries being sipped within. An incredible £14 pay-out was required to get us over the Severn Bridge and then, eventually, we managed to squeeze our way round the gridlocked city centre of the Welsh capital to our allotted parking slot.

The Millennium Stadium may be a fantastic international venue but its ability to handle cars, coaches etc is laughable. It has no parking facilities of its own and is even worse than Wembley, so it has to be bad. We faced a blowy walk of about a mile and a quarter before Gate 7 finally loomed into view. Then it was through the turnstile, £5 for a programme, get lost, eventually locate the right block and, hallelujah, in with 50 minutes to go to kick-off. Great timing – unless you were still stuck in the departure lounge back home waiting for Concorde!

Thank God for the roof. The conditions outside made it essential. Without it being closed, there is no doubt the game would have been a farce. But before the off there was the atmosphere to soak up and photos to be taken that would preserve for ever a fabulous scenario for all involved as the Blue hordes exercised their vocal chords.

LITTLE Grace Jeffreys took her penalty in the kids' shoot-out, which required a stunning save from Neville Southall to prevent it entering the onion bag. Lucky he appears to have shed a few pies or he would never have got near it. A proud moment for dad Terry and mum Kathy. The Blues youngsters ended up losing 1-0. Another omen.

Five minutes to go to the action and the South End (where else could we be?) and our bits of the West and East Stands were a sea of blue flags, banners, shirts and sheer, unbridled enthusiasm. United's 18,000 or so fans did the club so proud and, while we may never again see such a massed outpouring of genuine affection for the club, it is at least nice to know for the future that it is there. The overall feel was superb, even with sufficient seats still empty to hold more than double an attendance 14,000 up on Blackpool's 2002 final date with Cambridge.

And then the teams suddenly appeared. Blackpool looked resplendent in their tangerine, while, to me, our short-sleeved, 'silver' shirts appeared more like dull training tops. No matter. The roars of encouragement reached a crescendo and the moment we had waited for had arrived. It was game on.

Perhaps the linesman had lost the power in his right arm in that crucial 74th second, when Blackpool striker John Murphy found a deflection at his feet as he tried to get back from a blatantly offside position. Whatever happened, the official crucially missed the decision, Murphy comfortably slotted the ball past Darryl and we were on the back foot even before the players had raised a sweat.

The game itself saw us have plenty of possession, with Kevin Maher trying desperately to unlock the Seasiders' defence. But he got little help from up front and, when Blackpool got the ball, they made sure they moved it pretty swiftly to Martin Bullock. Bullock gave poor Che Wilson a severe roasting (no, not that sort!) and, with Mark Gower's dodgy knee perhaps making him reluctant to do too much dashing up and down, it was open season for the most part down our left flank. Murphy missed a sitter before their full-back Danny Coid moved forward to curl in their second on 55 minutes – and few would deny they deserved it. Darryl made a couple of

outstanding blocks, Mark Warren a couple of timely tackles, Leon Con blew our best chance with a tentative attempted lob from a Gower free-kick and, before you knew it, suddenly referee Roy Pearson was blowing the final whistle.

We may never have looked like pulling it round, yet that did not stop Tilly, Paul Brush and the lads getting a rapturous reception from the army of United followers. There is no doubt they deserved it. They did their best on the day, but Blackpool's experience of the venue and superior overall quality won through and the occasion seemed to overwhelm one or two of our braves. Simple as that, though Drewe made his below-par performance a focus of attention purely by sporting those ridiculous white boots. There were no hard feelings from the faithful, the trophy-sporting winners were warmly received, too, and all passed off peacefully. We showed we can take defeat on the chin – let's face it, we have had enough experience – rather than having to lower ourselves to the violent response of the feeble-minded. And credit to all for doing so. Oh for a goal, though. It seems the only one who lost it around Cardiff on the day was barmy Craig Bellamy.

THE walk back to the coach was a sombre one. And the mood was not helped when Messrs Berry and Yeomanson had to leap aboard Coach 8, acting on a tip-off, to confiscate some illicit hooch. I was sure I spoke English when I addressed all on board prior to our Hall departure, but maybe I was mistaken.

Cardiff was easier to escape from than enter. Some caught up on some more sleep, while others fell into a coma as they were assailed by Jackie Chan in 'The Accidental Spy'. A true cinematic turkey. Eventually the Hall loomed back into sight about 8.45pm. The golden No 8 spilled its dejected contents back on to the street, while Harley and Fred copped a nice little bonus from their grateful passengers. A swift farewell to Jenny Yeomanson and Rosemary Berry, tidying up loose ends in the programme hut, and then bruv and me exited to mull over the proceedings with a pint of IPA.

An end to the day pretty similar to a fair few others I suspect. The trains returned safely and the Dambusters all managed to fly back together. Ron even remembered to thank us all for turning out and doing our bit, which was a decent gesture that deserves to be acknowledged. Apart from the result and the much lighter wallet, I really could get used to these sorts of occasion. How about it next season, Blues?.....

Overall moans? Very few, really, considering all the work put in by the club. That must be recognised in the light of the fact occasions like March 21 are not exactly thick on the ground when it comes to our United, so experience is lacking. The silver shirts were undoubtedly unpopular with a substantial majority. We may have sold 1,750. But with opposition on one Blues fans' website running at around 60% to 40% against, that suggests about another 4,000 could have been offloaded in our favourite hue. In addition, the SUSCT commemorative shirt proved conclusively how charging £39.99 at any time of the season for these flimsy pieces of material is nothing more than legalised extortion – and I don't care whether it is at SUFC or MUFC! The way LDV final tickets suddenly were going to be available on the day, when we had been doing our best to tell everybody this would not be the case, was another mystery. But the ways of the Football League are weird and wonderful and have baffled better clubs than Southend in the past. Otherwise, Ron and Geoffrey, not a bad job at all!

While Paul and Chris were our coach travel spearhead, we would not have been able to get our fleet to the Land of Sheep without the following Trust volunteers who also each took charge of a vehicle either from Supreme or one of the other companies involved on the day. Hail to: Daryl Addlington, Trevor Bashford, Rosemary Berry, Peter Brock, Brian Cotgrove, Roy Cottis, Richard Coxell, Robert Craven, John Everett, Kevin Feasey, Craig Fillary, Paul FitzGerald, Roger French, Derek Jaques, Roy Keyes, Paul Marshall, Bob Mays, Matt Overall, Alan Perry, Nigel Rickard, Gerry Smith, Nigel Stuart, Lee Tanner, Brian Wall, Peter Wayland and Steve Wilson. Heroes all.

ONE other point. Contact Paul if you are a Trust member who travelled with us to the big one and have not yet got hold of one of our 'Cardiff 2004' badges. You are entitled to one – FREE! Paul is on p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk or 01702-302373. He has a few SUSCT 'Essex Girls on Tour' LDV Vans final things up for grabs, too. A bargain at £4. Mr G, one of these could make you a very popular man. See Paul as well at our match day stall in the Shrimpers Club for Trust polo shirts, mugs, badges, LDV brochures, pennants and key-rings.

It has been a busy time for the committee, many of whom we tend to forget have lives outside doing their bit for the Trust and following United to the four corners of the country. They last met together on March 29.

Once again it was very helpful to have DC Richard Spooner in attendance to give his analysis on various matters. The first concern was another troubled trip to Brunton Park, where one of our number was allegedly assaulted by a steward. DCS advised anyone who had encountered trouble at the game should contact the Trust and also complain in writing to Carlisle. We will be expressing our concerns to SUFC, who should themselves be contacting both Carlisle and the FA. On a much more positive note, DCS said the Trust should be congratulated on a job well done in organising the Cardiff coaches and trains. Cardiff Police have said the LDV Vans Final atmosphere was brilliant and they were gobsmacked that there had not been one arrest. Blackpool FC had contacted the club and praised Southend fans for staying behind to clap their team. This does not normally happen and it was something to be very proud of. Not so welcome was an Evening Echo article focusing on precisely the wrong elements of football just two days after the final. DCS said he was not happy with it and the timing was totally wrong. Bashers will be writing a letter of complaint to the Echo.

The Carlisle trip has, unfortunately, also led to disciplinary action having to be taken against one Trust member unwise enough to indulge overly in firewater. A letter warning about future conduct has been issued and a travel ban imposed to the end of the season. All members would be wise to remember that alcohol and Trust away travel do not mix. Another incident was suitably resolved without disciplinary measures being necessary.

THE Trust is looking at ways of possibly assisting with the finances of United's Centre of Excellence / Youth Department, which has a fairly sizeable shortfall in what it receives as a grant from the FA and the actual running costs. Helping to raise funds is the current preferred option rather than any direct Trust funding. It was agreed that Geoffrey King should be invited to a forthcoming committee meeting to lay out what United perceive to be the favoured options, though Mark Markscheffel will be the official liaison on the matter between the Trust and SUFC.

Trust vice-chairman Paul FitzGerald now believes the time is right for an 'update' meeting with Ron Martin and is currently seeking to get this sanctioned.

The 100 Club is looking a confirmed goer, with approaching 70 takers so far. Ideally, obviously, we would like 100. For details go straight to the Trust website – www.shrimperstrust.co.uk - or contact Alan Perry on alanperry4@hotmail.com / 01702-476458 or Trevor Bashford on 01245-362742. The idea currently being floated is to kick this off for the new season.

Let's hope we never need it, but we have a venue for the 'doomsday' meeting – Westcliff High School's school hall. I would love to go back for a look round, though not under those circumstances. Jon-Paul FitzGerald has put in all the hard graft to get that sorted out. 10 out of 10 and a gold star, J-P.

Our next planned social events are in the mix and moving slowly towards fruition. The end-of-season Quiz Night has been confirmed to follow the Yeovil game on April 24, kick-off the usual 7.30pm for 8. If you want a table, and seven have gone already, contact Alan Perry as above. The next curry evening should see a final testimonial cheque presentation to Ron Pountney, Dave Scriven and Paul Napper are trying to sort out a Trust event that will see a reunion of United's 1990-91 promotion side and Paul Yeomanson and Alan Perry are working out a date for the race night. Most importantly, though, we require YOU to join in – not least at the following two new *D.A.F.S. FOR THE D.A.P.*

THURSDAY MAY 6.- Golden Bowl With The Blues: An SUSCT 10-pin bowling night, with raffle, at the Kursaal Bowl, Southend. £10 per person plus £1 shoe hire. A chance to win a bottle of bubbly for striking the golden pin and, hopefully, to meet and bowl with some of the United squad. There are 16 lanes available, four persons per-lane. To book, ring Alan Perry on 01702-552904 (daytime), 01702-476458 (evening) or try 07901-845012.

WEDNESDAY May 12.- 2003-04 SUSCT Player of the Year awards: To be held in the Shrimpers Bar. Kick-off is 7.30pm for 8pm. Kevin Feasey hopes to show us his hour-long 'highlights of the season' video, sure to be up to his usual high standard, and we aim to have Tilly and as many of the players in attendance as possible. We will also need our usual healthy turn-out of Trust members on the night. E-mail your vote for the Player of the Year and Goal of the Season to Terry Jeffreys on terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com or complete the cut-out slip at the end of the newsletter.

After the four we put past Scunny, Quid A Goal now stands at £3,220.50. I think I might need a bank loan.

PAUL Y reported that membership had hit yet another all-time high of 1,086 (934 adults and 152 SJS). Solid. Now we have to keep them. Our 1,000th member was Adam Pye, who can look forward to an extra goodie or two to mark his unique standing amongst our number.

Remember you can now take out life membership of the Trust for £75 if you receive your newsletter via e-mail or £100 if you are a postie (reflecting the extra cost). The following have already raided their piggy banks and signed on the dotted line: *Julian Ambrose, Paul Baker, Peter Butler, Andee Byford, Tim Clayton, Brian Colbear, Stuart Compton, Gary Crowe, Hugh Cumberland, Gregory Dearlove, Melvyn Dearlove, John Everett, Ian Harrison, Brian Jeeves, Terry Jeffreys, Martin Leonard, Geoff Manning, Gill Manning, Matthew Marsh Andrew Porter Rachel Porter, Darren Posnack Paul Richards Brian Smith Matthew Weir James Wombwell and Bryan Woodford.* Their reward is a special Trust life member's card and pin badge.

In addition, welcome to the Trust to those new members who have joined our happy band since NUMBER 56 appeared. They are: *Steven Abbott, Tony Leake, Joe Leake, Phillip Baines, James Wombwell, Ryan Buckman, David Smith, Nigel Laverick, Joe Harrison, Nick Hanshaw, John Galbally, Robert Woodford, Jeffrey Hendrick, Eric Beatwell, Nick Harris, Peter Hall, Becky Jowett, Matt Tyler, Graham Davis, Caroline Johnston, Debbie Byard, Andy MacGregor, Wayne Phipps, Mrs. J Slade, Marc Preston, Ann Mays and Craig Bowen.*

But, yes, there has to be a downside. The following members will shortly receive their final reminders, so please pay your £7 subscription however you like as swiftly as you can: *441 Simon Adams, 418 Holly Bailey, 420 Jim Bailey, 417 Ken Bailey, 421 Melanie Bailey, 419 Rob Bailey, 947 Gemma Boatwright, 416 Johhny Bogelund, 1133 Emma Bullard, 818 Ted Carter, 392 Steve Dunn-Lowes, 960 Wayne Harris, 1139 Matt Harriss, 431 Gary Horn, 210 Roberto Irwin, 399 Stephen James, 398 Steve James, 1140 Dale McGill, 1141 Danny McGill, 1142 Phillip McGill, 128 Ritchie Merrin, 944 David Moore, 435 Steve Ovenden, 1144 Gary Penstone, 1143 Sheila Roberts, 819 Neil Sexton, 943 Keith Smith, 948 Graham Taylor and 1131 David Tubb.*

Secretary Terry J has been beavering away as ever on a multitude of tasks, including sending Mark Gower's £50 Player of the Month cheque for February to Great Ormond Street Hospital.

The superb Scriven-Wallis-Napper-Craven Trust LDV Vans final brochure was very well received and sold plenty. They are now looking at doing an end-of-season magazine or yearbook.

There has also been a liaison committee meeting on March 24, attended by Geoffrey King, Derek Wilshire, Mark Markscheffel, Dave Scriven, Paul FitzGerald and Terry Jeffreys.

The divine Ms Vine will be overseeing the divi-up of funds from the joint SUFC / SUSCT travel venture for Cardiff. Get those calculators humming.

THERE was a little differing of opinion over our minor sale of restricted LDV merchandise, but nothing to get excited about. A Ron Q&A is in the pipeline. We would like it asap after the results of the Fossetts Farm are known so we can get to grips with where we go from there depending on whether Two Jags rules 'Yea' or 'Nay'.

The club will consider our application for a Trust board member at the next board meeting. GK reported that he has been doing soundings from some of the 35 other clubs who now have fan representation at director level. It is nice to see United are now taking this issue seriously and making an effort to be helpful, even though it seems clear we will not be welcomed with open arms. TJ said that the fans' director would stand for re-election as a board representative every year.

The situation pre-match in the Shrimpers Club will continue to be monitored and any problems addressed as swiftly as possible.

OK, apart from Cardiff, how have we been faring on the pitch of late in the cut-and-thrust world of the Third Division's dead zone? Let's just say onwards and upwards.....

SOUTHEND 1 SWANSEA 1 (13/3/04): Ladies Day at the Hall and had we not once again gone a bit girlie in front of goal we would probably have taken all three points. This was Tilly and Paul Brush's first game in charge since being appointed to the end of the season – and the first time they have really caused me to question them. Our late substitution, where left-back Che Wilson was taken off and Tes thrown on, almost proved disastrous. Our three remaining defenders clearly had no clue what roles they were supposed to be filling and how to block the gap at left-back. How embarrassing would it have been if Darryl had not blocked at the feet of Andy Robinson with about two minutes left? As it was, Lawrie Dudfield did it again for us to celebrate his full-time move from Northampton just four minutes after we had let them pinch a goal from about their first really threatening strike. How we laughed as Trundle-free Swansea's keeper was sent packing for 'deliberate handball outside the area'. But, let's be honest, a red card was a joke.

Arts review: Alan Perry dashed from the game to catch Steve Hackett at the Shepherds Bush Empire. The former Genesis axe man must be about 60 now, isn't he? Meanwhile Mr G later told a stunned and sympathetic audience he had seen 'Sex Lives of the Potato Men'. He added: "I can confirm it's complete c**p!"

LINCOLN 2 SOUTHEND 2 (16/3/04): A case of Penn and stink. Referee Andy Penn, whose carefully choreographed pre-match warm-up with his fellow officials was risible, conjured up five minutes of extra-time which he allowed to drift to nearly eight before blowing the final whistle. All he lacked was a red and white striped shirt. I must apologise for the appalling nature of the language I directed at him when the game ended. I am sorry because he didn't hear it! Needless to say, City levelled in that crucial added period as another two points went west and almost all our basement rivals once more did us no favours. The key to this game was the strong breeze, which we made the most of in style in a convincing opening 45 minutes that saw a neat lob and a vicious right-footer from Leon Con put us well in charge. If Mark Bentley, improving in midfield, could just have got his head to a Kevin Maher free-kick a minute into the second period that would have been that. Sadly, he didn't and it was backs to the wall as City just lumped it long and hoped for the best. Darryl made at least three crucial stops, only to let himself down again aerially. His feeble flap at a long throw let them back in the game, though he had no chance with the equaliser. A cruel blow on a night when no one tried to hide with Cardiff just five days away. Around 200 of the faithful present, though it would have been 202 had a couple of first-time travellers due to catch the coach at the Watermill been at the lay-by as required and not in the pub car park. After waiting 10 minutes, Monsieur Beaver left without them. Drewe's car was spotted at the Peterborough services and Terry Jeffreys thoughtfully tucked an SUSCT membership application form under his windscreen. Did anyone know – or care – that Lincoln has a fishing tackle shop called 'South End'?

CARLISLE 1 SOUTHEND 2 (27/3/04): The one we were dreading. But instead of crumbling in the wake of the Cardiff setback, United found a new strength and hauled in three more points against the division's basement club. It was our first victory at Brunton Park since 1963 and never has a win been more timely. Leon Con slotted away a stunning solo strike early in the second half and then stepped up to the plate again for penalty No. 14 of the season after an innocuous handball following a Mark Bentley free-kick. Not even 'scoring' and then being ordered to retake the kick following some encroachment could throw Leon, who promptly slotted away his second attempt as well. He now has 20 goals for the season and no Blues striker has achieved that since the Angell back in 1991-92. Carlisle pulled one back with three minutes left from a vicious 18-yard volley, but we held out and huge credit for doing so. It was the perfect reward for the 144 fans we had at the game. A pity not all behaved as we would have liked in the face of the usual appalling antics from the Carlisle stewards. It also gave United their first win in the SunSport Bores League. Hurrah! I hear Ron travelled up to the game by non-wind-affected private jet – but not before he had taken the time to do a trophy presentation for one of the Southend leagues. A pat on the back for our leader.....

SOUTHEND 4 SCUNTHORPE 2 (2/4/04): A Friday night game and no one seemed to have a clue why. The crowd was just 4,976, meaning it took precisely 12 days for about 14,000 to desert the cause. So much for the LDV dividend. We had 5,085 for Northampton when we were sinking like a stone last November! But those who were in attendance certainly got their money's-worth – plus the palpitations that go hand in hand with a Blues victory, even when it should have been a cakewalk. The first thing that caught my eye in the car park was a gleaming new BMW 5-series in one of the board slots sporting the tasteful number plate '25 KOX'. So which comedian does that belong to? The next shock was seeing Brian Wheeler flogging programmes. I know we are cutting corners, but..... After purchasing one of the very nice new LDV Vans / Trust key-rings, it was off to the action. Kevin Maher has been playing superbly of late and he must know that because fans in the East Greens are shouting 'Come on, Kevin' rather than 'Come on, Maher, you *****', to which he

has grown more accustomed. Our March Player of the Month Leon Con missed an early sitter after latching on to a defensive lapse, but made no mistake from a precise Carl Pettefer through ball on 26 minutes. Drewe, minus white boots, then made about his one telling contribution of the evening by nodding in a neat Mark Gower dink two minutes later. We were on a roll, Scunny were punch-drunk and.....so we let them straight back in the game with a bizarre Mark Warren og. Leon Cort finally broke his duck with a power header from a Gower corner five minutes from half-time. Let the rout begin. Wrong. We fell asleep four minutes into the second half as they made it 3-2 and were all over the place for 20 minutes or so before Tes finally came on in place of DB. Four minutes from time Tes produced a great run and low cross from the left that Leon Con somehow bundled in to seal three more vital points. The post-match IPA tasted as sweet as Nicky Nicolau's first-half passing. Just one scandal – Tilly once again being overlooked for Manager of the Month behind Huddersfield's Peter Jackson. But at least he is up to joint 19th in the News of the World Managers' Performance League, alongside Swindon's Andy King, Gerard Houllier, Colin Calderwood of Northampton and Bristol City's Danny Wilson.

There are just three more road trips left: Huddersfield (April 10), Northampton (April 17 – and remember this one is an ALL-TICKET game) and Rochdale (May 1). As ever, the Berry boy would love to hear from if you wish to book a seat on on the coach/es on the usual numbers – 01702-558978 or 0770-898698 (no texts).

Poor old Sir Stanley. I see his wife has now left him. Still, that means one bonus. More time for him to concentrate on his hobbies – and at least he has still got his honeymoon videos.

WELL done to committee veteran Richard Coxell for passing his latest exams and moving a further rung or two up the social services ladder. Very good marks in law, I understand, but he let himself down in 'gender sensitivity'. Mmmmmm, smell the political correctness wafting off that little beauty.

We all know of the sterling support for SUFC and the Trust from our president and soon-to-be ex-MP Sir Teddy Taylor. But what of the football credentials of the ever-popular servant of Southend West, David Amess? I am told that he appeared on a recent edition of TV's 'A Week In Politics', where five different constituents ask five different questions of their MP on local issues. Amess had got four out of four when the cameras suddenly pinged across to the Hall pitch to focus on a couple who wanted to know which former Southend striker had gone on to play for Liverpool, Aston Villa and England. My source tells me he looked blank, but then suddenly came out with: "Errr, Colly, Colly, Collymore." Spot-on. Presenter Jeremy Vine hailed his effort by saying: "You're the first one to get five out of five." But Vine couldn't resist adding there might have been a 'suspicion of outside help'. Like somebody mouthing the answer from behind the camera? Heaven forbid.....

Nice to discover there is another Blues supporter on The Sun, reporter James Clench. Dad John, who journeys to home games from Folkestone with Slough-based brother Derek, filled me in on the details.

Lawrie Dudfield is back to stay after we all thought he had gone for good. But poor Lawrie is currently missing with 'a virus'. I regret to report that guesses from various parties as to what the exact medical condition might be have, in some instances, been potentially slanderous and, of course, will not be repeated in this haven of truth and honesty. Steven Clark's 'fly' bite was another interesting one. Meanwhile Jamie Fullarton, who has left the club by mutual consent, was crocked so often he now clearly has all the experience required to apply for an occasional role in Casualty. Welcome to Nicky Nicolau, on loan from Arsenal. If he is third in line behind Ashley Cole and Gael Clichy, he can't be half bad – as he has been showing.

Where Are They Now? The great Richard Cadette is currently managing Tooting and Mitcham in Ryman League Division One. How Did They Do That? Martyn Margetson has been called up into the Welsh squad as goalkeeping cover. The former Blues flop, now at Cardiff, appears to be reaping the benefit of a diet. Hidden talent? Damon Searle banging in a penalty for Forest Green Rovers. Pastures new? David McSweeney has headed off to Conference outfit Welling for some 'match practice'.

LEAGUE gates are up – and so are Blues! Our 19 home games to April 2 had attracted 79,217 spectators to the Hall at an average of 4,169. That is a 5.6% rise so far on last year's end-of-season average of 3,948. We need to average 4,348 for our last four Hall fixtures to hit the 100,000 mark for 2003-04.

Paul Napper attended the opening of the 'Let Fans Have Their Say' campaign at the Houses of Parliament. The event was introduced by Alan Keen MP, leader of the All-Party Football Group. The campaign is designed to bring about better communication between clubs and fans and action to improve relations between the two. There were speeches from representatives of the PFA, the Football Supporters Federation and a case study from the Norwich Supporters Trust. The sad thing was that Paul was probably the only person present on behalf of a supporters' organisation in the Third Division. Sad. The hope is that the campaign will help bring an end to familiar bugbears like the discriminatory treatment of away fans, above average increases in ticket prices, imposition of altered fixture dates just to suit TV etc. Past experience suggests those at the top of the food chain could not give a monkeys, but we live in hope..... More on the APFG in NUMBER 58.

OK, the final 'i' has been dotted, the final 't' crossed. As ever, you can contact me with any comments, criticism or quips at nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk To be honest, I prefer not to be rung at home!

NR (6/4)

PS 1: Ms G – should I ever again have cause to visit the inner sanctum, could I have a tad more sugar next time, please, plus a chocolate digestive.

2: Respect to Mr G Jnr, who, having been locked out of his pre-LDV Vans final hotel after a late-night 'clear-the-head' walk, risked life and limb by sleeping rough in the Mumbles area of Swansea. A very brave man.

3. Today, Sven Goran Eriksson will earn £13,468.

4. Atkins? No chance. Try 58.

SUSCT PLAYER OF THE YEAR 2003-04 VOTING FORM

A) My vote for the 2003-04 SUSCT Player of the Year goes to:

1.....; 2.....; 3.....

B) My SUSCT Goal of the Season was scored by:

.....v.....

C) Would you be interested in getting mailshots with your newsletter if it made the Trust money? YES / NO

Please return asap to TERRY JEFFREYS, 32 Herondale, Basildon, Essex. SS14 1RR