

SUSCT

NEWSLETTER 59

AMBITION. It is a word you frequently hear trumpeted around by professional footballers as a reason – or excuse – for wanting to manoeuvre themselves a move to a different club. But that ambition usually manifests itself in a player switching his allegiance to a superior outfit. Which is not, I would suggest, the case when it comes to the late and now unlamented Leon Constantine.

Perhaps only finishing runner-up in both the SUFC and SUSCT Player of the Year awards short-circuited a fuse. For you really have to wonder at our former 25-goal hero and leading scorer opting to succumb to the blandishments of the Fat Controller of Posh. LC has probably picked up a few extra pennies for signing on the dotted line, as he is perfectly entitled to do. Yet, realistically, what are Peterborough going to achieve in the Second Division – sorry, League One – next season? Set it alight? I think not. Had he stayed at the Hall, though, albeit a few Euros poorer, he might just have been part of a team pressing for promotion. So just where is his ambition? Hiding in his wallet, it seems. It must have been pure embarrassment that prevented him apparently even contacting United to let them know he was snubbing our own two-year offer. Let's just hope Bazza plans to use him as an orthodox No.9. If so, I doubt LC will get 10 goals next season.

No qualms about Leon Cort, though. He gave us consistently solid service, had a lot of good things to say about Blues, Hull are a club on the up and I hope it turns out well for him.

Yet while Leon Con failed to see the bigger picture, that could not be said of all those of us who attended the SUSCT Player of the Year awards night on May 12. If Peter Jackson thought he had got some great battle scenes down on film in Lord of the Rings I, II and III, he was surely put to shame by what our own cinematic wizard Kevin Feasey came up with in his latest magnificent chronicle of a Blues campaign. Kevin, tucked away on his perch at the Hall and wherever he could secrete himself at away games, covered 59 matches last season and saw 151 goals packed into 89 hours of play and four hours of stoppage time. Then he was finally able to think about setting it all down for us on CD and editing it for our privileged viewing – and what another superb job he did.

The Shrimpers Club was packed to the rafters for the occasion, a far cry from our first awards evening four years ago when it would be fair to say there was 'room to spare'. This meant a golden opportunity for fund-raising and Alan Parry was on me and plenty of others like a vulture on a clog-popped zebra to relieve us of some cash for raffle tickets. There is no doubt the Trust would be a hell of a sight poorer without Alan's Herculean efforts – and we punters would be a lot better off! The Trust stand was at the centre of an end-of-season sales boom under the supervision of Paul Yeomanson, while Steve Tilson, Paul Brush and the majority of the first-team squad were tucked into their usual corner at the far end of the bar. It was great to see them taking time out to join us, chatting away to members and signing autographs for overawed members of the SJS.

THEN it was time for Master of Ceremonies Brian Wheeler to do the introductions and for Kevin to begin unveiling the results of his hours of graft – both the colour and the highs, the negative and the lows. And it proved fascinating viewing.

In Part One you wondered why so many of the team were so eager to go topless against Cheltenham in our opening fixture. How did Swindon's offside first goal ever stand? Who thought Leon Con's first goal v Bury

would be the first of so many? Isn't Mark Gower's influence on the side massive? You also quickly realised the points cost of our crazy run of fluffed spot-kicks. You felt sympathy for Leke Odunsi as he scored his only goal in league football for us against Huddersfield before the injury that effectively ended his career. Yet again, the proof was there that Joe Ross is the worst referee on the planet and you could see that Wiggers was never going to halt the early slide.

Suddenly the lights came back on, reality reasserted itself and the moment had come for the first awards to be distributed, with Tilly doing the honours. Travel kicked us off, featuring salutes to those hardy senior Trust members whose devotion to SUFC is such that they were prepared to put in the maximum 10,256 miles following the lads on the road in 2003-04. Four of our number fitted that bill – Peter and Hazel Wayland, Phil Lamb and Lee Tanner, who were all rewarded with a unique Chris Berry-designed mug plus some vouchers to be used in the club shop. Chris, as he did all evening, was also on hand to take snaps. Then it was on to the junior stalwarts. Their top mileage of 5,654 was achieved by Sam Wall. Chris then collected a special award for all his efforts – and they have been monumental over the the past 12 months – before the SJS handed over their Player of the Year honour. The recipient was.....Leon Con, whose acceptance speech contained these weasel words: “Thanks for all your support and may it continue next season.” Well it will, but not for you.

Again the lights dimmed and it was back to Part Two of the Feasey blockbuster. This time you hoped Jay Smith would stay fit for 2004-05, cursed the wasted talent of Steven Clark, marvelled again at how we saw off Swansea in Sheepland with only eight men, realised what a couple of unsung heroes are the contents of Sammy the Shrimp and Elvis J Eel and recognised how stunning was the victory over QPR.

The award focus next switched to the Trust's 1,000th member. It has taken more than five years to reach that milestone, but has been well worth the effort. And Adam Pye, the man in question, copped a special mug and Trust polo shirt in appreciation. Barry Harris, who ran the London Marathon in a Trust LDV Vans Final commemorative shirt, then handed over a cheque for £2,200 to Christine Lloyd from his chosen charity, Barnardo's, and that was followed by a special 'Consistent Performance' award being handed to the Blue Belles. Ginger will be back next season, Mr I, so all the more reason to splash out on that season ticket!

The final part of the Feasey trilogy was now aired. Here we could relive the great night that was C** U being trumped in their own back yard, in front of fanatical Blues support at both ends of Layabout Road, and then being dumped by Drewe's strike in the LDV semi return at the Hall. You pondered over how exactly Lawrie Dudfield did manage to miss that sitter header v Kidderminster before wallowing once more in all the emotion of the Millennium Stadium, where the United faithful and the camp followers did themselves so proud in the stands as the team narrowly missed out on the pitch. A never-to-be-forgotten experience.

RON was spotted in the audience, but had to dash. He took the trouble to turn up, though, and that's the important thing. The raffle winner snapped up the DVD player first prize, with bubbly, a signed ball and signed pennant among the other rewards. Alan Perry reported an excellent profit of £128. Mick Higgins generously handed over £60 for an LDV Vans Final programme signed by the squad and then it was on to the main business of the evening.

The Goal of the Season gong came down to a choice between Drewe's crucial C** U killer at Roots, Jay Smith's classic last-gasp decider in the FA Cup replay at Canvey and Mark Gower's devastating jink and left-foot finish v Darlington. It was the latter that took the plaudits, if only because the goal was so good that even one of the linesmen wanted to join in the celebrations. And now, roll of drums, came the moment when our Player of the Year was revealed to one and all. In third place we had.....Mark Gower, down the pecking order despite being voted both SUFC and the Players' Player of the Year. I must admit that, had I seen Kevin's CD before casting my 'X', I think I too would have backed Mark. Second, and without dwelling on it for too long, was Leon Constantine. He collected his memento to chants of: 'Sign up, Leon, sign up Leon, sign up Leon, sign up'. Which, of course, is just what he did – but for the Lard Monster and not us! That just left the winner – Kevin Maher. He may still not be flavour of the month for some, yet it is almost impossible to deny the influence that he has on our midfield. Kevin declared: “I would like to thank everyone who voted for me. It was the fans, home and away. I know how much you spend to support us and all the lads really appreciate it.”

And still the prize list had not come to an end. Bashers, in his best suit and tie, then strode forward to hand Tilly and Paul Brush their own 'Great Escape' glassware. Tilly, clearly among friends, stated: "I know me and Paul have had a lot of credit, but it's really down to the players on the pitch. We have the nucleus of a good side and with just a few additions I think we can go for promotion next season either via the play-offs or automatically. Keep giving us the support and, hopefully, we will give you something to shout about."

Paul Brush then said a few comforting words as well and that was just about that, though the players gamely hung around to ensure that every last autograph request was fulfilled. Thanks, too, to Brian Wheeler for his humour on the mic and to Brian Dear and his staff for sterling work on the bar. Kevin also had his own message of gratitude for the usual towering efforts of the Beaver and Jenny. Overall, a great occasion and one that next season may require a larger venue.

DURING the clearing-up operation, I bumped into former Trust committee stalwart Jerry Moss. Jerry has always been a big backer of the Sopotians, the residents of Southend's Polish twin town of Sopot, and was wondering why the club did not consider a friendly against their team. To be honest, I have no idea. But I do have some good news for Jerry. If he fancies making his own way to Sopot, currently marketing itself as a sort of Eastern European version of our home town, it has never been easier to get to. You will soon be able to fly from Stansted to nearby Gdansk (famous for its shipyard and Solidarity) and then spend three nights in a good hotel for around 100 Euros (£70). Bicycle carriage may be extra.

The Trust committee met last on June 1, with holidays and other commitments cutting a most unusual swathe through the attendance level.

It was agreed that the Trust should be represented, as ever, at the Meet the Blues Day, which this year is on Sunday, August 1 at Boots and Laces. We will have a pitch for our brand new 9m x 3m 'pavilion' where potential members can be signed up and old members can chew the fat, while there will be room nearby for some fun and games. The hope is we can shift some memorabilia and merchandise, get some players around to sign autographs, auction some United shirts and have the great new 'Shrimpers With Attitude' t-shirts available to order. And if you cannot wait until the Meet the Blues Day for your 'SWA' garment, contact Paul Yeomanson now on p.yeomanson@bluevonder.co.uk or 01702-302373 and he will get you one rustled up. The price is around £15 for adults, with a reduction for children's sizes. We would also love to hear from anyone with memorabilia they would be prepared to donate for sale or to donate for display in the Shrimpers Club. Our thanks to Sheila White, who has already donated commemorative covers celebrating our 1,000th League goal (1972-73), the Division Four championship (1980-81) and our first match in the Second Division (signed by the one and only Ian 'Who Put the Ball in the Bury Net' Benjamin).

Alan Perry revealed that, so far, 76 out of the 111 Quid A Goal pledges had been redeemed. That has brought in a total of £2,554.75. But there is still quite a bit of cash to be paid, so if you owe money please make an effort to cough up as soon as possible or face 'reprisals' in the not too distant future. We plan to run the QAG again next season, again prominently displayed in the club programme, but want the current one resolved asap to avoid the potential for chaos. Follow the example of Geoffrey 'Sweat the Asset' King, who was one of the FIRST to pay up. My debt was boosted to £29 by the fact I did not realise Michael Kightly was regarded as a midfielder and not a forward. United director Michael Marscheffel has swiftly pledged £3 a point for next season, so let's hope his final bill comes to £250-plus. £600 of the take is already earmarked for United physio John Stannard to obtain a new set of weights and he is also still working on a 'wish list' on which further QAG cash can be expended. We will decline any requests involving 'Oriental massage'.

Alan also has 77 signings for the 100 Club. That is now just 23 short of our target, so if you want to be a part of a scheme that could earn you a nice little prize every so often then contact Alan now on 01702-476458 or alanperry4@hotmail.com The rules can be perused on the Trust's website, www.shrimperstrust.co.uk

Membership currently stands at 1,119, comprising 939 adults and 180 SJS, though there are some non-renewals about to be factored in.

LIFE Members total 34. They are: Julian Ambrose, Paul Baker, Peter Butler, Andee Byford, Peter Carter, Tim Clayton, Brian Colbear, Stuart Compton, Gary Crowe, Hugh Cumberland, Gregory Dearlove, Melvyn Dearlove, John Everett, Iain Findlay, Ian Harrison, Adam Hutchins, Brian Goodman, Brian Jeeves, Terry Jeffreys, Martin Leonard, Geoff Manning, Gill Manning, Matthew Marsh, Derek Murr, Andrew Porter, Rachel Porter, Darren Posnack, Paul Richards, Brian Smith, John Walton, Matthew Weir, Sheila White, James Wombwell and Bryan Woodford. To join their number will cost you £75. Details from PY.

New Members since Newsletter 58: Stephen Chapman, David Clark, Mark Dennis, Mark Griffin, Susannah Harding, Darell Phipps, Michael Ruta and Howard Studd. Welcome aboard one and all.

Final Membership Reminders: 1258 Daniel Armstrong, 951 Martin Brooks, 455 Lisa Burns, 348 Janine Carroll, 1168 Ian Hutcheon, 398 Steve James, 399 Stephen James, 275 Bob Mays, 1167 Dean Morley, 1163 Deon Paine, 1169 Mark Pearson, 810 Simon Rutter and 1164 Trevor Suckling.

We have not forgotten the Q & A and will keep pressing Ron until he fronts up. It was not felt a session after the club AGM would be a good idea, as suggested at the liaison committee meeting of May 12. Paul FitzGerald claimed the club accounts had not been conjured up before the deadline so the club faced a fine. But the accounts and annual report are now out – the AGM is set for July 1 – and it seems Christmas has already come early as SEL (UK) have agreed to write off the Hall rent for the last four years. That adds up to the small sum of £1.73million! United have also recognised the financial support the Trust has given and the equipment donated.

With all the LDV Vans final hoopla last season, the invitation to two United directors to share the ‘joys’ of the home match experience was overlooked. This will now go ahead at one of next season’s early fixtures. The fixtures are due out on June 24.

The race night and curry night head the list of pending social events. As soon as dates have been decided, you will get them and then the flood of bookings can commence.

We will be sponsoring a player again next season, though the uncertainty over Mark Warren’s future at the club has caused us a headache. Who we will end up with is still in the melting pot.

ALL is once more sweetness and light with United as regards the Centre of Excellence, except that Dean Austin will not be taking over its running. We have agreed to sponsor the CoE for the new season, in return for which we shall receive a number of benefits – chief of which will be the Trust’s name and logo on the CoE players’ shirts plus prominent displays of our name and logo in both the match programme, around the ground and even on the club letterhead. All publicity is good publicity and the more the Trust name becomes known and recognised, the better. Our only pre-conditions are that the cash is ‘ring-fenced’ in cast iron fashion for the CoE only and our share of the Cardiff travel bounty must be handed over without much further delay. The final figures are just being worked out and, suffice to say at present, our return on the venture will be a substantial boost to the treasury.

From the liaison committee comes news that we shall be continuing to run the Shrimpers Bar next season on match days, though we will lose the annexe due to a change of use. Plasma screens featuring Blues away games are on the menu, so that is another farsighted club touch.

Trust representatives on the liaison committee have again reiterated that the **ONLY** site where official Trust policy will be disseminated is the SUSCT site – www.shrimperstrust.co.uk Any postings by any individual anywhere else are purely a matter for them.

The Trust will be working with the club to help their already excellently rated facilities for the disabled remain at their current high level. Any fan who wants help or information on this issue should contact our link man, Alan Perry.

Geoffrey King has also asked us to be involved in the United centenary celebrations in 2006, which we appreciate. There will be a centenary dinner and numerous other functions and events throughout what should be an exciting year – especially if Fossetts Farm is on course to a successful conclusion.

One person, I see, hoping that will not be the case is local ecologist Mike O'Connor. Mike, currently studying seals off the Southend coast, wants the £100million project put on hold while scientists conduct a full wildlife audit of the site. He claims the site is recognised as an 'area of natural grassland listed in Southend's Biodiversity Action Plan'. Others see it as an area of natural wasteland. You pays yer money..... And the council say the site was cleared for development from 2001 on. Back to the seals, Mike.

So with Leon Con and Leon Cort gone, what else has been happening on the SUFC player merry-go-round following the end of the season? Well, we've said cheerio and thanks for everything to Ryan Robinson, Steven Clark, Neil Jenkins, Jamie Stuart, David McSweeney and Unleke Odunsi. Nicky Nicolau has surprisingly stayed with us for another year, which is a major boost, while Jay Smith, Che Wilson and James Corbett have done likewise. Mark Warren and Kevin Maher are still to come to a decision. But Mark Gower is supposedly all set to sign a new extended deal and that would be a huge bonus. In, so far, have come old boy Andy Edwards from Rushden and new boys Wayne Gray from Wimbledon and Adam Barrett from Bristol Rovers. Wayne seems a confident lad, with proven pace. Let's hope he shows it by swiftly racking up at least 20 strikes in the onion bag once battle recommences. Central defender Adam is a Belfairs School old boy, famous for playing in the same school side as Richard Coxell's son, who turned down a better deal at Bristol Rovers to join his home town favourites. That's the spirit we like – particularly as there is the added lift of a smack in the face for our old pal Ian Atkins. We also missed out on a C** U reject, but we'll get over it.

ELSEWHERE Tony Scully has somehow landed a two-year deal at Notts County, Andy Rammell has called it a day after an injury-ruined season at Bristol Rovers, Andy Woodman has sunk like a stone from being Oxford's top keeper to joining Stevenage Borough, Barry Conlon has somehow persuaded Barnsley he is worth a crack at a higher level and Damon Searle has jumped on the Hornchurch gravy train.

Having mentioned Ian Atkins, you will now be desperate to know at last what that sad story was about him and a former SUFC favourite. Well all can now be revealed, thanks to the Sunday Times opting to print a while back some of the choicest revelations from the aforementioned Andy Woodman's tome on his buddyship with Gareth Southgate. It seems that one day Andy was strolling through the bar during his time at Northampton Town, when who should he bump into but ex-Blues defender / midfielder Dave Martin. Now Dave Martin, as some of you may remember, was a feature of the Hall side in the late 80s and early 90s and had a reputation as a bit of a loose cannon. On this occasion, AW describes him as 'well into a little session' and he and the mates he had with him were drifting nicely into 'Crazy Gang' mode. Martin, of course, was also a former Wimbledon player. As the group 'simmered' nicely, a waitress offered them what was described as a plate of mixed vegetables. It proved an unwise move.

Martin supposedly declared: "If she comes this way again, I'm going to tip those vegetables over her head." AW promptly questioned his 'bottle' credentials and the bull saw the red rag. When the waitress, who was about 40, returned shortly afterwards Martin proved himself. AW records: 'A couple of feet from Dave, she stopped. He took the silver platter out of her hands and tipped the lot over her head. Shocked, the poor woman stood motionless in the silent room. Dave then rubbed the vegetables into her permed hair. Not realising just how out of order he had been, Dave kept saying 'The Crazy Gang lives on'. The embarrassment was enormous and the humiliation on the waitress was disgusting'.

Northampton's manager at the time was.....Ian Atkins. He made Martin write a letter of apology, but didn't kick him out as he clearly deserved. The reason? AW reveals: 'Football is a winning business and players who help the team to be successful get away with things off the field. Dave put the fear of God into the opposition. Often he scared me – and I was on his team'.

The clearly feeble-minded Martin had also impressed Atkins by one day cutting the sleeves off his boss's shirt and the tops off his socks before putting them back in his shoes. According to AW: 'Ian took one look at the damage and worked out nobody but Dave would have had the b*****s to do that. The gaffer loved him for it'.

And there you have it. The sad tale of an apology for a man and a manager clearly unfit to rise anywhere above the murkiest depths of the lower reaches. I trust Dave Martin will never even be considered for a place in our Hall of Fame, while we can only thank our lucky stars that Atkins never got his backside into the Blues hot-seat.

I have coughed my £305 season ticket cash for the next campaign – never in doubt – and according to the ticket office the level of applications already in is very encouraging. I am afraid that the latest £10ew on Blues for a 1,2,3 finish was a busted flush once again and another £20 in Mr Coral’s pocket. But I’ve a sneaky feeling that there will be another attempt made to fleece the bookies before kick-off in August. Watford’s £310 ticket could be bought interest-free over seven months – a pay plan that our backroom might consider looking at in future. As for Premiership new boys West Brom, they have raised prices by 33%! Blood suckers.

There clearly remains a desperate desire for success amongst Blues fans, with home league gates up from the 2002-03 average of 3,948 (a total of 90,815 through the turnstiles) to last season’s 4,535 (104,308). That adds up to a very encouraging increase of 14.87%, though it must be remembered that one or two of our home crowds in 2003-04 were boosted by family fun days and other special offers. But it is bodies on seats that count and in 2004-05 United must surely, given a fair wind and Tilly and the boys on song, be looking to burst through the 5,000 average barrier. Our away league games were watched by 113,844 (av. 4,949) compared to the 2002-03 tally of 100,132 (4,353) – up 13.74%.

United finished 17th, nowhere near what we were hoping for but considerably better than it looked at one dodgy time we might manage. One more win would have taken us to 12th. A worst-ever 11 home league defeats is never going to be a platform for success and turning the Hall into a fortress rather than a gift shop has to one of the top Tilly aims for the months of combat to come. Our record of scoring goals from set-pieces (corners and free-kicks) was also woeful in comparison to most of our rivals, though, bizarrely, figures showed Blues racked up the highest number of shots both on and off target per-game – 6.60 and 6.33. So who were our tops and flops in 2003-04? Here are my swift squad ratings, with a mark out of 10. You may, or may not, agree.

- CARL EMBERSON: Always at his best when the ball was nowhere near him. The dodgy keeper incarnate. 3.
DARRYL FLAHAVAN: As fond of crosses as Nosferatu. A problem with heights – his own. Hot shot-stopper. 6.
RYAN ROBINSON: Two first-team appearances, two defeats. Not quite league calibre, methinks. 4.
DUNCAN JUPP: Good or bad, rarely indifferent. Gallops hard, but feels the pace at times. Bit of a lunger. 6.
JAMIE STUART: A better centre-half than full-back. One-paced – very slow. Unlucky-ish to get the chop. 5.
LEON CORT: Poor start but back to near his best by the season’s end. Quality operator and a Hull of a loss. 8.
MARK WARREN: Transformed from about Christmas into a solid partner for Cortie. Couple of key goals. 7.
MARK GOWER: Genuine class act. Great skills and some fine strikes. Something Wiggers did get right. 9.
KEVIN MAHER: One-time hate figure is now a key midfield cog. Blues’ best passer. Mr I’s hero. 8.
TES BRAMBLE: Sometimes seems to think it is him in the Premiership, not Titus. Needs a big 2004-05. 6.
DREWE BROUGHTON: Cult favourite thanks to his LDV efforts. Yet overall requires more league impact. 6.
JIM CORBETT: Injury set him back just as he was looking good. Well worth trying out up front again. 6.
STEVEN CLARK: What a waste. So much talent, so little confidence. Never repeated his debut dynamism. 5.
CHE WILSON: Something of a Mr Average. Probably a good squad man, but will never set the world alight. 5.
MICHAEL HUSBANDS: Pacy forward who always seemed to have a worrying ‘twinge’ from October on. 5.
LEKE ODUNSI: Done for by injury in the end. Tried hard, but I sense really only a midfield makeweight. 5.
NICKY NICOLAU: Ex-Gunner looks an Ashley Cole replica – fine going forward, not so happy defending. 7.
NEIL JENKINS: Played for England Under-20s, though I was never sure how. One-footed trier. Time to go. 5.
MICHAEL KIGHTLY: Promising, though he needs some more muscle on him. Too lightweight at present. 5.
JAY SMITH: Just approaching peak form again when hacked out of the season. Fully fit, a midfield must. 8.
LEWIS HUNT: Fills in where required. A jack of all trades, master of none. Did us some good turns. 6.
LEON CONSTANTINE: May have flattered to deceive, even with 25 goals. Danger on the run, poor header. 8.
STEVE TILSON: Only saw him come on once. Did most of his best work in the dug-out with Paul Brush. 9.
MARK BENTLEY: Took a bit of time to settle, then turned in one or two excellent midfield performances. 7.
LAWRIE DUDFIELD: The jury is still out. Six-yard box predator, but his endeavours need more end result. 6.
CARL PETTEFER: Struggled early on, then showed he could get stuck in and had a bit of class as well. 7.
DAVID McSWEENEY: Always gave of his best, yet never totally convinced at either full-back or centre-half. 6.
JAMIE FULLARTON: So injury-prone he would have been better employed as an extra on Casualty. 4.

UNFORTUNATELY, if you were a devotee, the reserves will no longer be an option for you as they have been wound up. Judging by last season’s record, it would seem a sensible move and Tilly appears to have the requisite irons in the fire should he need to arrange relevant practice games for whatever reason.

Another victim of simple football economics – at our slot in the pyramid that is.

I have to admit that, with Barnet out, I was hoping Aldershot would make it back into the Third Division. Nowhere near as draggy a trip as Shrewsbury. But the Shots succeeded in making even some of our recent spot-kick horrors look quality as they blew the Conference's play-off final penalty shoot-out without even finding the net at Stoke's Britannia Stadium. Canvey fluffed the Trophy final, too, of course. Shame.

Sorry, I referred again to the Third Division there. United are now, of course, in League Two following the recent Football League revamp in the light of the new Coca-Cola sponsorship. First Division clubs have become part of 'The Championship', so from now on will be chasing the Championship championship. What a load of old codswallop. We all know our place, even if we don't want to admit it. This is just another bit of meddling that, had the fans been consulted, I am sure would have been consigned to the dustbin of history.

As for our most famous old boy, Sir Stanley's life continued with a big victory sign as he left court after being bound over for a year for threatening to do no good to his estranged wife. Hardly one of his finest performances, yet it does at least mean he will still have plenty of opportunities to pursue his interest in 'nature'.

I**F you are already clawing at the walls in desperation for your next Blues football fix, the pre-season friendly list has been issued. It is: 17 July East Thurrock (A – Arsene Wenger may be scouting!), 21 July Millwall (H – can we bang in more than M***** U*****?), 24 July Dagenham & Redbridge (A – the only time we want to face Conference opposition), 26 July Billericay (A – not one to lose), 28 July Brighton (H – how the hell did they get promoted?), 31 July Grays (A – could be all-ticket, then again perhaps not).**

Watching a recent TV programme on the African Nations Cup, I was stunned by revelations that made it crystal clear why Blues were beset by so many dire home performances last season. They were surely the victims of mooti, otherwise known as hom-jom or ju-ju. What the opposition have done, probably some n'er-do-wells like Mansfield or Lincoln, is seek out a local witchdoctor who has cast a spell on Roots following a spot of animal sacrifice. Another favoured trick is to bury a dead goat beneath the opposition's centre-circle at the dead of night, so it might be worth our groundsman just doing a bit of digging to ensure there are no animal carcasses beneath the Hall's green sward affecting the lads' play. Should there be, meaning there is clear evidence that 'mooti' has been spread around the environs, then Geoffrey and Ron will have to seek out our own rival witchdoctor for a consultation. He is likely to recommend a mass team wee-wee, with the 'donation' to be sprinkled on the centre-spot and around the goalmouths. Once that has been done, the 'mooti' should have been dispelled and Blues next season can look forward to a home record of: P23 W23 D0 L0. Simple.

Talking of Geoffrey, did you see that picture of him on the United website with the Cheeky Girls? The worrying thing for the talent-free Romanian combo had to be that Geoffrey was the best looking of the three!

Welcome aboard to United's new main sponsors, Betterview windows, conservatories, soffits, guttering etc. No quotation for me, thanks.

The recent Football Supporters Federation 'Time for a Say' campaign was boosted by a parliamentary reception attended by over 60 MPs and other dignitaries like the Trust's own Paul Napper and Lee Morgan. It appears many of the MPs were 'shocked' to hear of the poor service fans have to endure at their respective clubs both home and away – though with arch-dud Minister of Sport Richard Caborn as the messenger that hardly seems surprising. Government is always planning to improve our lot but rarely ever seems to.

F**OR example, the All-Party Football Group really needs to get itself some teeth so that action is taken on their recommendations. Unfortunately, the interests of the majority of those running clubs tend to be out of sync with such bodies as well as the supporters. Therefore, b*****r all ever happens. The APFG wants the powers of the (toothless) Independent Football Commission beefed up and their decisions to become binding throughout football. If that is not agreed, statutory regulation could be considered. The APFG, after nine months of probing and talking to various luminaries both from within and without the game, have concluded that the gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' needs tackling urgently. We could have told them that in nine seconds! What the APFG now wants to see, among other things, is the Premier League doubling to 10 per cent the broadcasting revenue it distributes to the rest of football. Sounds great, but will surely go down like a**

lead balloon with those giants of generosity such as Peter Kenyon and Co. Then how about wage capping in the Premier League? That will not sit well if, like a Roy Keane, you struggle to get by on £400,000 a month. Yes, in a little less than three months Keano can trouser more cash than the average worker on the average annual salary of around £23,000 will collect after a 47-YEAR lifetime of working from 18 to 65. Think about it – and weep.

Where the APFG can be guaranteed fans' backing, though, is for their views on Corporate Governance within football. Here they want to see a) An immediate introduction of the 'Fit and Proper Person' test (10 out of 10 at the Hall, we hope); b) All professional football clubs brought into line with best existing corporate governance practice; c) Full accounts published annually and passed by AGM (Vic must be turning.....); d) Supporters' views represented at board level; e) Tax-breaks offered to establish Supporters' Trusts; f) The FSF funded by football authorities; g) The FA to be more representative of modern Britain (i.e. alive!). Also on the wish list is that all agents should be licensed, all their payments should be disclosed, there should be an agents' levy to be redistributed to the grass roots game, a limited number of Premiership games should be broadcast free to air and the majority of all clubs' home league fixtures should kick off at 3pm on a Saturday.

And so say all of us ticket-buying, shirt-purchasing, merchandise-mad, burger-scoffing, club-loving, 100 per cent genuine supporters. But does anyone think for a moment that the employees of the Premier League or the agents that infest it and grow fat, sweaty and rich on it will play ball? Dream on.

United are releasing a CD of last season's action, focusing in particular on the LDV Vans Trophy Final and all the games leading up to it with extra bonus snippets. However, it seems coming up with the run-of-the-mill away footage is causing a problem. One I think the club should try to sort, as this is probably the only action most fans will have missed. If it is not offered as part of the package, sales may well not take off as anticipated.

Paul Yeomanson has been updating the Trust website where possible and I am sure that all the news and info that our members require, especially regarding travel, will be with them in future asap. Remember, just go to www.shrimperstrust.co.uk to check it out. I have to say the SUFC site is also looking a lot perkier and up to date. I wonder why that could be. I did have to e-mail them, though, over the current painting competition they are advertising. It said they wanted someone to paint a 'Muriel' in the West Stand. I told them the word they probably wanted was 'mural'. Our old pal in charge has also been asking what we would like to see in next season's programme. To be truthful, I doubt it would be legal – but otherwise I would be quite happy with a publication half the size and half the price. What about you?

It looks as if the club shop is shutting for a while due to staff 'sickness'. I would have thought one or two of those easing through another sunny day in their sumptuous club offices could have popped down and done a stint on the till to help out..... One office that has apparently been refilled is that of the divine Miss Vine. She has been replaced by a Gary Laver, who I am sure the Trust will be bumping into at some time.

No away fixtures to mention this month, of course. Messrs Berry and Beaver were rightly hailed for the LDV Vans final efforts, but remember they did the business for us over the whole season. And did it incredibly.

Oh well, all done for another few weeks. Plaudits, brickbats or comments to nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (17/6)

PS 1. Apologies for a few 'not quite rights' in Number 58's SUSCT End-Of-Season Draw results, chiefly due to last-minute over-speediness. 8th were Vicky and Brian Jeeves, 9th Doug Redgewell and 10th Jennifer Orford. Vicky, Brian, Doug, Gareth Tandy and Mark Edwards are also all Trust members.

2. Slightly tardy distribution this month as even I like to have a holiday now and again. Golf in Corfu was great, except instead of picking the usual sizzling week, I opted for the one with four days of downpours.

3. Who's running England? Sven or the adulterer (alleged)? Meanwhile, if Becks wants a chat about the emotional turmoil brought on by missing a penalty, he need only ring the Hall to find plenty of kindred spirits.