

SUSCT NEWSLETTER 61

CHRIS WADDLE is a man of many parts. Most of you will remember him as a winger with Newcastle, Tottenham, Marseille and England, weaving down the left flank with his 'wand' of a left foot and dud of a right. Before finishing his career, the indelible impression he left on the nation was how not to take a penalty in the infamous 1990 World Cup semi-final shoot-out v Germany. Think of Becks' woeful Euro 2004 effort v Portugal and you will have a fair idea of where the ball finished up. Row Z – if not higher.

Yet, prior to full-time football, wor Chris (bit of Geordie there!) was embroiled in another world, one in which some cruelly suggested he should have remained. Sausage stuffing! It is a career calling to which clearly many aspire but few are chosen. And he could well still be filling those gristly membranes with the regurgitated sludge that frequently makes up their contents had his talents not been in his feet rather than between his ears.

Since those golden teenage days deep in the minced pork, Chris has obviously done very nicely for himself, thank you, and having failed to cut the mustard in coaching or management is now 'punditing' in, amongst other places, the cream of Britain's national daily newspapers.

On August 9 his column confidently trumpeted that Patrick Vieira would be staying at Arsenal. At the time, his prediction looked nonsense of the funny farm variety. The marauding French midfield money-grabber's £23million move to Real Madrid was all but signed, sealed, delivered, I'm yours. But then, strangely, Vieira decided to remain at Highbury – and shame on anyone who would even suspect the likelihood of wad-filled brown envelopes. More importantly, the Waddler had been proved right! Now in that same column, as all columnists insist on doing pre-season, he also foisted his end-of-campaign tips on us. And there, under League Two, were the ghastly words.- Relegated: L***** O***** and Southend. Now, with luck, he will be right with his first pick. Especially in the light of the vandalism the Football League have allowed to be inflicted on Brisbane Road, leaving us with just a ludicrous 450 tickets for the December 7 visit. But Southend to go down? He is 'avin' a larf, isn't he?

Unfortunately, it seems you will struggle to find anyone tipping us to do much in 2004-05 and Waddle's crystal ball gazing was merely the top of the tip of the iceberg. The News of the World reckoned we would end up 17th, the Racing Post claimed we were 'unlikely to enter the promotion fray' and one United fans website had 6% of those polled claiming we were 'doomed'. Normally, we would respond: Total garbage! As we do each week in response to the deranged digs at SUFC of SunSport's C** U camp follower and fixed odds fumbler Andy 'Shot Totty' Totham, the man who is to punters' pockets what Frank Spencer is to DIY.

But then came the opening game against Cheltenham. And what a boot in the gonads that proved to be. Leaks at the back, precious little punch up front and off the pace in midfield. All against a side who hardly struck as a potential force to threaten the top three. A fact backed up by defeats in their following two home matches. We don't want another season of consolidation. But that, in the light of a selection of subsequent performances which have dumped us in an undesirable 20th position, may well be the best we can hope for unless our forwards start rattling the rigging. Mr G declared after the 'fortress' was breached by the Robins: "Two words come to mind. 'Vu' and 'deja'." Certainly some early signs suggest our devotion could be tested before that bright new dawn finally blossoms before us. The warcy simply has to remain: Onwards and upwards! With fingers tightly crossed.

RON has shown with Steve Wignall that he is not a patient man if he senses failings on the pitch and his Cheltenham programme notes hinted nothing has changed. He declared: "I believe we have the right combination of management, with youth and experience, to bring entertaining football and success to Southend United (no pressure for Steve Tilson then!)" If we do not hit a worthwhile winning streak fairly smartly, we could easily find out whether that throwaway remark is tongue-in-cheek or not. Tilly's Cheltenham notes said he reckons you need 10 to 15 games to tell how things are going to go. Most veteran Blues watchers would say 10 to

15 minutes. It is probably somewhere in between. Just as long as at the end of the season it is proved conclusively that, despite his Mystic Meg on Vieira, the sausage stuffer does not really have a clue what he is talking about.....

It will probably not be a good idea, either, to start getting all misty-eyed about the LDV Vans Trophy trip to Colchester. In our present position, that is rather like the jaunt to the Hamsters – a distraction. And, this season, I sense a not very important one when our No1 target has to be at least the play-offs.

The committee, in much truncated form due to holidays, met last on August 2 and August 23.

First off, a big welcome aboard to our new treasurer, Darren Posnack. This is a key position within the Trust and Darren looks to have all the credentials to keep our financial position as sound, if not sounder, than under previous incumbent Craig Fillary.

The Meet The Blues Day report saw Paul Yeomanson delighted to announce a merchandise take of £400.75 from the sale of badges, pennants, t-shirts, mugs etc. He described that as ‘way up’ on last season. ‘Other sales’ also brought in £125.65, while Alan Perry’s ever-reliable raffle netted £177. In all it added up to £703.40 to be banked – an increase of 165% on 2003. Our vice-chairman Paul FitzGerald described it as ‘a successful day’, but felt the club had set the date for the event too late in pre-season and queried some aspects of the organisation. Attendance looked to be down on last year, when it was held two weeks earlier, chiefly as more people were away. PY also revealed 11 new members were signed up, plus nine recruits to the SJS and 12 renewals. Solid. Inquiries revealed that the MTBD date delay was due to the club’s involvement in Essex cricket week in Southend over the weekend that would normally have been set aside. A 5-a-side tournament is apparently on the cards for 2005.

The raffle winners were: 1 Lou Lewis (Mark Gower package); 2 Pipa Herbert (£30); 3 Tony Sills (signed football); 4 Sarah Bunclark (bottle of wine); 5 Cathy Miles (bottle of wine). Thanks to all those who took part.

PY and Kevin Feasey fronted at what seems to have been a very successful Sponsors Evening on August 3. This occasion saw Paul obtain a Mark Warren signed shirt courtesy of our 2003-04 sponsorship, though whether it was the original was debateable, and he is due to receive another signed football for our links with John Stannard. Mark Gower revealed how pleased he was the Trust was sponsoring him this season and said he would be happy to attend a function, if available, and do a Q & A. He can be accommodated on September 7 (details to follow). John Stannard again expressed his appreciation of what we are doing to make his job easier on the physio front and wants us to get some pictures of the equipment we have purchased to go with an info piece for our website so members can see just how their subscriptions have been put to work. His future wish-list includes a top-notch rowing machine, treadmill, exercise bike and cross trainer. Brian Dear’s buffet was rumoured to be very tasty and the Beaver gave the impression he partook lustily of the spread on offer while the opportunity was there.

OUR white and yellow Trust polo shirt has been such a sell-out success that a new one is being planned in dark blue with silver logo and ‘Shrimpers Trust’ embroidered on the sleeve. Mk II should be available in around a month. If you want one of the first edition, there are one or two small and medium left. Our ‘Shrimpers With Attitude’ T-shirts are proving a good seller as well. Contact Paul Y (details below) or see him at the Trust Stand in the Shrimpers Bar on match days to make a purchase.

Wondering where the club DVD of last season’s action is? Join the gang. ‘Production problems’, it seems. The Trust’s verdict? Sack the producers.

Face-feeders should get this date marked down in their diaries immediately. Wednesday, September 15. That is when the next SUSCT Curry Night is scheduled for Le Raj restaurant near The Elms in Leigh-on-Sea. Paul FitzGerald has done all the taste testing and arranging once again and, at a miserly £10 a head, there is no excuse for anything but a full house on the night. If you want to book, ring Paul on 01702-478373 or contact PY. It is hoped to use the occasion to hand over the last takings from Ron Pountney’s testimonial to the man himself. The original date of the 8th was switched as Sven’s motley crew will be doing World Cup battle in Poland that evening.

The race night plans are still being formulated, with some slight bewilderment that the MC could be a ‘man with two names’. And I don’t mean Jeff Allen. Meanwhile Quiz Night devotees can begin rejoicing as the first brain basher of the new season is scheduled for the Shrimpers Club on Saturday, October 16 – with luck, after Swansea

have been despatched pointless back across the border. To book a table – and it would be very nice to see some new faces in evidence – just contact PY on 01702-302373 or p.yeomanson@blueyonder.co.uk or Alan Parry on 01702-476458 or alanperry4@hotmail.com There will also be an auction for a signed team photo, a signed ball and, steady girls, a Drewe away shirt.

Crazy Golf enthusiasts were supposed to have gathered on August 26 at the venue on Southend seafront. But what should have been a fun evening for families, especially the kids, proved a bit of a washout through lack of participants. Don't tell me – Emmerdale was on the goggle-box (rpt).

Our membership secretary has been investigating bringing in a new laminated card for members and, thanks to the financial support of Wyndham Plastics, this should be coming to fruition very shortly. PY has also – and not for the first time – been working on a substantial erection! But on this occasion it is the Trust's perimeter board, now visible atop the East Stand.

MEMBERSHIP has, once again, hit a new peak of 1,134, comprising 960 full members (41 life) and 174 SJS. Don't forget that life membership option. It is £75 for those signing up with access to e-mail and £100 for anyone still reliant on the Post Office. Remember, PY is the man to contact on all membership issues – joining, rejoining, queries etc – with secretary Terry Jeffreys the man to buzz should you be having any newsletter receipt problems either by mail or e-mail. Terry is on 01268-523974 or terry.jeffreys@btinternet.com

NEW LIFE MEMBERS: Irene Bashford, Trevor Bashford, Shane Chapman, W N Murphy.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS SINCE NEWSLETTER 60: R Andrews, S Andrews, Arthur Ashton, Russell Bignell, Paul Blackshaw, Graham Boosey, Wayne Burrage, Stuart Byford, John Byford, Stephen Carter, Lee Connolly, Terry Cook, Phil Cottrell, Terry Craven, Peter Darke, Tom Dixon, Phil Eastell, Matt Edmundson, Tracy Eglinton, Mike Freeman, Jason Galliano, Louis Greene, Richard Gunn, Susan Hamilton, Steven Henderson, Jacqueline Hill, Colin Hutton, Stephen Jackson, Simon Kirby, Mark Kohlbeck, Derek Laws, Kevin Lloyd, Simon McCoy, Trevor McKenna, Joan Neale, Dwayne Newcombe, Rex Palmer, Martin Paterson, Gina Perryman, Michael Polkinghorn, Simon Pope, Lorraine Posnack, Chris Potts, Neil Purser, Bryan Record, M.V. Reed, Jeff Rice, Brian Rose, Michael Shawyer, Martin Sheern, Colin Shulver, G.J. Smith, Russell Taylor, D.A. Tyldesley, Greg Ward, Chris Warner, Gary Warren.

IF YOUR MEMBERSHIP IS DUE FOR RENEWAL, PLEASE SORT IT OUT WITH PY ASAP.

The next Trust travel features the popular jaunt to Rushden and Diamonds (September 4), a ground not visited of late in Notts County (September 18) and then the LDV return to the apology of a venue that is Layabout Road (September 28). Our sun-bronzed travel tsar Chris Berry is back in situ from foreign climes on 01702-558978 or 07703-898698 (no texts) to take your bookings.

Alan Perry reports that Quid A Goal now has 122 individuals pledging, compared to 144 last season. There was a worrying claim that Ron has yet to front up with any cash. Paul Fitz promised to investigate this disturbing rumour. Mike Davies is backing Kevin Maher at £5 per goal and is so confident of a bumper crop from our captain he has already sent in £25 in advance. £5 a booking and we would certainly have been in the money! To play your part, contact Alan as above, complete the form in the matchday programme or go to the relevant section on the Trust website. The take so far, for obvious reasons, stood at a monumental £95.50 after the trip to Bristol.

SAD to say, there are still a few who have not yet, despite Alan's frequent requests, handed over what they pledged to QAG for 2002-03 to supplement the current haul of £3,093. A pledge is basically a debt of honour, with plain non-payment simply not an option. So the Trust would be grateful if the following would pay what they owe, especially the recalcitrant majority whose debt is *less than £10*: Jack Kershaw, Matt Overall, Lee and Adam McKenna, Clive Burton, Ben Herbert, Kevin Talbot, Dave Evans, Darren Gibbinson, Martin Bessant, Michael Goodchild and Peter Wallis. Continued withholding of cash may next lead to my having to reveal each individual debt. So come on all, save any further embarrassment and do the decent thing.

On the 100 Club front, Alan has 70 direct debit mandates up and running. The more mandates that come in and the more members that sign up, the more the prize fund will increase. So don't just shrug your shoulders, get involved by contacting Alan by telephone or e-mail as above. The first weekly prize of £20 went to Richard Coxell,

the second of £25 to Peter Brock, the third of £27.50 to Tim Wilson and the fourth of £27.50 to Penrith resident Geoff Manning, meaning they are already quids in. *You could be too!*

The Trust is again running the Shrimpers Bar on match days and evenings. Remember the procedure now is that members get in hassle-free as long as they show their membership card (tell PY if you have lost, eaten, destroyed etc yours and get a replacement), non-members MUST sign the book and visiting supporters are obliged to sign in and pay a small toll of 50p. SUFC TV is up and running inside and is clearly a popular innovation. *One person you will not be seeing there in the near future is the Trust member who has just been banned for his less than appropriate behaviour at Upton Park – behaviour that left a number of other members anxious to ‘discuss’ the matter with him.*

It seems that the Trust’s Player of the Month trophy is such a meritorious piece of silverware that no less than three presented to players have ‘disappeared’. It was agreed that in future there should be a trophy handed over on the day, but that it should then be swiftly recovered and a smaller memento given to the winner to keep.

The football club have again been getting heavy with those elements in the West Stand who insist on standing up at certain junctures of matches, while appearing to go soft on visiting supporters who do likewise. So why don’t SUFC take a daring lead? Instead of issuing Dalek-like orders to ‘O-bey...the...ground...rules’, tell the League it is clear fans want to stand and it is time to do something about letting them. This would be a thoroughly visionary move, so our illustrious leaders and ‘heads of security’ are bound to pick up the baton. Aren’t they?

Kevin Feasey, our cinematic superstar, would appreciate offers of help to film some of our away fixtures. If you want to volunteer, get a message to Paul Y and he will pass on your details.

START saving for the Christmas Draw. Yes, amazingly that time of the year will soon be with us again – and so will your tickets to sell. The draw should be v Mansfield on Tuesday, December 28, with prizes of £1,000, £500, £250, champagne and various other assorted baubles.

Couple of snippets pre-minutes from the liaison committee meeting of August 11. The United centenary date has been set for August 1st 2006. The Trust’s trio of Terry Jeffreys, Paul Yeomanson and Robert Craven will be joined on the centenary committee by Helen Giles, Ross Hill and Brian Wheeler from the club. We also celebrate 50 years at the Hall in 2005 and Helen Giles will be contacting Norwich City, our first opponents at our Victoria Avenue home, to see about a pre-season anniversary match. Perhaps Delia could knock up a few pies at the same time...

Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A, Q & A

*On the subject of the much sought after Q & A, it appears there are one or two issues that Ron would rather not discuss, especially with regard to the ongoing Fossetts arrangements. We will be trying to resolve this, but, whatever happens, **Tilly and Paul Brush will be in attendance in the Shrimpers Club to answer all your posers at a MEMBERS ONLY get-together on Tuesday, September 7 hosted by Brian Wheeler. Kick-off 7 for 7.30pm sharp!** Don’t waste the opportunity to get answers to the questions you feel are important. Our AGM has also been pencilled in for the night of Thursday October 28, so it is possible there might be a bit of a forum after that as well. We will know nearer the time.*

Director Derek Wilshire will be treated to the Blues ‘matchday experience’ as lived by the masses on September 25 v Kidderminster. It is hoped Frank Van Wezel will be able to make that date as well.

Our set of pre-season friendlies hardly set the world alight, did they? I am afraid my attendance record was zip and it really did not look as if I missed a great deal – especially judging by the moans and groans I heard from one or two of those who bitterly regretted forking out £12 for the 0-0 non-event with Brighton. So we will do no more than gloss over what occurred in the wake of the false dawn of the devastation of East Thurrock.....

July 19: SUFC 2 Canvey Island 1. A Kevin Maher penalty, after we were informed Wayne Gray would be Mr Spot-Kicks this season, put us in front and Wayne himself added the second to leave the Canvey convoy heading back to camp with their tails between their legs.

July 21: SUFC 0 Millwall 2. An amazing 2,302 turned up for this one and may well have been asking why at the final whistle. I would not put a penny in the pocket of the taxi trasher out of principle.

July 24: Dagenham and Redbridge 3 SUFC 3. “Sloppy”, said Tilly, after seeing a three-goal lead disappear down the gurgler in the final 15 minutes. Drewe and a double from the Gray man did our damage.

July 26: Billericay 1 SUFC 1. Huffing and puffing against a team from the foot of the Ryman Premier. But at the end of the day, so what? Our scorer was Drewe.

July 28: SUFC 0 Brighton 0. Lewis Hunt rattled the bar but not a lot to get overly excited about otherwise. Almost 1,000 had seen the light after the Millwall ‘match’, thus a gate of 1,354. No result on teletext or in any national daily next morning, so it must have been pretty bad if we wanted to keep it that secret.

July 31: Grays 0 Southend 0. That Grays club bar I mentioned in Number 60 must have been drunk dry as we failed to find the onion bag of a side so hard up for a keeper they were giving Embo a trial.

Dagenham was about the furthest we travelled pre-season. No American tour for us, like M***** U*****, Liverpool, Chelsea, Everton etc. Just one thing, though. When Fergie and Co start to moan about being tired after a couple of duff results or when the Christmas programme comes round, remember to treat their pitiful whines with the contempt they deserve.

Overall, our pre-season build-up hardly said to the world: League One here we come! But league performances are the only indicator of prospects that count and the story on that front so far is ‘have to do better’.

SOUTHEND 0 CHELTENHAM 2 (H, League Two, 7/8/04): The pre-match Robbie Williams was a fake and surely this was not the real Southend United. The number of ‘Shrimpers With Attitude’ on the pitch was precious few. A pair of object lessons in how not to defend by Andy Edwards and Nicky Nicolau saw us two-down inside 27 minutes and, apart from a Mark Gower shot almost on half-time, the Robins’ back-line went pretty much untroubled for the remaining 63. Trust-sponsored Gower was about the one player who could claim to have done ‘OK’ on the day. What depressed me most was seeing Carl Pettefer, supposed to be on the right of midfield, constantly moving inside to where he feels more comfortable and leaving a vast unfilled chasm of space down the flank which we could have utilised more fruitfully. Instead, not for the first time, we appeared to favour far more the ‘lump down the middle’. To cap an inglorious afternoon, Tes replaced said Carl on the hour and then, almost on the whistle, earned himself a red card after a somewhat unfortunate two-footed tackle verdict. He looked to have played the ball first. Kevin Maher stupidly got involved and was lucky not to go as well. It was all such a blow after so much pre-match optimism that we could repeat last season’s opening day demolition of the visitors and show our, whisper it, promotion credentials. The talk of a 9,000 crowd was shown to be the pipe-dream it always was as 5,332 piled in for the Trust-sponsored Blues Family Bonanza Day. Our box contained a veritable cornucopia of guests – Paul and Jenny Yeomanson, Robert Craven, Thomas Berry, Hugh Cumberland, Steve Lowes, Brian and Sam Wall, Paul and Glen Marshall, Lee Tanner and his grandfather George, Peter and Billy Brock, Bob Mays, Roy Rice, Paul and Jon-Paul FitzGerald, Darrell Adlington and Darren Roberts. All enjoyed the opportunity to see how the other half watches, plus, of course, the dished up double buffet. The family fun did not kick off until 2.30. Warbler Lucinda Rhodes, not a household name in my household, kicked off with ‘Hanging on the Telephone’. You felt she should perhaps have been hanging from a telephone a little later as she became the latest of many to murder Led Zeppelin’s Whole Lotta Love. Any chance of Annie Lennox next time?

LINCOLN 1 SOUTHEND 1 (A, League Two, 10/8/04): Geoffrey and Ron arrived in a brand new £30,000 Mercedes 240 CLK coupe and, presumably, headed straight for the Sincil Bank directors’ entertainment suite. Travellers on the SUSCT coach had to make do with the likes of the King Neptune Fish and Kebab emporium, 25 yards past the Adult licensed sex shop on the main road into Lincoln – though I am sure the fodder was much better. Nothing quite sets you up for 90 minutes of Blues action like a Pukka chicken and mushroom pie and chips, even if I did make the mistake of topping it off inside the ground with what was described as a cup of coffee. Regrettably, this foul-tasting liquid bore no resemblance to any watered granules I have ever drunk. At least it was cheaper than anything on offer at the abysmal Grantham Services, where new meaning is given to the

phrase 'rip-off'. Everyone was looking for a considerable improvement on the opening day and, with Mark Bentley and Drewe restored to the side, overall there were indeed a few pluses in a feisty encounter. Lincoln is usually a tough place to get a point, Drewe held the ball up as well as I have ever seen, midfield looked livelier and Wayne Gray put away our 'dodgy' penalty with aplomb. But our rearguard still looked vulnerable, as we showed again we do not like the ball bent round the back; we registered no attempts on target in the second half; daft dissent is already costing us needless yellow cards; and Bart, as I warned in Number 60, mixed some good saves with a fumble through the fingers and a bizarre attempted volleyed clearance that had 250 hearts in mouths. For our first away game we played in our home shirt. Why? As strange as Lincoln telling travel supremo CB to check Teletext to see if the game had survived the day's deluges. From a coach? Funniest moment of the return trip had to be during the all-male coach party's viewing of the video 'The Girl Next Door'. As the very tasty Elisha Cuthbert of '24' fame insisted on exhibiting her lithe physique in a particularly flimsy piece of lingerie, you could have heard a pin drop..... Some questions were asked pre-trip about the £20 journey price. As was proved, compared to anything else on offer it was, as always, a bargain. Try the train if you don't believe me.

ROCHDALE 2 SOUTHEND 0 (A, League Two, 14/8/04): We went one-down from 25 yards after a mere three minutes, they had Leo Bertos sent off (somehow Sky announced it was Mark Gower) and we responded by conceding a questionable penalty that put the game beyond us. Tilly was left to make a familiar complaint against the referee. But that refuge usually conceals more worrying realities. As he admitted: "I felt that if we could have scored we could have gone on to win." Trouble is, we couldn't score and didn't look much like doing so. A problem that if not resolved in Constantine-style quite shortly could have fatal consequences in a number of areas. We hit bottom at one stage during the afternoon, but 'recovered' to 22nd. C** U larging it around the top of League One does not make things any easier. For our second away game we played in a red shirt. Why? Have we not got a bona-fide away strip or is that light blue shirt a figment of the imagination of all those who have splashed out far more than it is worth to buy it?

SOUTHEND 0 CAMBRIDGE 0 (H, League Two, 21/8/04): Tilly said in the build-up we had been playing well and making lots of chances. Which made a lot of United fans apparently delusional, as I think it would be fair to say probably the majority had not exactly seen recent efforts in quite that light. This was better, to a degree. But against a powder-puff Cambridge, whose first shot on target almost stole the points in the 91st minute and who had a peroxide-blond Danny Webb looking as ineffectual as ever, it was still nowhere near good enough. Make that four league games and no goals from open play – and counting. We had some bizarre Subbuteo figures on our training tops. And a Subbuteo team might well have offered more threat at either end in the first 25 minutes. For after Mark Gower had sent a right-foot drive winging over the North Stand and off towards the Priory Park traffic lights inside 30 seconds, the two line-ups appeared to have signed a non-aggression pact. Then, from one of a number of dangerous Nicky Nicolau corners, Mark Bentley rattled the bar from 10 yards with a left-foot special. It would probably have gone in had it not crashed off the cranium of a hapless Wayne Gray en route. Mark, a midfielder remember, then put a six-yard header wide from another NN corner and shot past after being put through by Kevin Maher. Oh that one of our strikers looked as threatening. Drewe's work-rate cannot disguise the fact his league scoring record is 'inadequate' to put it mildly. And what are we going to do with our skipper, who picked up yet another insane yellow card after he would not stop arguing in the usual vain attempt to get the referee to recognise he had made an iffy decision? Kev, the message is simple. SHUT IT! Tell him, Tilly. Wayne Gray saw probably our best second-half effort blocked by Cambridge's 17-year-old keeper. Sympathy for the lads at the finish, but it left only Chester keeping us off the bottom.

WEST HAM 2 SOUTHEND 0 (A, Carling Cup 1st rd, 24/8/04): A novelty match that was really utterly meaningless in comparison to our now vital bread and butter. Not that we didn't give it a good go before bowing out, though it is clear the Carling Cup and Blues simply don't mix. A bizarre coach trip via Thurrock services and a too early exit off the A13 (no show Aaron Bloxham!) saw us dumped at Upton Park with an hour to spare. No problem finding something to eat – virtually every second shop in the area is a takeaway of some differing ethnicity. United sold around 3,750 tickets out of an attendance of 16,910 for this game. The majority went to the loyal, decent hardcore support. But clearly a number of the rest were snapped up by the rabble of feeble-minded, loud-mouthed, trailer trash plankton who enjoy attaching themselves to games like this as quasi-SUFC supporters and then make attempting to watch the action a thoroughly unedifying experience for those around them. Many of us were disappointed the police failed to throw out a few more. With the current pitch layout, some sections of our seating at one end had a job seeing anything anyway. We were a goal down in 10 minutes. Nigel Reo-Coker knifed through the midfield, laid the ball off to Marlon Harewood and 'bang' from 12 yards. Yet

our United never gave up and played some decent stuff at times, especially in the second half, against a Hammers line-up admittedly missing half a dozen first-choicers. Drewe blew a simple-looking six-yard header, then Mark Bentley and Kevin Maher went close before Dudders failed with a pull-back that could have put in Drewe and MB blasted in a shot which looked to have found the net but ended up as a corner. One last MB effort was blocked clear, picked up by Harewood, who raced away and rattled a 91st-minute decider past the Bart man. Very cruel. But until we find that goal-grabber, nothing is likely to change. Still no sign of our away shirt, while Kevin Maher looks intent on an early lay-off in the wake of his latest yellow card (for a foul this time).

BRISTOL ROVERS 2 SOUTHEND 1 (A, League Two, 27/8/04): The first of our Friday night follies ended with Rovers, under the charming Ian Atkins, going top and Blues hitting rock bottom. Needless to say, there was no chance of a report in any of the dailies. League Two matches played on any day other than a Saturday simply do not compute. Thanks to Soccer AM, I caught the goals and both those we conceded looked as if they might have been better dealt with by our back line. Adam Barrett put away a very nice 71st-minute header from Duncan Jupp's cross to give us that first 'open play' strike and it was just disappointing we could not have held out for another four minutes. The overall verdict from a sample of those in attendance seemed to be that we deserved better. Then again, how often have we said that. At least we were off the foot of the table inside 24 hours thanks to Darlo stuffing Chester, whose front-line is being led by a certain Kevin Rapley. Sky blue away kit? Do we have one or not?

SOUTHEND 2 MACCLESFIELD 1 (H, League Two, 30/8/04): Macc's perennial rubbing rags arrived at the Hall unbeaten under boss Brian Horton. But we were so confident of victory we had even had some new nets put up for the occasion. And Trust director of cinema Kevin Feasey deserved nothing less than a three-point reward for braving the downpours from his perch. Three minutes gone and the Silkmen's giant No 8 Jon Parkin, League Two's leading scorer, rattled the bar from 20 yards after brushing aside Adam Barrett. To be fair, it was Adam's one error of the game. We played some enterprising football without really creating much until the key moment of the first half – Duncan Jupp suddenly started to find some players in blue shirts instead of white. A Dudders charge-down rolled inches wide. Tes, in from the start and looking his most effective for ages, headed just past a post and then scuffed a clear opportunity. Dudders volleyed into the side-netting after a bit of glorious interplay between Tes and Mark Gower. Macc had to crack – and did three minutes from the break as Adam Barrett popped up to nod in Kevin Maher's free-kick. We were comfy and cruisin' – until the Bartman intervened. But don't say I didn't warn you! What should have been a routine hoof upfield was mishit low and skidded straight to Macc's Dan Whitaker, who looked up and rattled the ball back into the bottom corner past our bemused Dutchman from 45 yards. Unbelievable. It could have shattered us and from that moment on Bart went into Embo-mode. But three minutes later goal machine Barrett bundled in a Maher corner and we hung on to the end. Hallelujah, brother! Drewe came on as a late sub, doubtless feeling the benefit of a recent 'laying on of hands'. I was left wondering about the first name of eccentric ref Mr J Singh. Some of our supporters clearly mistakenly felt it was Jesus – because after most of his decisions, especially his failure to recognise a back-pass, a lot of them were yelling 'Oh, Jesus!' Finally, guess what. Our skipper went into the book for dissent again.

TALKING of referees, be warned. Joe Ross and Trevor Kettle, the Laurel and Hardy of Football League officials, will definitely be washing up at the Hall at some time during the campaign as they are on the designated League Two list. Perhaps someone there could tell us 'why' and 'how'.

If you had a season ticket on order, I hope it turned up on time. A touch of distribution panic seemed to ensue from HQ but it appeared to get sorted. Having paid £1.50 for packing and postage on top of the £305 East Greens ticket price, as demanded by the powers that be, I was interested to see that the postage stamps on my recorded delivery were worth 93p. Let's be generous and say the season-ticket sized envelope cost 7p and it all adds up to £1. Ergo, was I right in thinking that the other unaccounted for 50p contributed to another welcome little profit perk for the United balance sheet? Multiply that by 1,400 or so and it seems it is no wonder they no longer want us to go down to the club and collect them for *nothing* like we used to be able to do.* Even worse, the postie knocked to deliver my ticket while I was out, so I could not sign for the recorded delivery and had to make a special trip down to the sorting office. (*The official explanation was: 'administration costs').

While our back four continues to look occasionally vulnerable, it seems Hall security is hardly like Fort Knox after another ludicrous *five* break-ins. These have resulted in the usual theft and, of course, wanton vandalism. If you know anyone who might be responsible for these wilful acts, contact the club or the Southend constabulary

immediately. Even with insurance, such incidents are guaranteed to cost United needless losses. Anyone thought of a few strategically-placed man-traps? Whoever can shop the guilty is on for some free season tickets and kit from United as a reward.

DID you get your bet on Blues to go up? I risked £8ew at 33-1 but could have got 50s after the Cheltenham defeat and 80s after Rochdale. Helen Allen, who still has a few bob left from her £500 2003 Trust end-of-season draw triumph, laid out £10 on promotion and £10 on the title, though she recognised by 3.27pm on August 7 that this may have been a tad over-exuberant. Yet these pale into insignificance against two bets of £1,000 and £3,000 that I know have been placed at one local bookie at 33s on Blues to win League Two. Any more major wagers out there? I'll be happy to publicise them.

Can there be any more revolting sights than men in shorts? I spotted an horrendous example from among the SUFC brethren partaking of the Old Westcliffians lunch in the Old Southendians and Southchurch clubhouse on the Friday of Essex cricket week at Southchurch Park. The combo of white t-shirt, navy blue knee-huggers and brown sandals screamed "aaaaaarrrrrgh" to all who witnessed it. The portly frame also hinted at a spot of excess when it comes to the partaking of corporate hospitality. My lips must, of course, remain sealed as to this gentleman's identity. Suffice to say I shall be running vigilant checks to see if a more abstemious lifestyle is adopted once the cut and thrust of the new season is in full swing.

Also, fleetingly, this meeting of some of the town's most expert beer and wine connoisseurs saw THE man break cover. Deep Throat, whose finger is permanently on the pulse of life at the Hall, informed me via a trusted intermediary that 'All is quiet' for the moment at Ron's House of Fun. As this is DT's most optimistic report for some time, we can only hope that the situation continues to give him so little cause for concern.

Moving now to the continent and spotted in a bar in Kefalonia, one of the most popular current Greek hot-spots, was a United first-team shirt allegedly donated by Kevin Maher's brother. Another corner of a foreign field that is forever Blue.

In Where Are They Now corner, Dean Austin, having snubbed the prestigious Centre of Excellence post, has washed up as boss of Farnborough. Last weekend's 7-0 drubbing by Carlisle would suggest Deano has his work cut out. Martin Carruthers and Jason Lee – now at his 12th club – will be feeding off Gazza at Boston, Peter Johnson is moving to Cyprus and Leo did not take long to notch up his first Oxford red card. As for Jay Smith, a really big miss for us at present, he is due back in the blue shirt by November having just had the metal plate removed from his damaged leg.

Former Trust traveller Tom Dosser is currently turning out for L***** O***** reserves after playing for Great Wakering last season.

United's website continues to show improvement under the well-known media manager now in charge of it, while our own Netmeister Paul Yeomanson is ensuring the Trust slot on the web is equally up to date with all the details our members require. To see what is what, just head for www.shrimperstrust.co.uk

PAUL Napper noted recently that Charlton will be erecting a statue of their great old England keeper Sam Bartram at The Valley as part of their centenary celebrations and wondered who might be mounted on a plinth for the Blues do in 2006. Any suggestions? And don't all say Vic.....

Keith Holmes might be a candidate. Keith, who died recently aged 71, was Blues' club secretary for 18 years and put his heart and soul into the job during that time. He should have left the post on a high. Instead, Anton Johnson ought to hang his head in shame over the way Keith departed from the Hall in 1985. It did not need Sherlock Holmes to pinpoint the lone guilty party in the the Case of the Missing Christmas Club Cash.

Matt Wells, Trust member No 1, contacted me re the Friday night football fiasco to chip in his 10-pen'orth. He said: 'I totally concur with your comments in Newsletter 60. I live in Cambridge and as a season ticket holder feel aggrieved that, as well as hitting me with a hike in prices, the club is now curtailing my ability to attend games which I have paid to see. I welcome the occasional floodlit Friday (against local opposition) but this is taking the p**s. Obviously I don't mind travelling and will get to the games come hell or high water. But the M11/M25 on a

Friday night (after a day at work as well) can be hard going and means I will have to leave work early, take leave etc. Also sympathy to away fans that make the trip – or indeed have to miss the game.’ Couldn’t agree more, Matt. I have a sneaky feeling your comments will be read in high places, so don’t despair. Just as long as someone in the upper echelons is alive to the reality of the situation and not caught in a fantasy timewarp on this issue like Tilly seems to have been.

As SUSCT membership burgeons worldwide, August 2 saw two of the faithful cross swords for the first time in 33 years. Jamie Reeves, Singapore’s star pundit on English football, and Professor Alan Golding, American poetry guru at the University of Louisville in Kentucky, met up with fellow former Old Westcliffian Richard Coxell at the Crooked Billet in Leigh-on-Sea for their first night of reminiscing since 1971. Work kept me away, unfortunately, but it’s always good to see the Trust gospel being spread wider and wider. By the way, Al, I’ve sorted out your £10 membership subscription for the next two years. Pay me in January!

THE opportunity to sponsor a Blue Belle has had Mr I all of a quiver. Sorry, mate. Ginger has already been snapped up. For £250 (plus VAT, of course) you get, among other treats, your favourite’s shirt. Is that with the Blue Belle still in it?

How about this for a league table?

1. Arsenal
2. Chelsea
3. Southend Utd
4. Barcelona
5. Valencia
6. Bayern Munich
7. Roma
8. Werder Bremen
- 9 AC Milan
10. Porto

What an awesome line-up. But, believe it or not, it’s not the latest UEFA rankings. It’s an indication of how English fans are being bled dry when it comes to season tickets. UEFA looked at the cheapest available at the top two clubs in each major European league and I have helped them with the Blues connection. Arsenal charge £800, Chelsea £520, Blues £250 and, incredibly, the rest are all cheaper. Barcelona £182, Valencia £178, Bayern £174, Roma £158, Werder £127, AC £103 and European champs Porto £67. A

Premier League spokesman said by way of explanation: “Waffle, waffle, waffle, excuses, excuses, excuses.” Ron declared: “Well, everyone knows we give better value than those seven clubs below us, don’t they?” (Or I am sure he would have done.....)

Sven, Palios, the FA, what a complete shambles. Certainly the theory that the serial trouser-dropper might have lied over his relationship with FA femme fatale Faria Alam will have come as no surprise to Newsletter readers. I outlined in Number 60 Sven’s well-proven taste for a porky (as well as a porking!) as revealed in the old codswallop he fed us about Becks’ injury in the build-up to Euro 2004. No shock either that Becks and the lads are standing firmly behind the Swede with a need. England’s genial simpleton of a skipper is almost running a rope-a-dope the way he has Sven at his Becks and call. Meanwhile, the rest of the lads are happy to join in as membership of their cosy little club is clearly under threat from no one – and a 3-0 win over the under-achievers of Ukraine, with Becksy finding the onion bag, means all in the garden is once more rosy. At least until the World Cup qualifiers. Yet with David Davies still in the pack tipped to be the FA’s new chief executive, now Palios has picked up his pants and scarpered, who knows. Sven might well have a contract for life before we realise. And with Posh preppers again, who will have the guts to question Becks’ captaincy credentials further in the near future? Nice ‘work’ if you can get it. Isn’t that right, Tord?

So there’s another month’s-worth, or nearer five weeks actually. If you’ve any comments, observations, info, gossip or other pertinent points to pass on to me, I am on nigel.rickard@the-sun.co.uk

NR (30/8)

PS1 Have you ever had a phobia about flying and conquered it? If so, you might be able to help one of our Trust members by passing on how you achieved it. Contact me on the e-mail address.

PS2 Lee Hughes / just desserts. And already they are saying he could be out in a year.....