

Nov 2002

AGM 2003

What a strange AGM. Hard to put your finger on what made it different, but it was kind of...normal. The Board were defensive of course, but in a slightly more considerate way and gave some serious answers. There were a few oddballs in the audience, but even they mostly made sense. So that's the end of the article. Eh - you want to know what happened? Oh all right then.

This year Sir Roy Gardner sent his more competent twin brother or he'd had a personality makeover since last time. He made a bit more effort to chair the meeting properly, had a good stab at deflecting trouble and kept his gaffes down to single figures. The most cringe-worthy moment was when he got into a slanging match with a large section of the audience who began shouting that a question hadn't been answered. He said it had, they shouted it hadn't, he said it had and we only needed Widow Twanky to yell "Behind you!" to get the full pantomime effect.

There was the now obligatory video with lots of clips of the team performing miracles overlaid with some highlights of the business side. The subliminal message wasn't hard to catch. The accompanying soundtrack was by Darkness, the new kings of rock and someone questioned whether it was Gardner or Gill who was up with the latest music? The end of the video was greeted with a smattering of muted, embarrassed applause and Gardner began his introductory speech. There were thanks to Kenyon, Harverson and to Martin Edwards our new honorary president and chief toilet monitor (I might have made up the last bit). We had a warning that the Board wouldn't comment on the Rio case, but there was another subtle change in tone as Gardner said they'd try to answer as many questions as they could. He concluded with the information that the club has £28.6 million in cash, which sounded like they'd got a savings tin stashed away under the bed

David Gill was up next and he started his speech with loads of nice comments about how important we fans are and that the core business "has been and will remain football". Rather a change from last year's mantra of "Not just a football club." If he lives up to a fraction of the sentiment I might stop being nasty about him. He told us some interesting facts too. Nike sold 2.6 million replica United shirts – note he said Nike sold them, not United. That's because we sold them our merchandising rights didn't we? Anyway, Real Madrid only sold 200,000 and Gill joked that they were only expecting to increase that to 500,000 with Beckham. I bet the Board wouldn't sneeze at a 150% increase in our turnover. In the meantime 1.6 million razors were sold in Japan on the back of a promotion with United and Disney are about to set up schools to teach youngsters to play the United way. Seems we didn't need Eric Harrison for the class of '92, we should have used Mickey Mouse and Goofy.

Gems from the audience - not word for word, but here's the gist and apologies if any names are wrong.

- Oli Houston, SU Press Officer – Last year Gardner was brave to let Edwards out of the country unsupervised (of course he didn't behave) and this year he needs congratulating for his bravery in appointing him President. Asked had they sat Kenyon down to talk to him Gardner to gardener? Could our big brother shareholder, Jan de Mol, organise a Big Brother show to lock up our major shareholders until they decide what they want?
- Jonathan Michie, Chair of SU – just because you can increase ticket prices is not a good enough reason to do so. Kenyon told the SU meeting just before resigning that Roman Abramovich "seemed very pleasant".

- Rupert Harris – Asked what impediment could there be to letting shareholders and fans know what's being paid to agents? This became a common theme.
- Teresa Towle, SU Vice Chair – Appealed to shareholders not to sell out in a threatened takeover. Plagiarised an ex player (guess who?) when talking about the Board cosyng up to Americans by saying if you go trawling in the big seas you never know what you may dredge up. The elusive Malcolm Glazer got lots of mentions, but Gardner remains confident he'll meet the Board soon (yeah, right - maybe when he wants something).
- Steve Donaghue – One of you on that board must have a conscience.
- Johnny Fleck – Manchester United is a cash cow for the few, financed by the many.
- Peter Hargreaves – compared himself to the press, saying he'd never been invited in to OT for free tea and sandwiches and quipped "I can see you're shocked". Also unlike the press he's never tried to destabilise the club.
- JP – Will the Board make it a condition of Fergie's new contract that he drops the lawsuit against Magnier, one of our major shareholders?
- David Seagrave – A Blackpool fan holding United shares commented that when United had made nearly £30million profit and the cost would only be £2million, how could they justify not freezing prices?
- Adam Brown – Trafford council's risk assessment on standing hasn't been published, but he knows it concludes that persistent, passive standing is less dangerous than jumping up occasionally, like after a goal. You won't be surprised that the Board still won't support safe standing initiatives.
- Andy Terrington – was proud that this was his first attendance at the AGM but shocked that the Board side-stepped so many questions. Welcome to the AGM, Andy. He thought we should be leading the way, not hiding behind the law. Why not put information in the accounts and say we have nothing to hide?

No account of the AGM would be complete without recording the ramblings of the nutters, but that's difficult because this year there weren't many of them. One waffled on about Keane not being worth the money he gets (?) but then he had a point when he moved on to Barthez. Gill commented that circumstances changed and players weren't machines turning out widgets. Another guy on dodgy microphone 7 took ages to make his point, but we're not sure if it was the mike not working or his brain. He was only half a nutter because he finally made a good point about the risks associated with Vodafone's change of management.

One person managed to mention the state of the pies, but she's a well known proper idiot (sorry, Melissa) not the odd AGM type and she made a couple of telling comments too about Edwards' appointment not reflecting well on the club and the duty of the Board to protect their fans abroad. Another fool ruined quite a decent comment about the transfer negotiations for Ronaldinho by going on and on about how bad it was not to sign Damian Duff because he's a lifelong United fan – well so am I but they've never signed me either. The lack of nutters was surprising, but maybe supports my long-held theory that they were plc stooges, planted to deflect criticism. As this year was more grown-up in many ways, perhaps they could dispense with them.

The only real nutter was the guy from last year that Fergie justifiably called an idiot complaining that he's never received an apology. What a surprise! Overall, maybe Gill and Gardner are still the biggest nutters. Gill claimed he couldn't see what was wrong with United away fans being charged category A prices because we are the top product and Gardner said he wasn't aware Shareholders United were in favour of

the idea of a supporters' trust – what did he think they were for, decoration? After AGM day, you wonder what planet they live on for the other 364 days of the year.

Portia Vale