

final part of our
series on
based fan clubs of
the Premiership
ERNEST LUIS is
owned by the
Toon Army -
Newcastle United
Supporters Club.



TOON IN: The Singapore Newcastle United Supporters Club enjoying a drink and a cheer.

Picture/ CHOO CHWEE HUA

Toon Army wants you

In a land where hardly anything comes for free, you should note this: Membership to the Singapore Newcastle United Supporters Club is free — for now.

And it has been free ever since the club was officially recognised by Newcastle United last June.

Through the Internet, word-of-mouth and old-fashioned pasting of posters in shopping centres or even spotting of fans in the streets, the membership has now grown to 220.

It even has members from countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand.

Said the club's web-master John Hirst, 32, a retail consultant who has been working here for almost eight years: "When I first came here, I was looking for a couple of like-minded Geordies to watch games with.

"I set up the website in March last year.

"Slowly, we got more and more people in and now, there's a big group which is evenly mixed with locals and expats."

Two others, Tim Burdon and Mike Stokoe were soon roped in to help Hirst run the club.

Said Stokoe, 33, an IT consultant: "I've been here for one-and-a-half years and I myself

found them through the Internet, through their website. I met them to watch a game at the pub and from there on, I got more involved."

Burdon, 30, a systems analyst who has been working here for three years, never leaves home without his club name cards.

"We've never carried out any advertisements.

"So what we do is that whenever we see someone wearing a Newcastle jersey, we'll introduce ourselves and pass them our name cards and ask them to join us. It's back to basics.

"In fact, this is the first time we'll be getting coverage in the media, thanks to The New Paper.

GODSEND

"It's like a godsend for us and we hope more Newcastle fans out there reading this article will be encouraged to join us."

Added Hirst: "Newcastle I remember, was really popular among Singaporeans back in 1995 and '96 when Alan Shearer joined it.

"And now, the team is coming back up again under Bobby Robson.

"We hope the success of the team will draw those fans and more to come and join us in full

support."

The Toon Army is the nickname for the fans of Newcastle.

So where does the Singapore Toon Army gather to watch its favourite black-and-white striped team during live telecasts?

Father Flanagan's pub at the basement of Chijmes is the place to be at.

On Wednesday night, they were all there, drawing curious stares as they posed for The New Paper shouting, "Toon Army! Toon Army!"

But Stokoe was quick to add that the fan club is not just about having a beer at a pub on Saturday nights.

"We have young fans too, and we always arrange other activities, like a regular Sunday kickabout session.

"So Newcastle fans who can't come to meet us at Father Flanagan's can meet us for football games."

They play at the open field next to the Laguna hawker centre at the East Coast beach on Sundays at 3-5pm.

And the sessions are usually announced beforehand on the club's website.

So Newcastle fans, are you ready to sign up for the Singapore Toon Army...for free?

