

Trevor on ball to help

FUNDRAISING for the first ever sports college for children with special needs in Essex is finally underway.

Former West Ham and England footballer Trevor Brooking is lending his support for a golf tournament in June at the South Essex Golf and Country Club, in Herongate, to raise cash for the Endeavour School Sports College in Brentwood.

The entrance fee, which includes a running buffet and three-course dinner, is £60 a person.

A spokesman at the Hogarth Avenue school said: "This is just one of a number of fundraising events aimed at helping us with our project of providing a sports college in Essex for young people and children with learning difficulties.

"We would be grateful to any firm, organisation or school that would like to organise an event to help us raise cash for this very worthwhile cause."

AROUND £2,000 worth of power tools were stolen from a shed in Buxton Road, Grays during the weekend. Thieves levered off a padlock to gain entry and made off with a selection of items.

Knifemen nab cash

POLICE are hunting a knife wielding gang who threatened a young man and robbed him of cash.

Around five to six people approached the victim on Saturday evening in Shenfield Road, Grays. Two men then threatened to stab him unless he handed over his cash. The frightened man gave them £30 and quickly ran off.

Police believe the man holding the knife was white, 25-years-old, 6ft tall and slim. He had long blond hair tied back in a ponytail and was wearing a red hooded sweat-shirt top.

If anyone has information they can contact Det Sgt Dave Hudson at Grays CID on 01375 391212 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

Feast for music fans

A FEAST of Beethoven and Rachmaninov is on the menu at the next evening recital to be staged by Southend Council's arts department.

Young pianist Daniel Martyn Lewis will perform at the Plaza Centre, Southchurch Road, Southend, on February 12 at 8pm.

Tickets priced £7.20 are available from the Plaza Centre, Orpheus Music Sales in Leigh Road, at information centres and from the Civic Centre, Victoria Avenue.

Rettendon drugs murder witness talks of his constant fear

My secret life as a police supergrass

THE SUPERGRASS who helped nail the brutal Rettendon murderers has spoken for the first time about his secret life under police protection.

Darren Nicholls, 33, who has been given a new identity, lives in constant fear of being tracked down by supporters of killers Michael Steele and Jack Whomes.

Leaving behind his old life has led to massive changes for Darren and his family.

He has:

- Cut all ties with his mother in case she is beaten to find out where he lives

- Nearly lost his marriage as his wife came close to buckling under the strain

- Spent months living in police stations and jails while he waited to give his vital evidence

- Suffered sleepless nights and stomach upsets as his day in court approached

- Came within minutes of being sent to high-security Belmarsh Prison - where killers Whomes and Steele are serving their sentences - by bungling security guards.

It was Nicholls's crucial testimony which led to the conviction of 56-year-old Essex man Steele, and Whomes, 37, of Suffolk, at the Old Bailey in January last year.

They were found guilty of gunning down rival drug barons Pat Tate, 37, Tony Tucker, 38, and Craig Rolfe, 26, whose bloodied bodies were



By LINDA CHRISTIE

found inside a Range Rover down Workhouse Lane, Rettendon, on a snowy morning in December 1995.

Darren, who lived in Braintree then, was the unwitting getaway driver and finally confessed his role to the police in May 1996 when he was arrested for possession of drugs.

Darren, who is still waiting for the final details of his new identity to slip into place, says the future is still so uncertain.

He was finally allowed to join his family in March last year when he got bail.

In December he was sentenced for drugs and firearms charges and the judge gave him 15 months, which meant he was theoretically a free man.

But because his old identity has been erased - including national insurance number, passport and driving licence - and his new one has yet to be established he can't even get a job.

He said: "At the moment I'm just getting used to being at home.

"It was nice to get back to normality - well, to be with my family anyway.

"The place I'm living in is so peaceful compared to



■ Pat Tate

Braintree. It's a different pace of life and I feel like a retired person - without the pension.

"The police will help me find employment but it's difficult to know what to do. I'm still in limbo, I have been since May 1996."

The fear he might be tracked down by Whomes and Steele's underworld cronies is always on Darren's mind.

He said: "Mick is the sort of man you don't want to get on the wrong side of."

His only comfort is that they dare not risk anything happening to him.

He said: "As long as they are trying to convince everyone they are innocent there would



■ Tony Tucker

be no benefit to them in finding me.

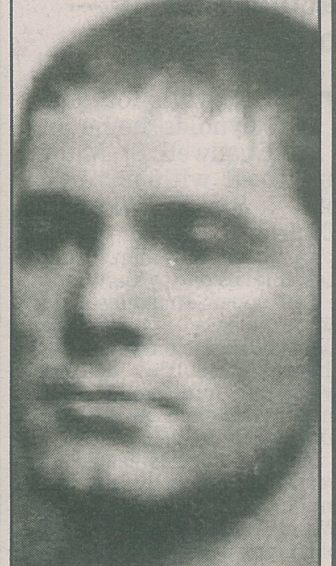
"It would just ruin their 'I didn't do it' claims."

And as for rumours there is a £500,000 bounty on his head, Darren said: "If it was true I would kill myself and ask for the money.

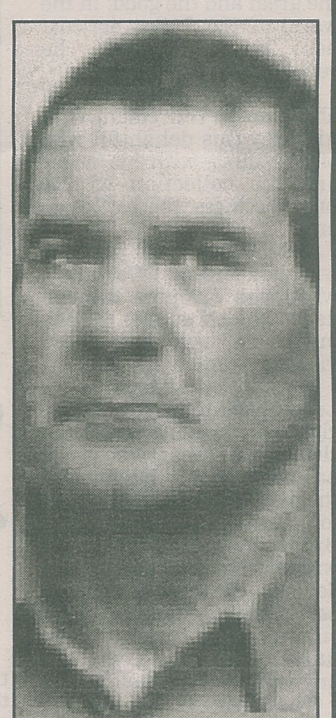
"There may be a bounty but who's got £500,000 to spare?"

Whomes and Steele's second bid to seek leave to appeal was turned down by a High Court judge last week.

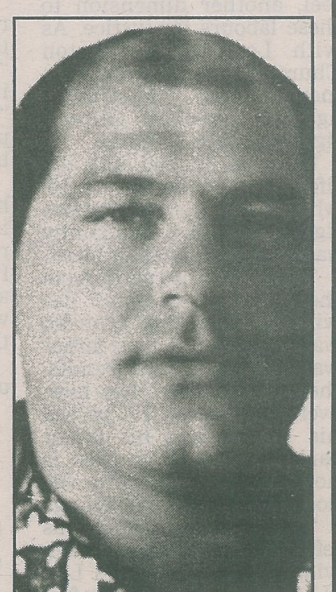
Thinking back to the trial, Darren said: "I knew I was doing the right thing and if it went Mick and Jack's way then fair enough. I just told the truth."



■ Craig Rolfe



■ Michael Steele



■ Jack Whomes

'As trial approached I was absolutely terrified'

AS THE day approached when Darren was due to take the stand against the men he knew were cold-blooded killers his main emotion was, understandably, fear.

He revealed: "I was absolutely terrified.

"I couldn't sleep and I had an upset stomach.

"I'm really surprised I kept it together in the court - I just wanted to run out and go to the toilet."

Bizarrely Darren was kept inside a washroom with a police guard in between his long bouts on the stand.

He said: "It was the only place they had for me that was safe."

He added: "When it was all over I just felt relief, but I didn't realise then I would be giving evidence

in another drugs trial."

That later case involved Russell Tate, the brother of one of Steele's victims, Pat. Russell was accused of conspiring to smuggle drugs and was sentenced to five years in November.

Darren said: "When he saw me in court Russell said 'thank-you very much'. He wasn't being sarcastic. I hadn't expected him to be nice, but I suppose I did put his brother's killers away."

Then Darren's own sentencing for drugs and firearms charges followed in December last year.

He said: "The police had repeatedly told me they couldn't guarantee I wouldn't go away and I was really worried.

"The judge sentenced me to 15 months - the amount of time I had

already served - so I was free to go.

"The only problem was the security guards in the cells couldn't find my name on the computer because it had been wiped off for my protection.

"They wouldn't release me and were trying to send me to Belmarsh Prison, where Jack and Mick are kept.

"The police officers with me told the guards 'he's going nowhere' and after some argument I was finally free."

Darren's incredible story will soon be told in a book, *Bloggs 19*, by leading crime writer Tony Thompson.

It tells the story of how he met Whomes, Steele and Tate in prison through to the present day. *Bloggs 19* was the

name given to Darren when he was held in a special supergrass wing in HMP Woodhill in Bedfordshire. Prisoners are all dubbed *Bloggs 1, 2, 3, etc.* to protect their real identities.

Darren said: "I wanted to do the book so people would know the whole story - there was so much I wasn't allowed to say during the trial.

"I haven't read the book and don't know if I ever will. I don't want to see myself described as terrible or a hero in black and white because I'm neither of those things - I'm just an idiot for getting involved with Jack and Mick."

● *Bloggs 19* will hit the bookshelves in the spring published by Little Brown and priced £5.99.