

All the vice-president's men won't save Newcastle

What is it that Newcastle's dazzling raft of appointments are actually meant to do?

By Marina Hyde

Who could fail to be dazzled by the raft of appointments at Newcastle United this week - even though the very convention for describing such appointments as a "raft" always gives them the feel of something put together by a group of estate agents on a team building exercise.

To revisit those St James' Park personnel changes in full: erstwhile London property developer Tony Jimenez will become vice-president (player recruitment), the former Charlton overseas scouting co-ordinator Jeff Vetere is given the post of technical co-ordinator and the gentrification of Dennis Wise continues apace as he is made executive director (football).

Wisey with a set of brackets... Who would have thought it? It somehow recalls that moment in Goodfellas when a made mobster returns and sees Joe Pesci minus the shoeshine box that was his boyhood stock in trade. "Look at Tommy!" he is greeted. "All grown up and doing the town!" Further patronising statements ensue, before the Pesci character can take it no more. "Maybe they didn't tell you," he says through a gritted smile. "I don't shine shoes no more." You will recall that the evening does not end convivially - though naturally one draws no comparisons between Wise and Tommy D, whose temperaments are like chalk and whatever they decide they want the other thing to be. None of us wants trouble.

Least of all Kevin Keegan, of course, who despite availing himself of Dennis's buffing services during Euro 2000 will know the import of a fancy title. How could he not? He was once chief operating officer of Fulham, even though, nine years after he left Mohamed al Fayed's employ, the precise distinction between that job and the more conventional "manager" remains tantalisingly obscure.

The most intriguing job title I have encountered belongs to a formidable-looking woman who some years ago handed me her business card. It was black, with gold lettering, and apart from her name and phone number it read simply: "Friend of the Krays". Was there much money in that line of work? "Not a lot," she admitted with a sigh. "ITV just send a car but the BBC usually give you hair and make-up. Anyway, if you hear of

anything..."

Rather more universally depressing was a later discovery: the fact that during the 2003 invasion of Iraq and its immediate aftermath, the Foreign Office employed a civil servant whose official job title was "head of story development". He was genuinely listed at the switchboard like that. Heaven knows where he is now. Downsized, possibly, after failing to iron out a couple of key plot points in the conflict's third act.

Then there was the time that Scarborough Safeway advertised for an "ambient replenishment assistant". The public mirth on discovering this meant "shelf stacker" could not be described as a coup for the store.

Frankly, these kind of euphemisms have become part of the vernacular in such a way that only management consultants and half-witted employers can say them without laughing. Only last weekend Jeff Stelling was faux-reprimanding Matt Le Tissier for describing Havant and Waterlooville substitute Tony Taggart as a "bin-man" instead of a "refuse technician" or some such.

Indeed, without wishing to belittle Jimenez's achievements, even "vice-president" is not the title it was, given that these days most of corporate America appears to hold this rank. It is a bit like being a count in Austria.

Yet time and again surveys flag up the allure of the meaninglessly enhanced job title. A recent one found 60% of workers would rather have a new job title than a pay rise. In which case perhaps Newcastle have adopted a thrifty strategy for keeping troublesome employees happy. This week's announcement was attended by the promise that "further key appointments" were to come. A kitman might be looking at the title of sartorial technology consultant. Or perhaps the club plans to bestow upon head-spa outpatient Joey Barton the title of personal equilibrium engineer. Should Joey fail to deliver, he could find himself being scheduled some face time with Jimenez, whose vice-president (player recruitment) role may also cover player recruitment.

And yet, for all that they claim to be assembling a team of elite silver receptacle recovery specialists, the suspicion lingers that the Newcastle owner, Mike Ashley, and chairman,

Chris Mort, are becoming the north-east's premier verbal waste specialists. Certainly, on current form, even the most euphemism-addled spectator might concede that the position Newcastle need to fill most pressing is that of senior vice-president (expectations management).



Keegan



Ashley



Wise