

# **Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum**

## **Ewood Park Monday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2019 – 7.00pm**

### **Present – Fans' Forum**

Tris Stock  
Mike Graham

John Wareing  
Peter Ridehalgh  
Savio Mathias  
Mark Hitchen  
Neil Duckworth  
Jim Holden  
Ray Williamson  
Jennifer Lewis  
Annette Birkbeck  
Alan Birkbeck

### **Present from BRFC**

Lynsey Talbot  
Steve Waggott

Mike Cheston  
Jason Harvey (Item 3 only)

### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Mike Graham  
Bharat Parmar  
Terry Crawford  
Steve Birtwell  
Jen Bellamy

### **2. Matters Arising from the Minutes dated 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

- JW asked if the results of the recent fans' survey had been published on the club website. LT undertook to check.

### **3. Catering – Jason Harvey**

SW introduced Jason Harvey from Sodexho to lead a discussion on the new catering offer at Ewood Park.

He stated that pies were currently being provided by three firms, mainly Hollands and Clayton Park, with some also from local start-up Pie Heroes. He brought a new range of pies from Hollands for tasting – these pies had increased fat content for more flavour and to prevent drying out. These should be in production soon.

TS asked whether there had been any improvement in handling queues on the concourses. JH replied that it was still a work in progress and that there were no easy cures – demand would always be difficult to

meet during the half-time period. ND asked if the opening of the Fan Zone at half time had helped. LT replied that it was still early days but there were a lot more people in the Fan Zone at half time already.

JH stated that already contactless cards accounted for 34% of total turnover. JL asked whether it was planned to go fully cashless over time. SW stated that whilst this would be an ideal situation, he recognised that this would disadvantage those that either did not have or did not want to use contactless cards.

RW asked whether it would be possible to take pre-orders for half time food and drink. JH stated that Newcastle already operated a system using pre-ordering through a phone app, but this required very good wifi systems which were not currently available at Ewood.

AB asked it would be possible to install the beer pump system used at Tottenham's new ground – 4 pints could be filled at once from a system filling glasses from underneath. JH stated that it was a very efficient system, but it was very expensive to install.

JH asked whether reusable plastic glasses could be introduced, as were now used at cricket grounds and music venues. JH replied that he would be willing to consider this if a system could be devised that did not produce hold ups with returns.

JW stated that many fans had been disappointed with the increases in food prices this season. MC stated that one reason for this was that whilst drink prices had gradually increased year on year the food prices had been held for a number of years and this year's increase was therefore bigger than usual. He was still working with Sodexo to understand what full effect this had had on demand.

RW asked whether there was a market for a mid-price pre match meal offer. The club had cheap food offers in Blues and more expensive food offerings from about £40pp but maybe there was a market for a meal offering around £20-25pp to compete with local pubs. After some discussion it was agreed that a trial food offering at this sort of price may be worthwhile using the Legends Lounge in the Darwen End.

TS stated that he was one of those who paid £60 a season for access to Blues Bar at half time. Previously this had worked very well in being able to access a better range of drinks with little queueing. This season he had noticed that service this season had been much slower, making the deal much less attractive.

#### **4. Season & Match Day Ticket Sales 2019-20**

In response to a question from JW, SW stated that 345 half season tickets had been sold so far this season. Given that most were sold before Christmas and therefore when the team had been on an unbeaten run, this total was disappointing.

PR asked why the club increased prices by £3 three hours before kick-off. He had a complaint from a fan who made a last minute decision to attend the Barnsley game but decided not to after realizing he would have to pay more. SW replied that ticket prices were generally announced several weeks before each game. It was a great help to the club to have a fairly clear idea of the attendance to be able to plan for catering and staffing in advance.

JW asked whether the club had considered a form of “airline” pricing i.e. offering early purchasers lower prices and gradually increasing them towards matchday. SW replied that the club was also under pressure to increase matchday takings to meet planned budgets. In the Championship gate receipts were on average 22% of total income. In the Premier League the pressure on gates was much less as they made up an average 4% of total income.

JW stated that some fans had suggested a flexible season ticket for fans who knew that they could not attend every home game i.e. a ticket for say any 15 games a season. SW suspected that such a ticket would cannibalise the main full season ticket market. He could, however, see a possibility to do something like this towards the end of the season.

## **5. Away Fans in Darwen End**

JW asked once again whether away fans could be seated in the lower tier of the Darwen End rather than the Upper Tier, to improve matchday atmosphere. SW replied that he was keen to improve atmosphere in the ground but that the team management were reluctant to agree to this.

## **6. Financial Fair Play**

PR asked how close the club currently were to the Financial Fair Play limit. SW stated that they were around the threshold and were very limited as to what could be done. The club had offers for some players but did not want to sell anyone. Recent injuries were exacerbating the situation. The owners would like to invest in the club but were unable to under FFP rules. It was not possible to create “artificial” sponsorship deals if they cannot be seen to be commensurate with the market.

There was considerable unrest about current FFP rules, which had been imposed on the EFL by the Premier League. But it was very difficult to make changes as they needed a 75% majority of the 24 clubs, especially since every season 6 of those 24 clubs changed with promotion and relegation, currently 11 clubs were receiving some sort of parachute

payment and clubs sometimes changed their views with ownership changes. SW stated that the rules for Leagues 1 and 2 were much clearer, as owners could invest and up to 60% of that investment could go into the team.

## **7. Fans Consultation Meeting**

This had now been set for 6<sup>th</sup> February at 6pm.

## **8. Team Matters**

JW asked for any comments on the current transfer window. SW replied that the injury to Bradley Dack had changed the dynamics for the transfer window, as the club now needed to replace his expected 15 goals and assists. The club had transfer targets, but the market was difficult, especially expensive from Premier League clubs. He confirmed that the club did not need to need any players in order to buy.

## **9. Disabled Fans Issues**

JW asked for an update on the disabled fan issues that had been raised at the previous meeting. LT stated that the club had been told that Ticketmaster had provided a solution to Coventry City to make comp tickets available in the ticketing system for disabled fans and carers – she hoped that this would not be a simple upgrade for the Rovers system.

SW stated that he was happy to make Box 22 available to any disabled fans that wanted to avoid the cold and wet in their current seats, but that there needed to be a robust system for allocating who could use it, assuming that there was more demand than space,

## **10. Car Parking Issues**

JW stated that he had had complaints from fans about the disorganisation when leaving carpark H after the game, which was leading to minor collisions. LT confirmed that there was no stewarding currently in the car park at the end of games and agreed to look into what could be done.

JW also expressed concern again about cars parked on Livesey Branch Road below Albion St. the cars were parked half on the pavement, which reduced the pavement to single file. After games this led to many fans walking in the middle of the road where they were meeting cars coming down the hill, which were not traffic controlled. LT replied that the club had had a meeting with the local authority that afternoon and the issue had been raised. It was clear that there was no easy solution to the issue but that similar concerns were being expressed across other Lancashire clubs so there was a hope of some future progress.

## 11. Rovers v Burnley Under 23s Kick-Off Time

PR raised the issue of the recent Rovers v Burnley under 23 cup game that had been held at 1pm on a weekday when most fans could not attend. SW replied that the timing of the game had been difficult. Fixture congestion meant that the game needed to happen on a Friday and there was concern about playing the game later in the day.

## 12. Any Other Business

- ND asked whether any progress could be made on the resurfacing of the small car park between the club sop and Bolton Road. LT agreed to look at any safety issues being caused by the surface.
- RW asked why the club could not play in their home kit when there was no clash with the home club in away matches. SW stated that there were commercial issues in getting the two away strips on display earlier in the season – this had been commercially successful as the grey strip had had to be reordered. It would be less of an issue later in the season.

## 10. Dates of Next Meetings

Pre -meet	Main meeting
6/1/20	13/1/20
2/3/20	9/3/20
4/5/20	11/5/20
6/7/20	13/7/20
7/9/20	14/9/20
2/11/20	9/11/20

All dates are Mondays.

Pre-meets are held one week before the main meetings. The pre-meet is open to all interested fans to attend, providing they request to do so in advance by contacting John Wareing by email or phone as below.

Members should contact John Wareing at [roversfansforum@hotmail.com](mailto:roversfansforum@hotmail.com) or 07984 085474 to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

Fans can also contact John regarding the Forum using the contact details above.