

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum

Zoom Meeting Wednesday 10th June 2019 – 5.00pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
Mike Graham

Present from BRFC

Lynsey Talbot
Steve Waggott

John Wareing
Mark Hitchen
Neil Duckworth
Ray Williamson
Jennifer Lewis
Annette Birkbeck
Alan Birkbeck
Steve Birtwell
Jen Bellamy

1. Apologies for Absence

Savio Mathias
Bharat Parmar
Terry Crawford
Anthony Corry

TS introduced the unusual format of a Zoom meeting for the Forum. He started by advising the Forum that Jim Holden had resigned as a member of the Forum having just turned 82. Jim was thanked for his 7 years membership of the Forum.

2. Overview

TS asked SW for an overview of the current situation following the suspension of games in March due to the Covid-19 pandemic. SW stated that the last three months had been unbelievable in terms of the demands on the club and its staff. As most fans will be aware, the team's fixtures are due to restart behind closed doors on Saturday 20th June. The club had had to go through a complete root and branch review of operations to make sure that a safe environment could be provided for the return to training of the players and coaching staff; the resumption of the games both at Ewood and away from home plus the working environment for administrative staff. He wished to put on record his thanks for the efforts of staff through a very difficult period and to also recognise the excellent work that the Community Trust had done right across the local community.

The club are operating with a vastly reduced amount of staff who were

covering key aspects of the Club. This included the Senior Management Team who are covering all of their various aspects of the club, a number of medical staff to remotely support players and their fitness during this time plus finance, IT and maintenance work.

LT reported that many club staff had been furloughed but were expected back to work as and when required by the business. SW was pleased that the financial support of the owners had allowed the club to top up the government furlough scheme to pay all staff in full for March, April and May and he was expecting to be able to confirm the same for June shortly.

3. Owners' Views

TS asked what the situation was with the owners given the financial situation and the effects of the virus on their other businesses in India. SW replied that he was in regular contact with the owners and had spoken to Mr Desai the day before. The owners were still fully supportive of the club despite having to deal with the difficult situation with lockdown in India both in terms of the pandemic health crisis and the economic turbulence created by the virus.

It was hard to make any long-term commitments at this time as we navigate through this crisis but we have a strong and experienced executive team in place who would continue to assess the current climate, government and medical advice and the impact it has had on the club. We carefully monitor our cashflow position on a daily basis to determine the next steps we need to take and what future support we may require from the owners to meet those objectives.

4. Sky TV Contract

SW stated that it had been a great advantage to have Rick Parry involved as the Chair of the EFL especially in the negotiations with Sky regarding the 19/20 TV contract. Season ticket holders would be able to access all Rovers' remaining games through iFollow whether also live on Sky or not. In response to a question from SB, SW stated that there were some concerns about the ability of the platform to cope with the significantly increased demand as season ticket holders from both clubs would be wanting access. Work was ongoing to avoid any problems and there would be more iFollow helpline number and the club were looking to provide staff support to help fans if needed.

SW hoped that all the games would go ahead as now scheduled but there was always the chance that should a squad get significant positive results from virus testing there may need to be postponements. Enhanced squad sizes and approval for 5 substitutes a game had been agreed to help with this and the possibility of more injuries with a hectic

playing schedule.

MG asked what if any plans there were for the return of fans to games with social distancing. SW replied that the club would love to have fans back in Ewood Park as soon as possible but that was unlikely to be in the near future. His personal opinion was that this might happen optimistically in October, realistically in January and pessimistically not until the 2021/22 season.

JW asked what the financial arrangements were for any live Sky matches that Rovers might have. SW stated that the new agreement allowed for 30 live Championship games rather than 20 under the original contract. That meant that clubs would receive £50,000 each per game rather than £75,000. SW was hopeful that the club would have at least one and maybe more live games before the end of the season.

RW asked what the situation would be with games on the Sky red button. SW replied that the red button facility would be removed for the remainder of this season, but all season ticket holders would be able to see games via iFollow anyway. He also stated that the ban on the live showing of games at 3pm on Saturdays would also be suspended.

5. Matchday & Season Tickets

TS asked how the club would deal with those who had paid for matchday tickets either for individual matches or season tickets. Other clubs in the Championship had introduced a variety of plans.

SW replied that he was planning a simple package. The club had made an estimate for season ticket holders who would miss four home games. A rough value of £15 per game made a value of £60. For that fans would get access to all 9 games in the regular season on iFollow. Play-off games are currently not included. However, he recognised that some fans would not have the technology to access the games online.

He hoped that the majority of fans would accept this as the club had significant cash flow issues with no income since late February, but the club did recognise that given the current economic difficulties that some fans might be hoping for a refund. He planned a communications message which would be made in the next 10 – 14 days (or once all those wanting to take up the offer had been given their promotional codes) to tell any fans with financial issues to contact the club to discuss options.

AB asked about match sponsorships – Ewood Blues had paid to sponsor the last home game of the season. SW replied that he would hope to roll that over to a game in the 2020/21 season and that the club would contact them to discuss options soon.

6. Player Contracts

JW asked what the situation was with player contracts, both for loan players and those out of contract in June. SW stated that he did not foresee any problems with extending the contracts of Christian Walton from Brighton and Tosin Adarabioyo from Manchester City for the remainder of the season. Those players whose contracts were due to end on 30th June were entitled to a month's severance pay and he believed all concerned would be happy to continue to play through July should the manager wish them to do so.

By now SW would have expected to have been to India and agreed budgets for 2020/21 but that had obviously not been possible. Post Covid 19 and with no supporters allowed to attend games it was very difficult to set exact budgets and make plans given that there may well be new regulations introduced that could include squad salary caps, agents fees being capped and a reduction in transfer fees and player wages. Many clubs were looking at the situation as a chance to reset financial arrangements in the division.

7. Merchandise

ND asked whether the club had considered Rovers branded face coverings and MH asked about fan cut outs to be placed in the stands. SW replied that the club were looking at some options along these lines and were very keen to get some on sale to bring at least some money into the club.

7. Dates of Next Meetings

Pre -meet	Main meeting
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 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.