

# **Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015 – 7.15pm**

## **Present – Fans' Forum**

Tris Stock  
Neil Duckworth  
Ste Birtwell  
Bharat Parmar  
John Wareing  
Jennifer Lewis  
Ray Williamson  
Alan Birkbeck  
Annette Birkbeck  
Gordon Ormerod  
Mark Hitchen  
Terry Crawford  
Anthony Corry  
Savio Mathias  
Rob Parker

## **Present from BRFC**

Gary Bowyer (Item 2 only)  
Lynsey Talbot  
Alan Myers  
Christine Peacock

### **1. Apologies for absence**

Jim Holden  
Ben Sumner

### **2. Gary Bowyer**

Gary Bowyer joined the meeting to answer fans' questions.

TS asked what the problem had been with a work permit for Kim Bo-Kyung. GB replied that the system of granting work permits for overseas footballers had changed recently and Kim did not meet any of the new criteria. It would have been possible had there been a large fee and salary involved, as had happened with Tottenham's signing of Son Heung-min. This was very regrettable as Kim had been very committed to Rovers. The same issue had occurred with Rudolph Austin, who had been denied a work permit despite having a son born in the UK.

SB asked how difficult it had been to keep hold of Jordan Rhodes this summer. GB replied that it had been the same for the two and a half years he had been the manager. Speculation had been there for every transfer window.

ND asked why GB had not gone to India this summer as had happened in previous years. GB stated that it had been the intention to go out but it had not been possible to agree a date when the owners were available because of their other business interests. This had been exacerbated by the earlier pre-season this year.

RP asked why there had not been more opportunities for younger players in league games. GB stated that players would only feature in the first team if they were good enough, regardless of age. In his experience it was easy to introduce young players too soon into the first team. At a young age form can fluctuate widely. From the outset it had been GB's plan to assemble a team of young, hungry players and significant progress had been made in this respect. The team on the pitch against Charlton had featured only two players over 24 at one time. In an ideal world he would keep the team together for several years but the reality was that some players would leave from time to time – Tom Cairney had been lost in the summer. Every club in England, including the big Premier League clubs, was a selling club these days.

He refused to publicly name any younger players who he thought would be most likely to break through to the first team as that just highlighted prospects to other clubs.

ND asked why David Raya had started the season as first choice goalkeeper but had then been dropped after keeping his first clean sheet. GB responded that it had been his call, ahead of three games in a week and a background of no wins. Nevertheless Raya remained a great prospect for the future.

SM asked when Sacha Petchi will be given a chance in the first team. GB replied that Petchi was one for the future. At the moment he was adapting to a full time training regime and adjusting to English conditions. He was doing really well as was Fode Koita.

AB asked whether GB had received any apologies after reports of him being sacked emerged after the Brighton game. AM replied that he knew the journalist involved and that he had apologised although no apology had been forthcoming from the newspaper.

MH asked why there had not been more loan players brought in this season. GB replied that some other Championship clubs had been paying huge sums for loans players, which Rovers could not pay even if they wished to do because of the restrictions of Financial Fair Play.

SM asked why QPR had not been reprimanded by the Football League after breaking the Financial fair Play rules. AM replied that the League were as frustrated as fans that they had been unable to apply the FFP rules in this case. AM also stated that the club was making progress towards getting the FFP restrictions lifted. It could have been done over the summer by selling Jordan Rhodes but the club had decided to keep him.

RP asked what area of the team GB felt needed strengthening. GB stated that overall there was good competition for places across the

team. The only area where he felt there was possibly room for strengthening was for a wide player.

ND questioned a perceived overcautious approach in some games. GB replied that this was definitely not the case – the team always went out to win every game. You could not let the players get into a mindset of playing for a draw.

GO said that the club had indicated that they would take the Capital One Cup more seriously, but had played a weakened side against Shrewsbury and lost. GB stated that whilst some players had been rested the team that he put out was a strong one and one that should have been capable of beating Shrewsbury. There had been one or two players that had been carrying slight knocks and had not been risked but it was a strong team. Some fringe players had been given the chance to impress and had not taken the opportunity.

TS stated that a number of fans questioned what Jason Lowe brought to the team. GB replied that Lowe had a fantastic engine, had the ability to spot danger, was fully committed to the club and was a different type of midfielder to other options at the club.

TS asked why Matt Killgallon had not been given an opportunity this season. GB replied that it was just competition for places. There would be a time when his ability and experience would come in useful during the season.

JW asked what GB and the players felt when individual players were singled out for booing and abuse by fans. GB replied that it was frustrating but that it was part and parcel of the game. It was not unique to Ewood but happened at every club across the country.

### **3. Matters Arising from the Minutes 20<sup>th</sup> July 2015**

#### **a) 2015/16 Season Tickets**

AM stated that the total number of 2015/16 season ticket sales was just below the previous season. TS asked if there could be a more detailed discussion on season tickets at the November meeting

#### **b) Flag**

LT reported that the old flag was ruined beyond repair. AM asked fans to let the club know what they would like on a new design.

#### **c) Premium Lagers**

LT stated that alternative lagers were now available in the Fan Zone but that it was not currently cost-effective to provide them at bars in the ground.

AB asked whether it was possible to have a bar in the Fan Zone across its full length, as the present set-up was causing queues. AM agreed to look at the layout but there might be problems because of space restrictions on the site.

**d) Trading Places**

LT agreed to check whether the Trading Places scheme was causing dilution in the Rovers Readies draw.

**4. Attendances**

SM asked what was being done to halt the recent decline in attendances at Ewood. AM replied that he and the team were constantly looking at different avenues to increase both ticket and hospitality sales. After some discussion it was agreed to consider this in more depth at the November meeting.

**5. Burnley Home Game**

TS stated that he and JW had attended the first planning meeting between the two clubs, the police and fan representatives and would be at the second on 23<sup>rd</sup> September. The arrangements for the home game with Burnley on 24<sup>th</sup> October would be by and large the same as those for the previous occasion two years ago. Burnley were expected to receive around 4,500 tickets. Rovers season ticket holders in the Darwen End had been written to and provided with alternative tickets, which could be amended if wished. There would be cordoned-off seating areas in both the Riverside and the Jack Walker stand.

**6. Commercial Director Vacancy**

TS asked what if anything was being done about the vacancy for a Commercial Director. AM replied that it had been decided not to fill the vacancy at this point, AM has assumed a Communications & Commercial Director role with Greg Coar taking over some responsibilities. Part of the reasoning for this was that the shirt sponsorship had been fixed for a number of seasons and the other long term commercial deals had been put in place.

**7. Car Park H Access**

LT provided everyone with copies of a leaflet produced by Blackburn with Darwen Council about how the new gyratory road scheme would work. (<http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/Lists/DownloadableDocuments/Pennine-Reach-Ewood-Gyratory-leaflet.pdf>)  
A trial had been due to start on 19<sup>th</sup> October but would be delayed for a week as Rovers had two home games in that week. Exit from Car Park H would still be turning left from Calico St on to Bolton Road. Those who wished to access Livesey Branch Road, Aqueduct St or back into

Blackburn would be able to turn right at the new roundabout.

RW expressed some concern that this would cause long delays as traffic was at a standstill on Bolton Road for some time after games. He suggested that pressure could easily be relieved by allowing temporary access to turn right from Calico St through the planned Buses Only lane.

## **8. Accessible Parking Spaces**

JL stated that she wished to record the excellent record that Rovers had with accessibility issues. It was good to see the newly marked parking places which had been widened for easier wheelchair access. She asked whether some of these spaces could be used by those who did not use a wheelchair but had mobility issues. CP responded that the changes were currently a trial. The wider spaces are primarily for wheelchair users who need space to get out of the vehicle. Fans with mobility restrictions who are not wheelchair users would continue to be allocated standard spaces –and proximity to the ground will be the prime consideration. The Club will continue to consider individual requests e.g. end of bay parking and accommodate fans where possible but at this stage we can't promise end of bays for everyone. It is a trial and these issues will be considered as part of that.

JL also stated that Charlton fans had informed her that stretchers in the Darwen End had been blocking the disabled toilets at the recent game. CP stated that, whilst stretchers were stored in that vicinity, they should not have been blocking access. She agreed to check the situation.

## **9. Any Other Business**

- a) AN asked why fans who had travelled by coach had been charged the £4 transport levy by Brighton for the recent game. The £4 provided free local rail travel to the ground but fans on coaches had not needed to use the train
- b) MH asked whether the club were aware of the contents of the book which Sam Allardyce had written and was to be published on 1<sup>st</sup> October. AM replied that they were not.
- c) SM noted that the number of adverts inside the stadium had reduced. AM acknowledged this and it formed part of the activity mentioned in item 4.
- d) AB asked why the away game at Leeds had been moved to a Thursday night. AB and AM stated that Sky were planning to show a number of games on Thursday night.
- e) MH had been approached a friend who was interested in bringing his young son to games. He was interested in the free under 8s ticket but wondered whether it could be used in the other parts of the ground rather than the Family Stand. AM agreed to consider this.
- f) JW highlighted a potential dangerous situation along Livesey Branch Road between the Fox & Hounds and Albion St after games. For the

last season or so cars had been parking along this stretch of road, which was forcing fans to walk in the road, coming into close contact with cars coming down the hill. There had been one or two incidents of cars almost colliding with fans. LT agreed to look into the matter.

## 10. Date of Next Meetings

Pre -meet	Main meeting
2/11/15	9/11/15
4/1/16	11/1/16
7/3/16	14/3/16
3/5/16 (Tuesday)	9/5/16
4/7/16	11/7/16
5/9/16	12/9/16
7/11/16	14/11/16

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 give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

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