

# Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2012 – 7.00pm

## Present – Fans' Forum

Ben Pirraglia  
Julie Wilkinson  
Gordon Ormerod  
John Billouin  
Neil Duckworth  
John Wareing  
Andy Neill  
Jennifer Lewis  
Alan Birkbeck  
Annette Birkbeck  
Mark Hitchen  
Terry Crawford  
Glenn Pegden  
Ste Birtwell  
Rob Parker

## Present from BRFC

Paul Agnew  
Greg Coar  
Lynsey Talbot  
Rob Gill

### 1. Apologies for absence

Ben Sumner  
Ray Williamson  
Tris Stock  
Martin Haworth

### 2. Paul Agnew

PA attended the Forum for the first time in his new role as Director of Operations. He was willing to take questions from members and wanted to emphasise that he wanted to be as transparent as possible. He stated that one of his requirements to take on the role was to bring Derek Shaw in to help him. In partnership they were responsible for the day-to-day running of the Ewood Park operation.

He realised that the club was currently in a very difficult situation with relegation, disgruntled fans and an unpopular manager creating a negative atmosphere. There was a need to win back the trust of supporters but everyone recognised that this was going to be a long and difficult process. Nevertheless season ticket sales were steadily increasing, (currently around 9,500), and commercial sponsorship was similarly growing.

There was some discussion about the future role of the Forum and who within the management team would be responsible for meeting

members. PS replied that there was a management team and that who attended would depend on the agenda for each meeting.

AB expressed some concern that the club management were favouring contact with other supporters' groups rather than the well established Forum. PA responded that the club were very keen to retain the independence of all supporters groups and not prescribe a particular communication route.

In response to a question from GO, PA stated that he felt that the club has let supporters down over the last 18 months and that there had been a lack of communication between the club and fans. He felt that there was no point in raking over past mistakes that could not be undone and that it was better to look forward and start to build back trust.

JulieW asked how the manager can still be employed given his record. PA stated that that was a matter for the owners, who currently supported him.

In response to a question about rumours of new redundancies at the club PA replied that as far as he was aware, no one had recently left the club under redundancy. He was aware of a couple of recent redundancies at the Community Trust, which was a separate organisation. PA was also asked how many redundancies there had been at the club following relegation and replied that as he understood it, the number was 4. In addition some staff had resigned over time and not all had been replaced, but there had been some new hiring of casual staff in retail to replace students leaving for university.

MH asked whether now was a good time for Mrs Desai to be interviewed in the Telegraph to reassure fans about the ambitions of the owners for the club. PA agreed and stated that he was working towards something similar.

### **3. Disabled Supporters Minibus**

ND asked whether the club were able to give an update on a replacement or repair for the disabled supporters' minibus, which was in urgent need of improvement. It was now unable to enter central London because it did not meet emissions standards which meant that it would not be able to go to the Charlton away game at the end of September. PA replied that he had been recently asked to help and that he was very hopeful of setting up a sponsorship deal which should provide a new vehicle and hoped to be able to have news by the end of the week. He would work with the Disabled Supporters Group on the specification for a new vehicle and committed to make temporary arrangements so that no games would be missed.

#### **4. Fan Safety – Pre-season Tour of Holland**

ND reported that the Forum had received a letter of complaint from a fan about the treatment of Rovers fans on the short pre-season tour in Holland and the resulting bad publicity in the national media. Other Forum members were able to corroborate the complaint. PA replied that he felt that the local club had panicked in cancelling the game when given some information about possible trouble. It was recognised that Rovers fans had not been to blame for any violence which had happened around the tour. Whilst the club had always visited European clubs in advance for competitive games it had never done this for pre-season friendlies.

In addition PA stated that he believed that this year's pre-season had been fragmented and he hoped to see a home game back at Ewood as part of any plans.

#### **5. Burnley Away Game**

ND asked what arrangements were likely to be put in place for the upcoming away game at Burnley. GC confirmed that Rovers would have an allocation of roughly 3,600 and the whole of the away stand. There had already been one meeting between Rovers, Burnley and the police and another was scheduled for the following week. He confirmed that whatever arrangements were made that, as always, season ticket holders would have first priority. It would be decided nearer the time whether the first priority would require attendance at a certain number of away games as well. It was not yet clear whether the same transport arrangements as last time would be put in place.

#### **6. Season Tickets and Matchday Sales**

GC confirmed that Season ticket sales were currently around 9,500 and he expected that more would be sold over the next few weeks. The very keen pricing meant that a purchase now would still be extremely cost effective. More corporate boxes had been sold than last season and the atmosphere in the Premier Suite had been good at the two home games so far. August fixtures are traditionally slow for corporate sales and consequently Jack's Kitchen had not yet opened this season. Selected concourse kiosks in selected areas had also not been open so far this season.

#### **7. Shirt Sponsorship**

GC reported that negotiations were underway and there had been serious progress and he was hopeful of an agreement soon. Should a sponsor come on board fans would be able to have their logo added to 2012/13 shirts at no cost should they wish.

## **8. Rovers Website**

In response to fans' complaints about the look and feel of the new website, GC stated that there was universal dislike from virtually all the other 80 clubs under the agreement and little could be done by the club itself. There was a meeting of all clubs planned for the following week at Wembley to feedback concerns.

## **9. Half Time Entertainment**

RP asked whether some more imaginative half-time entertainment could be provided by the club. GC agreed to take this forward.

## **10. New Third Strip**

A number of fans had complained about the lack of a short-sleeve option for the new third strip, which otherwise had been popular. GC replied that there had been a last minute plan to replace the yellow third strip. Umbro were unable to provide a bespoke alternative as normal lead times for new kit were about 12 months. They had instead been able to supply an off the shelf kit but this was only available in long sleeve. The cost to tailor a short sleeve would have meant the retail price rising by £8-9 a shirt which was therefore commercially prohibitive. In addition supplies were very limited and would soon be sold out in any event.

## **11. Any Other Business**

### **a) Photocall**

GO asked when the normal photocall would take place. GC replied that it would be soon.

### **c) Bruno Ribeiro**

GP asked whether the club had any plans for any specific Bruno Ribeiro merchandise given his current cult status amongst fans. GC agreed to take this forward.

### **b) Forum Promotion**

RP asked whether it was possible to repeat the promotion of the Fans Forum on the big screen and in the matchday programme at a future game. Again GC agreed to take this forward.

## **12. Date of Next Meetings**

Pre -meet	Main meeting
Tuesday 9/10/12	Monday 15/10/12
Tuesday 20/11/12	Tuesday 27/11/12
Monday 7/1/13	Monday 14/1/13
Monday 18/2/13	Monday 25/2/13
Tuesday 2/4/13	Monday 8/4/13

Pre-meets are held at Ewood 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.