

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Ewood Park, Tuesday 6th March 2012 – 7.15pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Martin Haworth
Julie Wilkinson
Gordon Ormerod
John Billouin
Ben Pirraglia
Neil Duckworth
John Wareing
Steve Birtwell
Andy Neill
Ben Sumner
Ray Williamson
Jennifer Lewis
Alan Birkbeck
Annette Birkbeck
Rob Parker

Present from BRFC

Paul Hunt
Greg Coar
Lynsey Talbot
John Newsham (items 3 and 4)

1. Apologies for absence

Tristan Stock
Mark Hitchen
Terry Crawford

2. New members

MartinH welcomed Alan and Annette Birkbeck and Rob Parker to their first Forum meeting. PH also welcomed Lynsey Talbot, in her new role as Supporter Liaison Officer.

3. Fans' Protests

In response to a question about the club's contact with the protest group PH stated that there was still an ongoing dialogue. The group had been offered a meeting with the club on the day of the Aston Villa game, provided there were no protests. Subsequently PH learned that protest marches were to be arranged, so cancelled the meeting after the Action Group Committee had refused to cancel the protest. The group had offered to not hold any protests for the next three home games in return for a meeting. PH planned to offer a meeting if there were no more protests for the remainder of the season, hence the stand-off. Any such meeting would be unofficial and not minuted as the Fans Forum is the only recognised Forum.

JN stated that he had had regular contact with the protest group to make arrangements for the protest marches to ensure the safety of both the protesters and of all fans attending games. There had been regular liaison with both police and stewards to facilitate the marches.

PH said that, whilst the club had no problems with properly organized protests outside the ground, there were difficulties with protests inside the ground because of the effect on team performance and the risk of confrontation between home fans with opposing views.

RW asked whether it was a strategy of the owners to be remote to prevent antagonism. PH responded that the owners were far from remote as they were in contact with staff at Ewood daily but they had not been attending matches recently. They had, however, sent guests to recent games. In response to a question from GO, PH stated that the protests had cost a considerable amount of extra money in police and steward costs.

4. Darwen End Stewarding

AN asked about the reasons for the change to stewarding of the home areas of the Darwen end at the Aston Villa game and whether this approach would be extended to other home areas.

JN firstly stated that he could confirm through CCTV evidence that no children were searched and searches were only undertaken by males on males and females on females. He stated that he understood that he had an agreement with the protest group that no banners would be taken into the ground. This was because the raising of banners may well antagonise other supporters and a confrontation could well ensue. Despite this agreement two banners had been unfurled towards the end of the QPR game. As a consequence the protest group had been told in advance that fans would be searched in the Darwen End.

There was also a need to trial the barrier system ahead of the two high profile games for away fans against Liverpool and Manchester United where these teams take up the entire Darwen End. The barrier system was one which is widely used at other football grounds and Rovers fans had been subjected to the same system at the away game at Manchester City recently. JN had recently attended the Wales v Italy rugby game as a security auditor and there had been more security there for all fans despite it being a low category game from a security aspect. At the upcoming Olympics spectators would have to go through seven separate security checks.

There were more police at the Aston Villa game than the QPR game but that was because the Villa game had a higher rating because of trouble on previous occasions by Villa fans. There were fewer stewards at the Villa game.

There were no plans to deploy this system for other home fan areas.

5. Matters arising From the Minutes 13th September 2011

- a) Item 9c). In response to a question from SB, GC stated that he would speak to Ken Beamish about involving ex-players in the half-time draws.
- b) Item 8. JN stated that the club was in the process of renewing seats and gutters on the roof and had been so for the last two years. He also pointed out that some of the leaks that fans experienced were actually condensation on the inside of the roof.
- c) MH reported that the flag used at home games in the Blackburn End was ripping and needed attention. JN agreed to check.
- d) RP reported that the lighting of the rear exit to the Riverside was poor. JN stated that this was not an official exit but was opened for a small number of fans who preferred to use it. It was always locked in bad weather. He agreed to review the lighting.

6. Season Tickets

GC stated that the club understood that there was some negativity but the club believed that most fans still support the team. Forum members reported lots of feeling around non-renewals and potential high price rises. AN believed that most people had already decided whether to renew or not and those that have decided to renew would do so unless there was a significant price rise.

GC said that the club was committed to its strategy of providing affordable football for fans. The club was preparing the policy for next season and an announcement could be expected shortly.

7. Academy

JB presented members with a copy of a paper he had prepared on the future of the club's academy in response to the Premier League's Elite Report. It was agreed that the report would be discussed in more detail at a future Forum meeting.

PH stated that the Premier League recognised that the current academy system could be improved in comparison to those in other countries. The intention is to both increase the number of good players and the number of contract hours produced but also to look after those who are not successful, in terms of better education provision. The original plan was to introduce the new system based on four categories of academy in 2013/14, but this had now been brought forward to 2012/13. As a result the club had to decide which category to opt for by 31st March. There would then be an audit process to make decisions on which clubs would

be granted category 1 status. The Board were keen to gain category 1 status although this would require significant capital investment and also potentially an increase in annual budgets.

8. Contingency Plans For Relegation

In response to a question from MH, PH confirmed that the club, as every club in the bottom half will do had contingency plans in place for all eventualities.

9. Future of Disabled Minibus

JL expressed concern regarding the future of the disabled fans minibus, which was in very poor condition. PH replied that the club already had one quote for a replacement and were awaiting two others. PH agreed that an appropriate vehicle would be provided for fans in the future as the alternative for disabled supporters travelling on ill-equipped coaches was wrong.

10. Any Other Business

a) FA Youth Cup Semi-final

Ticket prices had now been confirmed for the forthcoming FA Youth Cup semi-final first leg against Burnley. Season ticket holders would be admitted free but would need to obtain tickets in advance before 5pm on the day of the game. Prices for other fans would be £5 and £3 and £1 for concessions.

Buses would be run to the away leg at a cost of £5. The police would prefer fans to use the buses but they would not be compulsory.

There was a possibility that the second leg could be featured live on ITV4.

b) Disabled Supporters Player of the Year Awards

JL announced that the annual Disabled Supporters Award Night for Player of the Year would be on Monday 23rd April. Tickets were now available priced £7.50. "Other" Player of the Year Dinner is 30th April. Details to follow.

c) Fernhust Pub

Now that the Fernhurst pub had been refurbished it would no longer be used by away fans. The club were aware that this gave them an opportunity to provide an extra facility at the ground but

there were licensing, policing and cost implications that needed to be considered.

e) Pre-season 2012-13

In response to a question from AB, PH stated that no concrete plans were yet in place for this summer. The club had had offers already. It was expected that there would be a pre-season training camp in Austria as in recent seasons.

f) Full members Cup 25th Anniversary

The 25th anniversary of the Full Members Cup victory would be on 29th March and an event was planned in Blues with most of the team in attendance. Tickets would be £5 each.

g) Promotion of Forum

RP asked whether the work of the Forum could be promoted through the Big Screen and the programme on match days. PH agreed that this would be an excellent way of promoting the Forum to all fans and agreed to do this for the next meeting.

11. 2012 Meetings – Proposed Dates

Tuesday 1st May
Monday 25th June
Monday 20th August
Monday 15th October
Monday 10th December

The next pre-meet will be at Ewood on Tuesday 24th April 2012. Note that this is a day later than usual as the Disabled Supporters' Group Player of the Year night is on 23rd. 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 on 07984 085474 with any queries about the Forum or to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.