

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum

Zoom Meeting Wednesday 14th October 2020 – 6.00pm

Present – Fans' Forum

Tris Stock
John Wareing
Neil Duckworth
Jennifer Lewis
Alan Birkbeck
Jen Bellamy
Savio Mathias
Bharat Parmar
Peter Bolton
Mushtaq Khan

Present from BRFC

Lynsey Talbot
Steve Waggott

1. Apologies for Absence

Mike Graham
Ray Williamson
Steve Birtwell
Anthony Corry

TS welcomed Peter Bolton and Mushtaq Khan as new members to the Forum.

2. Matters Arising from the Previous Meeting 10th June 2020

None.

3. Season Ticket Offering and Update

SW stated that the club had planned to launch the 2020/21 season ticket offer in April but that had been stopped by the pandemic. After some time the EFL told clubs that they could expect that fans would be allowed back into grounds by October. The club then developed a scheme to reflect this and put them on sale just before the season start but then the Government deferred the start by up to 6 months.

The EFL have agreed to allow streaming of all home and some midweek away games via iFollow for free for season ticket holders and for £10 a game for other fans and for those away games not covered.

At the present time sales of season tickets were just under 2,500 with a small number of sales still happening.

Oliver Dowden, Secretary of State at the DCMS, was keen to get supporters back into grounds as soon as possible and SW confirmed that the club had completed plans and were ready as and when this was allowed. Nothing about the current situation was ideal.

Public Health had two further concerns about fans attending games – transport to the ground for those who could not travel by private car and gatherings of fans at local pubs before games. SW stated that the latter issue could be helped by working with the local pubs and maybe having earlier kick-off times. LT added that the club were working closely with the local authority and Lancashire Police on plans to get fans back as soon as possible.

JL asked about the situation for fans keeping their season ticket seats who either could not or did not wish to renew at this time – the club had to date stated that fans would need renew to guarantee their seat for 2021/22. SW recognised that, whilst the policy had been made to encourage ST sales now, that this policy would be revisited before next season.

4. Financial position / Owners' Support / Financial Fair Play

SW confirmed that the club's owners were continuing to support the club on a month by month basis, despite having significant challenges in their other businesses in India.

It was pleasing to see the increased number of Academy players now playing regularly in the first team, which justified the cost of £3m a year (£1.9m from the club and £1.1m in grants). The club did not wish to sell any of their players, although given some of the inflated fees being paid in this transfer window, he could not rule out a sale if a very big bid was made.

SW stated that the EFL had agreed that two seasons had been wrapped into one regarding Financial Fair Play rules (more correctly known as Profit & Sustainability rules). The Championship may well move to a salary cap system for 2021/22, possibly with an £18m cap.

5. Transfer Market Activity

TS asked for progress on the development of a European scouting network. SW replied that a Head of European Development was in place and identifying targets in lesser European leagues such as Austria and the Bundesliga 2 – markets that the club could afford. Thomas Kaminski had been identified some time ago, but it was only recently that he had become available at a price the club could afford. He hoped that before the window closed a defender would be brought in and maybe a midfielder because of Lewis Travis' injury and there may also be a loan

out.

6. Ewood Park Maintenance and Appearance

TS stated that there had been a lot of comment on the poor state of the ground both online and in the Lancashire Telegraph. SW replied that Ewood Park was now an ageing stadium. He recognised that the fascia panels did need work on them. These did need specialist cleaning and the club preferred to use a specialist cleaning company.

The club had a 10 year maintenance plan in place but that had had to be put on hold because of the lack of income. The club had concentrated on protecting their human resources as much as possible. Whilst some staff were furloughed there were some staff working but they had to concentrate on work around safety, which whilst often unseen was frequently essential. Staff had also been involved in preparing the stadium for fans' return with social distancing and installing hand sanitisers and Perspex screens. Some non-priority areas have had to be left.

ND asked whether the club would consider asking fans to help with cleaning the stadium. LT replied that the club had considered this but had decided that with having to provide PPE, ensure social distancing and provide supervision, that it would not be practical.

7. Club Shop Opening

SW stated that the club shop had been made Covid-19 compliant with sanitation stations, a one way shopping route and a queueing system and was now open from 11am to 3pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The first day had seen an encouraging number of customers. He expected there would be longer opening hours for half term and in the run up to Christmas. All sales would be by contactless cards and click and collect was also available.

8. iFollow Revenue

TS how the money made from iFollow purchases was being distributed. SW stated that the £10 fees included VAT and that the net profit was therefore £8.33. The club kept all of the £8.33 for any sales through its website, both for home and away purchases.

Both the club and the EFL have some grave concerns about fans using illegal streaming services with links shared through Facebook – doing this directly took much needed revenue from the club. The club was averaging between 1,500 and 2,000 sales of match passes for home games and any sharing of illegal streaming was compromising potential

profit.

JW asked about whether the club was considering opening their catering facilities as restaurants on both matchdays and during the week at other times. LT replied that using lounges on matchdays was a possibility, although there could not be a pitch view. The club were considering using Blues and the Premier Suite in the first instance, both for match days and other times.

9. Premier League Project Big Picture

TS asked what the club's view was on the proposed Project Big Picture plan. SW stated that the project had been rejected at a meeting of Premier league teams that afternoon.

He said that the plan had looked very good from a financial perspective and would have more than doubled the funding that the club received. Coupled with the introduction of a salary cap it could have led to a working sustainability model. The problem though was with the plans for changing voting rights. He recognised that at least the plan was a way to start discussions and was better than doing nothing. Something needed to be done about bridging the funding anomalies in the Championship, with many clubs still getting parachute payments after relegation from the Premier League.

MK stated that the plan was something that should have input from fans and was concerned about the further concentration of power, the loss of the League Cup and the reduction in promotion opportunities.

10. Any Other Business

- SM asked whether a 2020/21 team photo would be issued. SW stated that there were obvious issues with social distancing, but the club were hoping to make one available.
- LT stated that the popular Blackburn Rovers poppy badges were now back in stock at the club shop.

11. Dates of Next Meeting

Tuesday 1st December at 6pm.

Members should contact John Wareing at johnwareing52@gmail.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.