

**Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum
Ewood Park, Monday 5th February 2007 – 7.15pm**

Present – Fans' Forum

M Howarth
S Birtwell
G Pegden
N Duckworth
J Wareing
G Wignall
D Gardiner
M Patel
J Billouin
C Lloyd
P Lloyd
S Leigh
Julie Wilkinson
I Filbin
C Peacock
P Brooking

Apologies

Pauline Perkins
Andy Robinson

Present from BRFC

T Finn
J Williams

1. **Apologies/Introduction**

Apologies were noted.

2. **Bayer Leverkusen home match kick-off time**

In response to a question about the early kick-off time for the home match with Bayer Leverkusen and the subsequent inconvenience for some fans TF explained the reasoning behind the decision. Rovers were behind both Tottenham and Newcastle United in terms of attractiveness to TV stations but they had been offered a large sum of money by German television to move the match to 6.00 p.m. so that they could also show another live match on the same evening. This was an offer that the club found too good to refuse. Recognising that this would cause inconvenience to a number of fans had led to the offer of free admission to season ticket holders and £1 entrance to children. The club regretted the fact that some fans would not be able to attend but also pointed out that it would allow families with young children who are normally unable to attend night matches, hence the special pricing for children.

TF announced that home TV rights had been sold to ITV and the match would appear on either ITV2 or ITV4, depending on whether Tottenham's match at Feyenoord goes ahead. As a result the kick-off time had been moved to 6.05 p.m. at ITV's request.

3. **Bolton Reciprocal Ticket Arrangements**

MH asked whether Bolton would be offering any reciprocal ticket pricing for the match at the Reebok Stadium following the special pricing at Ewood Park earlier in the season. TF responded that the club had not been informed of pricing arrangements as yet but would expect them shortly – no reciprocal arrangements had been made at the time of the first match. They had, however, been advised of ticket pricing for the FA Cup 5th round match, should Bolton beat Arsenal in their replay on 14th February. Tickets would be priced at £20 and £15 for season ticket holders, both Bolton and Rovers. Prices for the cup match should it be against Arsenal would be more expensive.

ND asked whether there would be special arrangements for cup tickets for fans who would be travelling to the away match with Bayer Leverkusen on 14th and may not be back in the UK until immediately before the cup match on 17th. Those travelling would be able to apply in advance on forms available soon from the ticket office. In addition the ticket office would be open until 10.00 p.m. on 15th and 16th and there would be a facility for ticket collection at the ground should we be playing Arsenal. Given the short time tickets would be on open sale immediately but given that allocations would be 2,000 for Arsenal and 3,000 for Bolton and the lunchtime kick-off and live BBC TV coverage, the club were anticipating being able to meet demand.

4. **2007/08 Season Tickets**

MH noted the club's recent public commitment to lowering season ticket prices following the increased TV deal for the 2007/08 season and asked for any further details. JW replied that, whilst the club were not expecting turnover to increase as much as press reports they wanted to return some of the increased TV income to fans in lower ticket prices. They were looking to simplify the price structure and therefore not every price would necessarily be reduced – for example children's prices at £99 were unlikely to change. The club did, however, need to balance cheaper ticket prices against the need to remain competitive in the market for the best players and consequently needed to be aware of what was happening in the rest of the market. The club was already seriously disadvantaged in terms of gate income with many of its competitors, taking at least half as much as many clubs and about one seventh of the biggest clubs. Higher crowds are very desirable for the club as atmosphere is improved and they help to attract and keep good players but lower prices do have to drive volume.

A detailed pricing strategy had not yet been finalised. The club were not planning to continue the current loyalty scheme to protect value for season ticket holders but were planning a new points loyalty scheme based on total spend but the introduction was dependent on upgraded technology which may not be immediately available. Details of season ticket prices would be announced early but there would be no repeat of last year's early bird offer. The club wanted to do everything possible to retain season ticket sales and encourage growth. Research had shown that 76% of the fans who did not renew their season tickets had not been to a home match all season. The club were conscious that it was much more difficult to regain regular fans once they did not renew.

In response to a query about foreign live TV coverage of matches in local pubs JW stated that the Premier league had confirmed that this practice was illegal and that a pub in Portsmouth had been fined £8,000 in the previous week.

MH asked what the club had learned from its recent price promotions. The club had been delighted with the response for the Bolton match but less so for Middlesbrough, although the latter had been expected as fewer away fans came given the distance and it was the second home game at Christmas in a few days. GW asked for more details of the Settanta contract. Little was known yet about pricing but the second contract would not lead to any more matches or different kick-off times as it would replace the current Sky pay per view programme. There will be no more live games under the new contract from August 2007.

5. **Feyenoord Song**

There was significant interest in the club encouraging the singing of the song used by Feyenoord fans. It was now popular amongst the away support and fans wanted to see its encouragement at home matches. The club were very eager to do anything which would improve the atmosphere at home matches but were conscious that an attempt to introduce it officially would not work and that it needed to be a fans led initiative. There was some discussion about how best to achieve this but the club offered whatever support was felt appropriate.

6. **Club Shop & Merchandising Issues**

MH stated that fans were very disillusioned with the club shop run by SWI , which was now little more than a normal high street sports shop and offered very little in terms of Rovers merchandise. JB also had a number of specific complaints from fans. The club were also dissatisfied with the current situation. They had a lucrative long term contract which they would not be able to replicate managing the store themselves. The contract contained a commitment to Rovers merchandise and percentage of floor space. They were working with SWI to resolve the various issues but were unable to give any more information or commit to a timetable for a resolution.

7. **Any Other Business**

- a) SL raised the issue of poor pitch quality at Ewood. JW responded that the club spent about £30,000 a year relaying the top surface of the pitch and there had been some gradual deterioration. This had been exacerbated by playing two home games in very wet conditions and the extra demands of warm up and warm down routines and the commitment to pitch training for UEFA opponents. It was likely that the pitch would have to be completely replaced, probably in 2008.
- b) GP asked about policy regarding away fans occupying boxes in the Blackburn end, given there had been problems in a number of matches, notably against Sheffield United. JW responded that it was difficult commercially as companies took contracts for boxes specifically in order to entertain their customers, who were frequently supporters of the away team. He did, however, undertake to make sure that the area was patrolled more effectively.
- c) IF asked whether the TV gantry could be moved to the Riverside in order to give a more impressive view of the ground on TV. JW pointed out that this would highlight the Jack Walker stand, where the greatest concentration of empty seats were located. It would also be very difficult technically and would not be popular with broadcasters as they insisted on easy access to the tunnel and dressing rooms. If it was practical at all the cost would be in the

order of hundreds of thousands of pounds. It was still on the agenda as a possibility but there was no immediate prospect.

- d) MH pointed out that all fans at the recent away match at Chelsea had been put into the upper tier, despite tickets having been sold at two rates (£45 and £48). Tickets had also been sold on the night at £50. It was clear that the move to put all fans into the upper tier had been done to save stewarding costs. TF undertook to raise the matter with Chelsea.

8. **Dates of Next Meetings**

This is a proposed schedule for the rest of 2007, based on a frequency of every 6 weeks during the season and every 8 weeks in the close season: -

Monday 19th March
Monday 30th April
Monday 25th June
Monday 13th August
Monday 17th September
Monday 22nd October
Monday 26th November

Could all members please confirm their availability for these dates by contacting John Wareing at anne_allister@hotmail.com or on 01772 741530. In particular please consider the suitability of regular meetings on Mondays.

There will also be an agenda setting meeting for Fans' Forum members a week before the main meeting, proposed as follows; -

Thursday 8th March (home reserve match on Monday 12th)
Monday 23rd April
Monday 18th June
Monday 6th August
Monday 10th September
Monday 15th October
Monday 19th November