

Football – our game!

The fans' blueprint for football



MALCOLM CLARKE IAN TODD

This draft of the **Fans' Blueprint for Football** is being circulated by the national council of the Football Supporters' Federation, prior to the debate at the Fans Parliament, the first FSF annual conference, on 21 June.

We welcome proposals for additions or changes, all of which will be debated on 21 June. The Fans' Blueprint will be the central policy document of the FSF, and will guide our work.

Ideas for changes, additions or amendments should be submitted to Steven Powell, FSF, PO Box 25874, London N5 1WR or e.mail to sl.powell@virgin.net

It would be helpful to receive proposed amendments or additions as soon as possible, but they can be submitted right up to, and on the day of, the Fans Parliament. Let the debate begin!

Malcolm Clarke
Ian Todd

Co-chairs, The Football Supporters' Federation

John Charles,
centre-forward
for Wales,
Leeds United,
Juventus, Roma,
Cardiff City and
Hereford United



"Il tifosi sono il cuore di calcio"

"the fans are the heart of football"

La Stampa, October 1960

- Football in Britain is at a crossroads. Financially the game has never been better off. It's never had more committed followers both at home and overseas. Yet never have so many clubs been on the brink of financial extinction, nor has the game been so ridden by short-sightedness and self-interest.
- Since the start of the current season the chief executives of both the Football League and the Football Association have been forced to resign. The root cause of both departures? Power and money. The game's elite in England, Wales and Scotland seem intent on keeping an ever-increasing proportion of the wealth generated by the game for themselves.
- The Football Supporters' Federation unites the former National Federation of Football Supporters' Clubs and the Football

Creation of one unified governing body for football

The FA said its objective when setting up the Premier League was to streamline and modernise the administration of the game in England. The reality is that instead of having two governing bodies we've now got three. Decisions by the Premier League are taken by their staff and by the twenty member clubs. They're quite entitled to ignore the long-term interests of the game as a whole. Frequently they do.

This malaise doesn't only affect the game at the top. In the pyramid the sensible structuring of the game at this level is hostage to the vested interests of the various "feeder" leagues to the Football Conference.

We think it's simple. We need one governing body responsible for all aspects and levels of the game with the clout and desire to govern the game as a whole. No hostages to vested interests please.

Supporters' Association and represents over 100,000 of the game's most committed supporters in England and Wales. Our members follow teams from the Premiership to the non-League pyramid, as well as the national teams at home and abroad.

- It's these supporters who travel thousands of miles throughout Britain and overseas every season. Without them there would be no game. We pack the grounds, sing the songs, and provide the passion.
- Yet fans are the one group in the game who are most frequently ignored. No more. Football supporters are uniting around a set of principles, which they believe are essential to the future of football. We invite all those who love the game, and have its best interests at heart, to join us.
- It's time to act before it's too late.

Revenue sharing

There's always been a wealth gap in football. Arsenal has always had more money than Barnet or Orient. Manchester United have always been better off than



ARSENAL HAVE ALWAYS HAD MORE MONEY THAN BARNET OR ORIENT

THE FANS' BLUEPRINT FOR FOOTBALL

Rochdale or Bury. The problem is that the gap's now a chasm - and it's getting worse.

The gap between the First Division and the Premier League is simply fantastic. The payout from TV for finishing eighteenth in the Premiership is around £17 million. The TV payout to the Football League champions won't be a tenth of that. When the Premier League was established the gap between what the top league got and the rest put together was £2.5m. Now it's an astonishing £316m, an increase of 12,500%. Relegation used to be a headache. Now it's as likely as not to be financially disastrous.

Before the Premier League breakaway the Football League caved in to the big clubs and got rid of gate sharing. It's time for financial sanity to return to the game. Supporters want competitive leagues. It doesn't only make sporting sense. It makes business sense too.

All the big sports in North America share revenue. That's why a team from Green Bay, a town the size of Ipswich in rural Wisconsin could win the Super Bowl recently. We need a return to gate sharing and fair shares for TV and other corporate revenues. The Blueprint calls for one quarter of all such income for distribution to clubs to be pooled and distributed equally. There's no need for any club to be threatened with going out of business with the amount of money that's in the game today.

Fit and proper person" test and the governance of football clubs



BRIGHTON FANS EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS, AFTER THEIR CLUB ALMOST COLLAPSED IN 1996

We all know about some of the more than dodgy-geezers who have latched on to football clubs. Sometimes their dealings have been illegal. Most have been immoral. Why is it that ice hockey and basketball seem able to impose their rules but football can't?

Football needs stringent tests for who can own, manage and control football clubs. Why? Just ask supporters of York City, Brighton & Hove Albion, Chesterfield ... need we go on?

Legal status of football clubs

As football fans we're all dreamers. We all want to see our clubs do better. Does anybody really believe in sugar daddies anymore though?

Rich people who put money into football clubs don't make gifts. They make loans.

Football needs to stand on its own two feet. The FSF wants to see a robust, legally enforceable licensing system introduced over a five-year period. A similar system operates in Germany. It's stopped the worst aspects of the financial lunacy we've seen here. Most fans could see Leeds United coming a financial cropper. Why couldn't the board?

Club licensing system

Most football clubs became limited companies by accident. With football's increasing popularity at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the sums involved in building the grounds needed to cope with the ever-increasing crowds meant there was a need for personal financial protection for the individuals involved.

The FA had (in fact still has) strict rules barring club shares from being publicly quoted and capping dividend payments. When the financial bright boys saw a potential killing in football they got out their coach and horses and drove it straight through the FA's rules. And they FA's response was to do nothing. Spot on. Just what the game needed.

The Blueprint calls for the development of a special legal status for sporting clubs with similar tax and financial benefits to charities. The Royal Opera House is a charity. Why can't a football club have a similar status? In return for these privileges we'd expect clubs to obey strict rules about disposal of assets like grounds.

Safe standing

What is it you can't do at a First Division or Premiership football match that you can do at horseracing? Or either code of rugby? Or at a rock concert? Or the opera? Yes, you've got it. Stand up to enjoy the entertainment.

What we don't want is a return to huge, swaying terraces with few facilities. What we do want is small, safe, well organised and stewarded standing areas.

Areas where those who prefer to can stand and watch a game in safety and comfort without annoying those who prefer to sit. A step backwards? Tell that to the 60,000 who pack Europe's newest super-stadium, the Arena Auf Schalke in Germany. 14,000 fans stand up during Bundesliga games. In four hours these areas can be converted to 6,000 seats for European and international matches.

A recent independent survey of Arsenal supporters showed a massive 65% supporting a safe standing area at Arsenal's new ground. The law currently bans standing at 44 out of 92 professional clubs in England and Wales.

How could it have been safe to stand at Craven Cottage one season, but not the next? The safety of a ground cannot logically

be a function of the quality of football being played on the pitch. This is completely illogical. It's time for the conspiracy of silence on this subject to end.

TV fixture changes and TV contracts



MANCHESTER UNITED FANS DEMONSTRATE FOR MORE 3PM KICK-OFFS

Talk to any group of football fans and they'll tell you they've had enough of matches being moved at a whim to suit television. A successful campaign was run by supporters in Germany recently to get matches played at 3.30pm on a Saturday, the traditional time for games there.

The FSF is backing a similar campaign here. Fixture lists are in danger of becoming a work of fiction as things stand. We say put the blame where it should properly lie. This is down to the football authorities. They own the rights. They can decide the terms. Most of us don't mind the odd game being moved.

How about for starters a rule that says a minimum of half of any club's games must kick-off at 3.00pm on a Saturday? Not perfect, but a better deal than some clubs are getting at the moment.

We also want consideration for supporters when games are moved from weekends or bank holidays to working days. And proper consideration of the needs of the away fans in travelling long distances to games that have been moved to odd times. Only football would ignore its most important customers the way it does.

We also want prior consultation with supporters on TV contracts to put an end to TV 'overkill' and a fair deal for the match-going fan.

Away fan bans and away ticket allocations

We understand what's behind the current rash of bans on away fans. None of us wants to see the sort of scenes that have been creeping back into football. We understand that the curse of hooliganism is still with us.

But to ban away fans is to surrender to mob rule. Nobody, for example, proposes banning young men from city centres on a Friday and Saturday night, because a small number cause problems. Why should most fans have to suffer for the actions of a mindless few? Let's get the hooligans banned



BAN THE HOOLIGANS AND ENABLE TRUE FANS TO ENJOY THEIR FOOTBALL

from football and enable true football fans to enjoy our day out.

Whilst we're at it let's look at increasing away ticket allocations, at least to the level required by the rules. Some clubs seem able to ignore the minimum allocation with impunity.

Wimbledon FC and franchise football

It's simple. The decision of a commission appointed under FA rules and procedures to allow the former Wimbledon FC to move to Milton Keynes should never have been allowed. The fans didn't want it. They were so disillusioned with the decision they've set up and now run their own club, AFC Wimbledon. Following the true Wimbledon tradition their plan is to work their way up on merit through the non-League pyramid and back into the Football League. Good luck to them.



Neither did the Football League want it. Or the Football Association. The FA's position is that it's still a very bad thing for football. Surprise, surprise, there's even a rule against it!

That didn't stop the FA-appointed commission ruling by a 2-1 majority that Wimbledon could move. They also pronounced that the suggestion by supporters that they would set up their own club if theirs was stolen from them to be bad for football.

What planet were these people on? How does the FA manage to allow a tribunal established under its rules to flagrantly breach football's own rules and procedures by allowing the move in the first place? This loophole has got to be closed now. This one is very topical. Fulham fans may never see The Cottage again. York City fans who have just saved their club still have a mountain to climb to provide a new ground for the club. Why? Because a few speculators

were allowed to get away with legally dividing the team from the ground and then offering the ground for sale for development making the club homeless.

Surprise, surprise there's a FA rule to deter this sort of thing. And the FA, in response to this threat has done nothing. It says its hands are tied. The company that controls York City's ground is privately owned. They can do what they like. Well, why bother having rules in the first place then?

At least the FA has agreed to meet with supporters to try and find an airtight way

of stopping this sort of asset stripping. Legally this might be ok. Morally we've got a name for it - theft. Grounds should only be sold or ground moves contemplated where a clear majority of that club's supporters are in favour after being given all the facts.

Structure of the season and domestic and International competitions

We think it's time for a root and branch review of the way our season is structured. Nobody asked supporters when replays were ditched in the FA Cup at the semi-final and final stages. Or restricted to one in the preceding rounds.

Nor have fans been asked what size they believe the Leagues should be (16? 18? 24?). Nobody asked supporters about UEFA Cup games on a Thursday evening. Or about a mid-season break, international weeks with no League fixtures, increasing the World Cup to 32 teams. Or about the structure of the Champions' League, UEFA Cup or World Club Championship.

Many supporters will have views on these issues. What fans deserve is a chance to be heard, and for our opinions to be seriously considered before decisions are made.

Racism



Recent events, such as the racist chanting of a significant minority at the England v Turkey Euro

2004 qualifier in Sunderland, have shown that racism has not disappeared from football. Racism at England's home games is no more excusable than when it's aimed at England's own players in Bratislava or elsewhere. Right from the highest level of the national team down to the grassroots game, there remains a nasty racist and xenophobic undercurrent. Fans need - and want - to be involved in dealing with it, so that the high-profile campaigns from the top fully involve and complement those of us at the sharp end. Discussions have started at national level; and at some clubs. It's time that this gradual progress becomes the norm throughout football.

Discrimination against away fans

We're all fed up with being discriminated against as away fans, both here and elsewhere in the world when following our club or national teams. Bad or in some cases downright aggressive policing, discriminatory ticket prices. The list is endless.

It's not just overseas either. The FSF has had

THE FANS' BLUEPRINT FOR FOOTBALL

to fight long and hard over many seasons to stop clubs charging away fans more. As a direct consequence of FSF intervention away fans attending category A games at Birmingham City are paying £5 less than they would have done. But why does it take supporter protests to make clubs follow the rules. Simple. Most big clubs don't seem to care very much about their own fans. As for away supporters

Ticket Prices



CHELSEA'S WEST STAND – CHEAPEST TICKETS NOW OVER £40

Football can and should do something before people start voting with their feet. The cheapest adult ticket for a category A game at Stamford Bridge is now £40! An adult restricted view seat will cost you £35! The football industry is fond of quoting Lord Taylor's Hillsborough report on safe standing, but forget that Taylor also said that a reasonable price for a seat in the top league should be no more than £6 (in 1992 – equivalent to about £9.65 now!)

At all levels of the game supporters have to pick and chose their games. The constant year on year price rises have simply got to stop before people stop going, not because they want to, but because they can't afford to anymore.

Alongside this we want to see cheaper

seats available for kids and pensioners in all parts of the ground, supported by national rules on age criteria..

TV-free evening

With wall-to-wall television coverage of football these days smaller clubs find it hard to schedule matches in midweek that aren't competing with a domestic, European or international match on the box. There should be one TV-free midweek day built into the fixture list when clubs know they can plan games without competition from TV.

Take Morecambe. They reckon their gate drops by about four hundred when they have competition from a match on TV. Might seem like a drop in the ocean to a First Division or Premiership club. It's a lot of money to Morecambe.

Policing and stewarding

We've all seen good and bad policing. And stewarding. After many years talking fans views are now being taken more seriously by the Association of Chief Police Officers and, through them, matchday police commanders.

We understand that from time to time there will be legal or operational reasons why we can't be consulted in advance. Most of the time however there's no reason why policing and stewarding issues and policies shouldn't be freely debated and discussed with supporters.

We want a real dialogue opened at every club as well as at national level. Supporters want to be part of the solution, not the problem.

Including supporters amongst football's stakeholders



SUPPORTERS FROM EVERY PROFESSIONAL CLUB HAVE COME TOGETHER IN THE FSF

For more than thirty years every independent enquiry has recommended proper funding for supporter organisation and representation. The latest was the Government's final Football Task Force report published in 1999. This recommended that supporters should form one united national representative body.

We delivered this on 1 August 2002 when the Football Supporters' Federation came into being. As for funding well, you've guessed right. The only organisation to support the work of the FSF so far is the Professional Footballers' Association.

Football needs an independent and representative fans' organisation, without vested interests. To do the job required for football and its supporters we need resources. We aim to obtain sponsorship and support from a diversity of sources, and we certainly don't want to be reliant on any single source of funding.

But - like independent bodies in other parts of society - the reality is that the industry we are part of should use a very small part of its wealth to support its consumers (who, of course, create that wealth).

Disabled facilities

Whilst these have improved at many new grounds there's still a very long way to go. It's not only facilities in the ground too. It's public transport. Too many disabled supporters have had to travel in totally inadequate conditions in the guard's van on long distance trains. Too many trains still don't have and other facilities that can be used by disabled supporters.

Let's not forget that mucking about with fixture lists affects disabled supporters more than their able-bodied fellow supporters too.



POLICING AND STEWARDING – SUPPORTERS WANT TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION – TIME FOR A REAL DIALOGUE



ABOVE, WIMBLEDON CHAIRMAN, CHARLES KOPPEL, IN SPLENDID ISOLATION AT SELHURST PARK.

BELOW, THE TRUE FACE OF FOOTBALL: PASSIONATE WIMBLEDON FANS WHO CARE ABOUT THEIR CLUB AND THEIR COMMUNITY



Regulation of football

Football needs a strong, effective, efficient and independent oversight and regulation. We hope the IFC can become that.

The Independent Football Commission isn't exactly what we wanted as we believed that stronger regulation is needed for football. Our experience on many key issues meant that we concluded that the football authorities' record on exercising effective regulation ranged from non-existent to weak.

In an ideal world the Football Association would regulate the game. It's not happening. More and more the FA has become the tame lap dog of the big clubs.

We were disappointed with the Government's decision to go for self-regulation. That didn't mean we don't want it to work. We do. Unfortunately it appears that so far the football authorities have paid little attention to the IFC. In the end the IFC will be a paper tiger if the football authorities decide not to voluntarily co-operate and comply and we'll be knocking on the Government's door again.

The fans' blueprint

We call for:

- 1 The creation of one unified governing body governing all levels of football in England to replace the current multiplicity of leagues and associations.
- 2 The introduction of revenue sharing between all professional clubs where one quarter of all league TV and gate revenue (including executive boxes) is pooled and divided equally.
- 3 Minimum standards of governance, administration and financial control for all clubs to be enforced by the governing body as a condition of membership and league entry, including a fit and proper person test for all persons owning or directing a football club.
- 4 An annual club licensing system to be introduced over a five year period. A condition of licensing to include a ban on unfunded revenue deficits.
- 5 The creation by statute of a special legal status for sporting clubs giving similar tax and financial benefits to charitable status.
- 6 The Government to permit safe standing areas at stadia where clubs and their supporters so wish.
- 7 A reduction to constant fixture changes to suit television.
- 8 Prior consultation with supporters on broadcasting contracts to ensure a fair deal for the matchgoing fan and an end to TV overkill.
- 9 An end to bans on away fans and an increase in away ticket allocations.
- 10 A comprehensive review of the structure of all domestic league and cup competitions and the structure of the season involving supporters at every stage.
- 11 Consultation with supporters on the structure of all European and international club and national team competitions and how they relate to domestic competitions.
- 12 The development of clear rules in consultation with supporters to prevent any recurrence of the FA appeals tribunal decision to permit the former Wimbledon FC move to Milton Keynes.
- 13 The development of clear, legally enforceable rules to prevent clubs selling their grounds without the explicit prior agreement of their supporters and other another ground being provided in the same town.
- 14 Involvement of supporters in initiatives to combat racism on the field and in the stands.
- 15 An end to discriminatory treatment of away supporters in terms of ticket prices and allocations in both domestic and international competitions and club levels.
- 16 The development of a regular TV free midweek evening with no live broadcast Premiership, Football League or Champions' League games for midweek fixtures to encourage live attendance.
- 17 An end to the constant above-inflation increase in ticket prices, particularly for lower priced tickets.
- 18 Discount ticket prices for younger and retired supporters with national standards on age criteria.
- 19 The development of disabled supporters' facilities at all levels of the game including minimum standards.
- 20 Involvement of supporters in all policing and stewarding policies affecting them.
- 21 Encouragement and adequate funding of supporter organisation and involvement in the game at all levels.
- 22 The strengthening of the role and powers of the Independent Football Commission.