

Tony Goodall Fans' Conference

Saturday 3rd February – 11am



Attended:

Andrew Cullen, Rich Hughes, Tony Brown, Mark Judges & Johnny Moore (PFC)

Barry Dewing (Pompey Independent Supporters' Association), David Callahan (South West Supporters' Club), Donald Vass (TGFC Secretary & Chichester Portsmouth Supporters' Club), Gemma Raggett (London Supporters' Club), Graham Price (Pompey 808), Ian Marshall (Chimes Lounge), Kev Ryan (Central Branch Supporters' Club), Leon Tricker (Social Media Groups), Martin Callahan (South West Supporters' Club), Nick Paul (Northern Blues), Roy Gregory (Central Branch Supporters' Club), Simon Colebrook (Portsmouth Supporters' Trust), Steve Heaven-Gandy (Isle Of Wight Supporters' Club), Steve Tovey (Legends Lounge), Tony Howe-Haysome (Armed Forces & Services Club) & Vicky Lamb (Her Game Too).

Apologies:

Adrian Foster (South Wales Association of Pompey Supporters), Mike Fulcher (TGFC Chair & Social Media Groups), Mike Whittle (Pompey History Society), Pam Wilkins (Pompey Disabled Supporters' Association) & Peter House (Pompey Independent Supporters' Association),

Agenda:

1. January Transfer Window

Q: The club have strengthened significantly in the January transfer window. Can you talk us through the deals completed? How do you rate the team's chances for the rest of the season following the close of the window?

RH: Before we get into details of the players, just a quick word on timings. We said we might need to wait until late in January to complete deals, and the way the window panned out proves that. We understand that everyone wants us to act straight away, but deals do take time. We always had in mind what we wanted to achieve, but that was dependent on time factors.

Chronologically, we started with Matt Macey. Goalkeeper was an area we wanted to strengthen. That was the easiest deal, as he was a free agent and we didn't need to negotiate with another club. We knew his character from his previous spell at the club, and he provides us extra strength in depth. We extended Josh Martin's contract early in the window, and he will have an impact before the end of the season. We then had to wait three weeks until Myles Peart-Harris came in. I've worked with him before at Forest Green Rovers, Jon Harley has worked with him at Chelsea, so we knew him well. The deal was actually agreed before Brentford's game against Nottingham Forest [2 days before he joined], and so we knew he just had to make it through that fixture without getting injured. In the end, he didn't make it off the bench that day and so we knew he would be able to join us. Myles had been getting minutes for Brentford, and that's meant he's been able to come straight in to our side ready to play.



After that, we completed three deals this week. They were all players we'd targeted prior to the window. Tom McIntyre comes in at centre back following the injury to Regan Poole. Tom gives us balance, drives forward with ball, has Championship experience, is a good age and will progress further, so it made sense to bring him in. Callum Lang comes in as a frontline attacker who will bring fresh impetus to the group. He has a good League One record, is versatile and will provide a foil for Colby Bishop. Owen Moxon was due to be out of contract in the summer, so we wanted to strike early and bring him in this window.

We felt we had certain needs to address this window and wanted to strengthen in certain areas. When proposing deals to the board, we received very strong backing from the owners. We felt able to go and make things happen to make us better for the second half of the season.

TB: We've always had backing from the Owners in previous January Transfer Windows, but as Rich stated we have received additional backing from them this season to provide additional cover for the long-term injuries to Regan Poole, Alex Robertson and Tino Anjorin. We've also made some signings in this January Window aligned with the football strategy we implemented 15 months ago, for players who may have gone to Championship clubs next summer.

Q: A sixth deal for a Premier League youngster reportedly fell through late on. Is this a transfer we might potentially revisit in the summer?

RH: Possibly. The player in question is a bit younger – it would've been nice to add him to the group, but it wasn't important for the back end of this season. We want to continue targeting good young players, that's the type of market we want to exploit.

Q: How important is mentality when recruiting players?

RH: It's huge. It's not always possible, but we try to look at potential signings in different scenarios. We'll scout them when they're favourites in a home game, then underdogs in an away game and so on. Our final three signings have all captained their previous teams - that's important. We'll always do the data, but we have to weave it in with trusting what we see as well. Having the right mentality is a big part of what we're trying to create. Playing for Portsmouth Football Club comes with pressure and expectation - we don't shy away from that. We want players who are prepared to embrace it. I loved seeing Callum Lang score on his debut and showing an instant connection with the club and the fanbase. Everyone we spoke to gave him a glowing reference.

Q: Destiny Ojo was recalled from his loan at Poole Town. Is he earmarked to join up with the first team?

RH: We'll continue to monitor him. We'll get him some minutes training with the first team, then may look to get him back out on loan.

2. Stadium & Training Ground



Q: The Milton End redevelopment appears to be nearing completion and will host away fans on the north side again today. What's the current status of the works? Will the lift be operational from today?

AC: We're very close to finishing. The frustrating thing has been the delayed installation of the lift - wet weather has caused delays. The lift won't therefore be in use today but is due to go in in the next 7-10 days, hopefully in time to be used for the Cambridge game. We'll be working with some disabled supporters who are coming in to help us test it and there will be opportunities for disabled season ticket holders to try before they buy. Aside from snagging problems with the lift, the whole project is on budget and on time. We are very grateful to PMC who have managed the project and their team of sub-contractors.

MJ: The lift not being ready today has impacted Northampton, but we've liaised with the club and their supporters at length over routes of access for supporters with accessibility needs. We've ensured no one coming today is disadvantaged. We want their experience to be good.

Q: How will home and visiting supporters be segregated when the stand is at full capacity? Will a column of seats need to be kept empty between fans, and if so how many seats will be lost when doing so?

MJ: We can change the size of the away section in the Milton End from 850 up to 2,000 seats. The remaining seats in that stand are left for home supporters, minus what's lost to segregation netting. There are 6 different places we can have the segregation, which ties into the concourse facilities as well as the seats. We will test each configuration and continue to tweak things over the next few months. It will be hard to test every possible option unless we get the right sales numbers from away teams. We have really open lines of communication with away clubs to help us sell strategically, as we don't want to lose any seats, we could potentially sell to home fans. The Milton End now has 3 kiosks where both home and away supporters will be able to get served alcohol in that stand. That will help grow the club's matchday income.

AC: We need to be very careful in the coming games. There were issues at the Leyton Orient fixture with away fans trying to get across the segregation netting, so we need to ensure we have effective safety protocols in place. Reading have sold 2,000 tickets for their forthcoming fixture here, the maximum they will receive, and so we will be cautious with larger segregation gaps for these initial, full away capacity fixtures.

MJ: There will be a slightly wider segregation today, to safeguard that Reading game. We're taking a cautious approach to demonstrate that we operate the stadium in a safe and efficient manner.

Some fans have asked me why we've only sold Milton End season tickets in block R - that's the first one uninterrupted by any segregation pattern. Seats in block S might potentially be knocked out if Sky televise a game, as their broadcast tower may go here, so we're not selling season tickets in this area.

Q: You've previously spoken about the difficulty and expense of filling in the corners of Fratton Park with additional seating. Would the club ever look to pursue this?



AC: They are notoriously challenging to do. At a previous club I was involved in the redevelopment of an 8,000-seater stand. We then went on to compete a corner infill with the 750 seats which was around 40% of the cost of the entire 8,000-seater stand. We have looked at the possibility of filling in corners at Fratton Park to add extra seating. We could do it, but it would be hugely expensive to do so compared to the relatively small number of seats that would be delivered. The main priority has to be the North Stand. That's important not just for adding significantly more seats, but in the context of enabling the wider development of the area north of the stand, including for mixed commercial / residential properties as has been outlined in the Portsmouth Local Plan. It would be a huge expense, partly financed by the extra income we'd make from the wider development and increased ROI from future revenue from ticketing and other commercial activities projected from within any new redeveloped stand.

Q: A behind-closed-doors friendly with Aldershot was reportedly cancelled last month due to a frozen pitch, leading some supporters to question why we don't have indoor training facilities as some other League One clubs do. Would the club benefit from having an indoor training dome, and is this an aspiration for the future?

RH: I know there was a lot of talk online about this, but lots of games were called off up and down the country that day – very little football was played anywhere. We had the opportunity to play the friendly on a 3G pitch, but we were planning to use the game mainly to bring back players from injury, so we only wanted to do that on a grass pitch so as not to aggravate their injuries. We wouldn't have played it on 3G indoor pitch even if we'd had one. The first team squad trained as normal that week – we didn't lose any training minutes.

TB: We purchased our training ground two and a half years ago which we believe may be the first time that the club has owned its own training ground in its history. Since then, we've spent several million on bringing the facility up to standard with the priority being to create an elite working environment for the first team squad for what, in essence, constitutes their main place of work. We've committed a further circa £1m this summer on the integration of all first team operations into the main building. We've spoken about a potential dome previously in relation to our Academy operations and the potential longer-term strategic development of the overall site.

AC: Moving forward, we have the ambition to do a number of different projects. Our vision is to have a dome at the training ground. The next stage is to fully integrate the first team into the main building at the training ground, as that enables us to remove the portacabins they currently use, which frees up more grass. We also have more available space where the old Play Football facilities were. We are also maintaining dialogue with our neighbours on future developments.

I don't think having a dome would've solved the problem of the friendly mentioned above. We would never have played such a game on 3G or in a Dome as Rich has outlined. Where 3G becomes useful is for the academy. Our academy rent 5 different sites each week, as they train in the evenings and need floodlit services. Having an indoor dome would be expensive but would bring down those rental costs as it would be kept in house.

Q: Could the club look to hold concerts at Fratton Park in the future?

AC: It's still part of our future plan. We'd need a new pitch first. This summer, the TV gantry work is the main project. That will start as soon as the last home game finishes. It will be an intensive



project. We only have access from the front via the pitch, not from the back where there are houses. We will get some of the pitch work preparation done initially, then when the crane work is complete in mid-June, we'll be able to relay it in full. The EFL season kicks off a week later this year, which gives us an extra week to complete it if we need it, but the groundsmen will still be working to a very tight schedule. The advantages of a new pitch mean we could potentially hold concerts and more women's fixtures at Fratton Park. We may even look to hold the majority of their games at Fratton Park if they go up. You could hold 50-60 games a year on a new pitch and it would still hold up well, particularly in its early years.

Q: Some fans report that the Victory Bar toilets get extremely busy and difficult to access at peak times. Does the club still plan to revamp the Victory Bar in the near future?

AC: It's one of five new cap-ex projects we're keen to develop, alongside the TV gantry and pitch over the next 12 months. We'll look to improve the interior and exterior of the Victory Bar. I can't guarantee it will be this summer – as it will depend on a number of external factors, not least the volume of work we have already committed to this summer, so it may well be worked on throughout next season – but it's a project we wish to proceed with. We don't currently have great facilities for conferences, meetings and bigger functions. A refurbished Victory Bar with updated designs, new toilets and a new entrance will encourage people to host more events here. The updates won't impact on its matchday use – the Victory Bar will still operate for supporters on matchdays with improved facilities and won't become a new hospitality lounge.

Q: Regarding the footbridge requirement in the Portsmouth Local Plan, please can the club confirm who first proposed the bridge, and what alternative solutions were considered for reducing footfall on Goldsmith Avenue?

AC: It wasn't the football club – it's from the Portsmouth Local Plan. The Local Plan is written by Portsmouth City Council.

Q: Is there anything more supporters can be doing to help raise the Fratton train station safety concerns with Network Rail?

AC: I'm very aware that there were issues once again after the Fleetwood game, this time on the station platforms. Several dangerous issues were reported to us. People were crowding onto the platform, and I've heard reports about a young child nearly falling onto the tracks. Please keep sending us information and reports like this and we can pass it on to the relevant bodies. South Western Railway continue to be very supportive and collaborative. I had a meeting with Stephen Morgan and Network Rail at Westminster recently, which has given us access to other people as well. The next stage of these discussions is to work towards delivering a bridge feasibility study and we are making constructive progress on this.

3. Ticketing

Q: With home tickets in high demand this season, the club's ticket exchange has been opened for some fixtures. Currently fans only receive £5 for re-selling their ticket however, which some supporters don't feel provides much incentive to list their seat. Can the club consider promoting this scheme more, to ensure there are as few empty seats as possible for the rest of the season?



MJ: The ticket exchange has been available for every home league game this season apart from Bolton and Northampton. It goes live when less than 200 seats are available for sale. We promote it via multiple channels to help get the message out to supporters. The uptake is good – use has gone up 130% this season. Only 490 ticket exchange sales were made during the whole of last year, whereas we're currently at 1,127 sales for this season. We understand fans' frustration when there are empty seats at sold out games - we live and breathe that as well. The option to list your ticket on the exchange stops at midnight before a game. As some fans don't make a choice about attending until the day of game, some may not be able to use it. Something we need to consider is including information about the ticket exchange in the pre-season pack we send out with season tickets in the summer. For next season, that's something we should be doing. On the £5 contribution [for fans whose tickets sell via the exchange], we know there's a debate about that and we'll review the fee before next season.

Q: When a supporter generates an account balance from the ticket exchange, how can this balance be used?

MJ: As soon as a ticket is sold via the exchange, the £5 balance is added to your account immediately. This credit can be used for anything sold via our e-ticketing site where we're the home club – season tickets, matchday parking, stadium tours, league fixtures taking place at Fratton Park and Women's games at Westleigh Park. You can't redeem it for away matches or cup games as the ticketing distribution is different. You can use the credit online, over the phone, or in person.

Q: Given our current league position, is the club able to give an indication of likely season ticket price increases if we are promoted to The Championship? What should fans prepare to pay next season?

MJ: We have no indication to share at this moment in time. Those conversations are yet to be finalised.

MJ: One change to season ticket pricing we want to make next year is to have more of a level playing field. Ambulant and disabled supporters currently pay a flat rate – that benefits some and penalises others. We want to bring age categories to these tickets as well so that everyone pays a fair price.

Q: When will away season ticket holders find out more about plans for next season, when the scheme will no longer be available?

MJ: All legacy away season ticket holders will be written to by the end of March this year. These people will not be disadvantaged in any way – we're committed to that. We have circa 80 people on this scheme, and they are among the people with the most loyalty points in the whole club database, so they won't miss out on ticket access.

4. Kits & Merchandise

Q: The club's kit deal with Nike is due to end this summer. Are you able to share any information about next years' supplier? Availability of kids' sizes in the summer and the run up to Christmas has been disappointing this season.

AC: I can't say too much at this stage – we're concluding the tender process at the moment. Discussions have to remain confidential. Our current deal, negotiated in 2017 by Mark, Tony and

Anna, is very advantageous to the club and one of the best retail models I have seen in football. That's the benchmark - my intention is to come out even stronger. We've had very high income from merchandise this year. We've sold 15,000 shirts, up 9,000 from last year, hence stock selling out very quickly. We will see significant increases in stock available next year.



Q: The Women's team have been playing in blue shorts of late – are these available for supporters to purchase? Some junior supporters are keen to be able to wear the complete women's kit.

AC: That's something I've asked the kit suppliers to deliver for us next season.

RH: I been involved in the meetings with potential suppliers, and women's kits are a key part of our discussions.

MJ: We had a kiosk with Pompey Women-branded merchandise at their last home game – that did very well. We were left with very little stock after the game, which is a nice problem to have. We have one brand identity across the football club, but it's good that women's team have their own identity within that. It's great to see people supporting that.

5. Pompey Women

Q: Pompey Women are enjoying a successful campaign. Are there any plans for them to play at Fratton Park again before the end of the season?

AC: I'd like to hold more games here. Jay Sadler is very conscious of the competitive advantage they get from playing at Westleigh Park at the moment. The team naturally wants to keep that momentum going. There's a game towards the end of March where Westleigh Park is unavailable, which we'd love to move to Fratton Park, but it does clash with the final of the FA Women's National League Cup. Once the result of our semi-final against Newcastle is known, we can look at planning for that weekend. Everyone at the club is coming together to help deliver success for the Women's team.

Q: Are there any plans to run official club coach travel to Newcastle for the FA Women's National League Cup Semi Final later this month?

AC: That will be determined very much by interest. The problem we've got, as the game kicks off at 2pm, is that it would be a 4am departure for 1pm arrival, then a 4:30pm departure and 1am arrival home. Are people prepared to get up that early and have such a long day, particularly families? We'll hear from our women season ticket holders to assess likely demand.

6. Other

Q: Has an overseas pre-season trip been organised for this summer? If so, please can it be announced earlier this year so that more fans have an opportunity to attend?

RH: That's still being planned. An overseas trip has to fit in from a footballing perspective. We're working to identify a few different countries. We understand that everyone wants to know the fixtures, get flights etc, but we have to first co-ordinate our plans. Our good trip away to Spain last year has contributed massively to our early success this year.

7. AOB



Q: What's the status of iFollow for next season?

AC: The club is currently part of the EFL Digital collective, but that contract comes to an end at the end of this season. The current business model is no longer viable for the EFL, and so the arrangements as currently exist will stop. We have a decision to make – one option is to stay and buy into the new EFL model, but there may be certain advantages to leaving and going our own way. We're going through a tender process at the moment, which would look at the digital provision for our website and app, as well as a streaming platform for live matches.

MJ: If we do choose to step away from the collective, it will give us a great chance to offer more to supporters. We'll have more flexibility to add our own helpful elements to the website, as it will no longer be a frame worked 'out-of-the-box' product.

AC: iFollow will no longer exist for domestic supporters, but the option to purchase and watch live games will be available on a new Sky app. They'll be able to show all midweek and bank holiday games, as well as every game from the opening and closing weekends.

We will still be able to offer a streaming service for international fans for every fixture, and we will develop our own streaming platform to do so. That gives us the opportunity to set up own channel. There are a lot of companies tendering for that. We'll complete that process fairly shortly so that it's ready in time for the new season. One benefit from going independent is that we could stream pre-season friendlies for example, which would be another good source of revenue.

An important thing for fans to be aware of is that the new TV deal will materially affect kick-off times. Two games each in all three EFL division will be played at 12:30 and 5:30 on Saturdays. Fans will receive a much longer notice periods of schedule changes, and we will need to be transparent with season ticket holders about this when they buy for 2024-25.

Q: Can the starting 11 be read out in the Victory Bar before the game? We often can't get phone signal in there.

MJ: We will get this sorted.

[This was implemented ahead of the Northampton fixture, with Barry Harris running through the Pompey team at 2pm].

Q: Is the Hall of Fame dinner returning this season?

MJ: We're working on that. We had a productive meeting on Tuesday and hope to have some details to share with fans in the next 2-3 weeks. We want to make it as cost accessible as we can, and for it to be something the club and attendees can be proud of.

AC: Something I'd like to make supporters aware of it that, as part of the EFL's equality, diversity, and inclusion club requirements, we're obliged to hold an EDI survey of our supporters. We will need to send this out shortly, as our EDI audit is in April. It will ask things like your ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender, to develop a better understanding of our fanbase. I'm quite sensitive that some may see this as an invasion of privacy. I want to reassure fans that completion of the survey and answers will be completely optional and anonymous.

- Minutes by Donald Vass

