

Tony Goodall Fans' Conference

Thursday 1st July – 6:30pm



Attended:

Andrew Cullen, Anna Mitchell, Johnny Moore (PFC).

Barry Dewing (Pompey Independent Supporters' Association), Barry Thompson (Northern Blues), Colin Farmery (Pompey History Society), Donald Vass (TGFC Secretary & Chichester Portsmouth Supporters' Club), Gemma Raggett (London Supporters' Club), Graham Berry (Portsmouth Supporters' Trust), Graham Price (Pompey 808), Ian Marshall (Chimes Lounge), Jeff Harris (Armed Forces & Services Club), Mike Fulcher (TGFC Chair & Social Media Groups), Pam Wilkins (Pompey Disabled Supporters' Association), Roy Gregory (Central Branch Supporters' Club), Scott Clarke (Clan Pompey) & Steve Tovey (Legends Lounge).

1. Welcome

Q: Welcome to the role, Andrew. What have your first few weeks in post been like, and what are your top priorities? What would you like to achieve here in the short and long term?

AC: It has been an amazing start. I've been here 2 weeks now, and it seems like 10 months! There's so much going on. I had a really dynamic first couple of days – we announced the stadium redevelopment and then the training ground acquisition. That's a real step forward, making us the masters of our own destiny. We've seen a real acceleration on player recruitment, and we've just announced Gavin Bazunu. He kept a clean sheet in my very last game at MK Dons, so I know him quite well! I've been delighted to have met a number of different supporters' clubs – the Pompey Supporters' Trust, the Presidents, the Heritage And Advisory Board, Pompey Independent Supporters' Association next week. I've been meeting external partners as well, such as the University who we've been agreed a really good three-year sponsorship deal with. I've had some media engagements, giving me a chance to articulate some initial thoughts. The most important thing so far has been having the chance to get to know staff, which will help me to shape a plan going forward.

My top priorities – first of all player recruitment, not just for now but taking a long term view of the next two to three windows. The manager has a philosophy he wants to bring in, possibly different from the previous manager hence we've had quite a few departures. Danny's been quite clear he doesn't want to compromise in terms of the quality of player brought in. We went through something similar at MK Dons with Russell Martin – he came in with a different style to the previous two managers and needed to do an overhaul of playing personnel to get his own players in the building. It took 3 windows, and he's now in a position to have exactly the players he wants. I see some similarity between this and Danny. My second priority is supporting Anna in creating new revenue-generating opportunities. The third priority is preparing for the return of crowds, which we hope will be back in big numbers in August. We've got a big job to do on hospitality, taking that in house, both concessions kiosks and the lounges. I'm also prioritising the integration of the Academy at the Roko site and working with Greg Miller to improve what we're doing there.

Greg is reviewing the entire Academy operations, a process I am familiar with and that's an experience I'm familiar with, having gone through it at MK.



The Goal here is to get to the Championship, sustain a regular place in the Championship, then be knocking on the door of the Premier League. But I'm wise enough not to make promises on timescale!

Q: You talked about revenue generation there – is there a business plan in place to help make us sustainable in the Championship?

AC: The Championship is in danger of imploding, as clubs struggle in the aftermath of the pandemic! Look at the interest in football clubs at the moment – new owners are mainly buying clubs in League One. You can do something with a Sunderland, a Wigan or an Ipswich, whereas Championship owners are getting burnt fingers, throwing so much money at it to get to the Premier League. Some owners are finding they can no longer do that as their own businesses suffered during the pandemic. In League One, there are three clubs spending huge money - Wigan Ipswich, Sunderland. Only three clubs will go up, and experience suggests that not all three of those will. So at least one could be in a tricky situation in the year after next. We've got a long term commitment from our owners here, shown by the £11m commitment to stadium and the training ground purchase. On the business plans, I inherited the one we've got at the moment so I need to assess that, but being sustainable in the Championship can be done. We're looking at additional new commercial revenues, we're looking at the player trading model, the Brentford model. They've put together an example of how you can go up without throwing money at it, but instead having a clever recruitment plan.

Q: Will you continue to engage with fans through the existing channels such as the monthly video Q&A sessions, the fans' conference and radio phone-ins?

AC: Yes, absolutely. Mark Catlin did a great job providing clear channels of communication and accessibility. I'm conscious of the recent history of the football club and know the need for fan engagement. I've subscribed to this at previous clubs, and I come from a marketing background, so know how important communication is. There are some great groups set up and I'm keen to look at new ways to do things to. I'll keep doing the video Q&As, and want to bring someone from different part of the club in to do them alongside me so can have a different focus each time. We could do one with Greg Miller with an academy focus for example.

Q: What have been your first impressions of the Pompey fanbase? Do you recognise the passion and expectation? How can this be harnessed and used as a positive? Will you be leading from the front when it comes to demonstrating the fighting spirit which the city personifies?

AC: The fanbase is absolutely massive – it's one of the reasons I was so excited to come here. This is a one city club, and the passion in the city is evident. When I moved into my apartment, the first person I bumped into on my very first night recognised me and asked if I was the new Pompey CEO! It comes with a degree of responsibility, and it's why the communication with fans is so important. We want to use the passion as a positive, for example working closely with Pompey In The Community to bring benefits to the entire city.



2. Player/Management update

Q: How do you reflect on the summer transfer window business so far? What are the latest developments?

AC: We've brought one in today! So much work has been done already, and we've got shortlists we're pursuing. Having five signings through the door to date is more than many clubs. It's more complicated for loans as the European Championships have meant many Premier League clubs don't want to release players on loan yet, as they need them in training while their internationals are away. Loans are more likely to come later in the window than sooner, which is why we're so pleased to have Gavin Bazunu done early. Ideally, we want to have 9 to 10 of the 11 through the door by the first week in August, as by the end of the month 6 games have already gone which is a good chunk of your season. We've had some disappointments – some targets went to the Championship, while we had terms agreed with another and he decided to go elsewhere. That's the nature of the summer transfer window at this particular stage.

Q: The club entered into discussions with five first team players who were out of contract but did not retain any of them. Were serious efforts made to keep these players, and how disappointed was Danny Cowley not to sign them?

AC: You have to look at the players you want – their track records, their injuries and so on – then make the right offer to fit the player and their value in the market. It's easy to recruit a player if you're willing to pay him more than he's worth! We've seen some good servants leave but Danny doesn't think we've missed out on anyone because we haven't been able to afford them. If he really wants a player, we'll back him. Nothing's been forced on Danny – he's made decisions based on who fits his philosophy and identity. The task now is to bring in new players who do fit into the club's style and ethos.

Q: Danny Cowley is overseeing a significant clear out and rebuilding job of the playing squad. Are there concerns that we may have a slow start to the season while players take time to settle and gel?

AC: That is a risk. Russell Martin lost his first 4 games in charge of MK. It's a natural consequence of change in playing style. But we have got existing players in the squad who got close to the playoffs last year, and have already added great players like Shaun Williams. We've signed good experienced campaigners like Ryan Tunnicliffe and Clark Robertson. Danny wants to play out from the back, he wants to build possession from the back. Our long term recruitment plan is the Brentford model – snap up young, hungry assets under 23 with resale value down the line. Liam Vincent for example is young and highly rated, he's an asset for the future. Some may come out of academies, and we've got a couple of those on the radar.

Q: There has been some talk that this summer would see a big market readjustment with clubs spending less after the pandemic. In practise, are players and agents now asking for less? Have you got a sense of how our budget compares to other clubs with similar ambitions?

AC: Players and agents will always ask for more, and in the early stages of the window they can and do! We're entering the more realistic stage of the market now. It depends on the player– do



they want to be a reserve for a Championship club, or be a first-choice player in front of a full crowd at Fratton Park? Clark Robertson is a good example of a player who subscribed to the new coaching philosophy. We beat off Championship interest because he wanted to play for Pompey and wanted to play for Danny. It's still hard to gauge budgets as clubs don't know whether they're budgeting for a season with fans or without, but we're certainly starting to see Championship clubs cut their cloth accordingly.

Q: We've previously appeared reluctant to enter into contract renewal negotiations during the middle of a campaign. We've got twelve players out of contract next summer – what will your approach to renewals be?

AC: I'll take each one individually. Every player is different. It's important for us to protect the assets. I think Mark's approach was right last year – with so much uncertainty during the pandemic, he wanted to see how things unfolded before committing to deals.

3. Footballing structure & Academy

Q: As well as playing staff, we seem to have had widescale changes of backroom staff. Can you expand on the restructuring of the football club?

Q: Are the club still planning to appoint a Head of Football Operations? Some fans are concerned that Roberto Gagliardi appears to be in the running for the role despite his record at Leyton Orient.

AC: This is a new era for the first team. Danny and Nicky have brought in Simon Basseby, someone who will complement them in terms of personality. He will provide immense support to the management team. The sports science and medical department is as it was. On recruitment and analysis, Phil Boardman and Roberto Gagliardi are working long hours to identify players. Roberto is extremely hard working, and has brought great talent into the club. He spotted Ronan Curtis, a tremendous asset for this football club. On a Director of Football, I won't talk about individuals but I'm doing a comprehensive review. I need to see how different roles interact with each other. I'm open to the idea, but it means different things at different clubs. We will find the best dynamic to achieve success.

Q: When Tornante made their pitch for ownership in 2017, the academy formed a major part of their proposals. This summer, many academy youngsters were released, while Alfie Stanley reportedly turned down the offer of a new deal because he didn't have faith in the pathway offered to him. What can be done to help overhaul an underperforming part of the club?

AC: Greg Miller is doing a complete review of the academy. He's new and so can take a real objective view of things. Greg's brief is to work closely with me and Danny. We want to be smarter on recruitment and ensure the coaches are totally aligned to first team and across the academy. The owners are totally committed to it. Michael is committed to the Academy and purchasing the Roko site is a sign that it's still important to them. At MK Dons, we didn't sign an academy player this year either. These things tend to go in cycles. There's no point forwarding people who 'might' become a player, it's better to let them go and get on with their lives. There's a risk it could come back to haunt you, of course, but it's the right thing to do. We had George Williams at MK Dons, he was released by the academy, went to university, got a degree, ended up back in football



getting promoted to the Championship with Barnsley before returning to MK Dons. Personally, I'm a little sceptical in the merits of an U23 side – That is my own view - at this level a player should be playing first team football by 21 at the latest. That is all part of our ongoing Academy review and it will be good to hear if there are alternative points of view We can loan players out to help them build and develop their experience.

4. Fratton Park

Q: Which areas of the ground will be affected by capacity reductions in 2020/21? What will happen to people whose season ticket seats are out of action?

Q: Where will away fans be sat while the Milton End is redeveloped, and how will this impact season ticket holders in that stand?

AC: It's a three season project. We'll be working on different parts of the ground at different times. Social distancing rules will impact this – we may need to move people even if their seat isn't affected by the works.

AM: The North Stand is the priority for this season. The North Upper seats have been removed and will be replaced for the start of the season. In January, the North Lower seats will be removed and replaced. At the end of the season, we'll start on the South Stand for Year 2 of the works. That will involve reprofiling the stand and improving the concourse areas. In Year 3, we'll start on the Milton end. This season, there will be reductions in all 3 stands because of health and safety. We will liaise and consult with people who are affected and help move them to another stand that they're happy with, then convert them back to their original seats when we can. Steve Cripps at PMC is working on a plan where we can redevelop the Milton End in sections, which will help with the relocation of away supporters. Some of the Milton End work has already commenced, for example the floodlight removal. We want to minimise disruption wherever possible.

Q: We recognise that further improvements to Fratton Park may be reliant on changed to local infrastructure. What discussions are ongoing with local politicians and stakeholders?

AC: I'm aware of all the background. I've got a meeting set up with one of the local MPs later this month, and have meeting with others local stakeholders coming up soon. That will provide an opportunity for me to come up to speed, understand where everyone is and explore what can be done.

Q: Previous comments have been made about relocating the stadium to a different site. Is this designed to push other parties into acting?

AC: We've made a commitment to stay at Fratton Park regardless now. We've made a firm commitment and decision to remain at Fratton Park, reflected in the investment made. Without these works, capacity would reduce significantly. We do have aspirations to do much more. We want to make Fratton Park a safe place not just to attend but to travel to. That's absolutely key. We can't realise the grand designs we have for the future without wider infrastructure.

Q: What improvements will be made to the disabled facilities as part of the redevelopment? Which stands will benefit? Are any improvements for disabled supporters likely to be ready for the start of the 21/22 season?



AC: Disabled facilities for away supporters has been a hot topic for me every time one of my two previous clubs has come to Fratton Park! The Milton End is where we'll see the big improvements for disabled fans. I want to work with the Disabled Supporters Association to start to share details and plans with them and check with them that what we're doing is right. It comes back to the idea that consulting fans is key.

AM: The Disability Discrimination Act will be addressed by Milton End redevelopment, with a platform, a lift, and accessible toilets and so on. We're looking at what can be done in the North Stand, and may be able to get some small wins there, but the Milton End is where we'll see the main improvements. It's unlikely to be in time for this season, though we might be able to do something in the North Stand.

Q: Some clubs are installing rail seating in new developments to future-proof their stands. Have the club given any consideration to this, and is safe-standing something you'd like to see at Fratton Park in the future?

AC: I'm open minded – we'll look to find out if it's something fans want to see. Right now, it's hard to do until the legislation changes, and some clubs who have already installed rail seating as part of a pilot are finding some concerns with the design of the seating and further remodelling may be required if the guidance released permits further developments in these areas.

5. Training Ground

Q: What are the plans for the ROKO site? Is the club intending to carry out improvements to the training ground now that we own the freehold? Is there scope to improve the facilities and become a category 2 academy?

AC: Plans will be shaped by what everyone wants – what do the first team need? What does the academy need? What does the gym need? It's quite a big building, with plenty of underutilised space. We've got quite a few acres to play with. There's scope to potentially re-site pitches or add 3G / 4G pitches or an indoor Dome . For the academy, we'd love to get them all on site. I'm a bit of a sceptic on category two academies – the investment needed for return is questionable. If you're going to do it, you need to look at how you then get to Category One, or you develop a "category 3 plus model with a stronger games programme and improved facilities.

6. Ticketing

Q: Are the club still planning to convert flexi-season tickets to full season tickets as soon as possible? If Covid restrictions were to be lifted on July 19th, would they go on sale before the start of the season?

AM: We're still in a state of limbo. We're waiting for the announcement like everyone else. What we can say is that we do have the appetite to get flexi-season ticket holders converted to full season ticket holders as soon as possible. As soon as we can accommodate all 13,000, we will.

Q: What are the contingency plan if we don't open up? Will we continue to use 'groups' when allocating matchday tickets to flexi-season ticket holders?

AM: Yes – we'd start from scratch on the groupings and let fans re-assign themselves, then share games out equally on this basis.



Q: Is it likely that away fans will be permitted next season, and for the Luton Town pre-season friendly?

AC: That will be determined by the authorities. The government may decide they don't think it's safe to allow that travel. The EFL are mindful not to have some clubs allowing away fans and others not – they will probably apply for consistency. That will have an impact for iFollow coverage, and what's allowed to be broadcast next season.

Q: Will there be any changes to hospitality next year? Are the lounges still in use as changing rooms while restrictions are in place?

AM: It all comes down to social distancing. If we kick off the season with restrictions, the lounges will be needed again. We were operating on 40% capacity in the lounges last season. We want guests back in as soon as possible.

7. Finances

Q: What's the state of the club's finances having come through a year and half without fans in the stadium? For how long will we be feeling the impact?

AC: We made significant losses last year and are budgeting for significant losses this year as well. It's difficult, but we enjoy the support of owners who are providing such outstanding support to seeing us through these losses as well as their multi million pound investment in the stadium redevelopment and their purchase of the training ground. We're fortunate to have that level of support. We may need to say no to some players to work within the budget or say no to infrastructure or operational projects in the short term until we get more certainty on restrictions. But we look set to come out of the pandemic with a bright, rosy future. None of this investment from the ownership takes the form of repayment loans, it has all been fresh equity coming in. We should be optimistic about the future.

8. Ownership

Q: We appreciate that Michael Eisner is planning to attend the next fans' conference, and that Eric attended the previous one in May. For most fans though, they have not heard directly from the owners in some time. Do they intend to be more visible in future? Could they do a regular video update for the club's website?

JM: Few owners over the years have come out and spoken. Milan Mandarić was one, Iain McInnes was the other. But most don't. We have a Q&A video with Michael Eisner coming up later this month and should get Eric Eisner and Andy Redman on the website this season too. Andrew Cullen is here to speak on their behalf. The club do speak with fans, and speak on a regular basis. I've been here before when no one from the club came to speak with the fans!

AC: I communicate with fans on behalf of the owners, and channel things back to them as well. That's my role as it should be with any CEO appointed by a Board.

AM: Michael also joined the call with the university recently and spoke passionately about what it meant to the city.

Q: You mentioned the university video – that actually came across as a negative for some fans. Some people felt it showed that the owners were willing to speak to corporate



sponsors but not fans. It would be really positive for supporters to hear from the owners, for example doing a Q&A video on the club's website.

AC: We have one planned for the end of the month.

AM: The questions will be diplomatic but tricky. The media team do pick the hard questions which fans want answering. The university isn't just a corporate sponsor – they're a community partner. They're giving local kids chances to improve both their educational and life skills and bringing new people and investment into the club.

Q: The perceived vacuum of communication from the owners does leave room for rumours to grow, like the one about the club being up for sale. Is there a genuine desire from the owners to get us promoted to the championship this season?

AC: 100%. There's a realisation that we have to back the manager over a longer period. They want to be in the Championship, no doubt, but they want to do it sustainably so we're in a good position to stay there.

9. Other

Q: The new adult home kit costs £50, up from £45 when we first signed with Nike. Why so expensive?

AM: We had a price freeze for the first 3 year of the contract but manufacturing costs have now gone up. The shirts are good quality and do last.

Q: Will the club be producing matchday programmes again this season?

AM: Yes – when fans are back and it's viable to do so.

Q: In previous meetings, discussions took place regarding the possibility of having a formal arrangement with either a non-league or overseas affiliate club. Is this something we're still pursuing?

AC: I'm open minded about the prospect. There are many different ways of doing it - Brentford and Brighton are doing it well but in different ways for example. What do you want out of it? Loan opportunities for youngsters? CPD opportunities at Premier League club with great facilities? A feeder club? Overseas recruitment opportunities due to Brexit? It's an opportunity we want to be alive to, but there's nothing coming up soon.

Q: What plans do the club have to help support Pompey Women?

AM: I'm a director, which creates a clear link between both clubs. We have combined sponsorships such as Utilita. We set out to run it as a sustainable club and managed that within the first year. Now Jay Sadler is seeing the money we've saved and generated reinvested into the team. We work hand in hand with them.

AC: There's a great opportunity next season with the European Women's Championships coming to England. I've recommended that we start to plan how to take advantage of that to the benefit of the development of women's and girls' football in Portsmouth.

Q: Taking the knee continues to be a contentious issue in football. How does the club intend to navigate this in the season ahead?



AC: I get both sides of the story. I will have a discussion with the captain and get the players' thoughts. If there is a determination from the players, we need to position that strongly as an anti-racist message. We would put anti-racist messages on the big screens at the same time, for example, to acknowledge this is a campaign and stand against racist behaviour.

Q: Will the club look to put on more music events following the Queen tribute act last weekend?

AM: Yes, definitely. We would've sold more if not for social distancing. It was profitable and we had great emails and comments. Fans were just happy to be back at Fratton Park.

10. Pompey History Society update (Colin Farmery)

CF: The Pompey History Society received heritage funding to tell the story of Pompey's 49/50 Championship winning side. The project was extended for a year because of the difficulty interviewing older fans during the pandemic, but work is now complete. It will be a permanent exhibition at Fratton Park in one of the corridors near the directors' box, and will be taken round as a pop-up exhibition to other venues. There will be a supplement in The News in the first week in August, and an accompanying website with recordings and memories. The club have been very supportive and I'm extremely grateful to Anna Mitchell. I also gave a historical tour of Fratton Park to Andrew Cullen last month and can vouch for his commitment to heritage – he knows dreams and memories are central to football.

DV closed the meeting at 20:15

- Minutes by Donald Vass