

SFA / ATAC Meeting 31 October 2012

In attendance

Stewart Regan, Chief Executive, SFA (SR)

Alison Jack, Customer Services Manager, SSC (AJ)

Darryl Broadfoot, Head of Communications, SFA (DB)

Jules McGeever, Head of Marketing, SFA (JM)

Kenny MacLeod, Commercial Director, SFA (KM)

Jim Brown, WESTA and ATAC (JB)

Scott Rae, WEBATA and ATAC (SR)

Mike Scales, LADTA and ATAC (MS)

Are you familiar with the SSC points system

SR said he was familiar but did not know the intricate details or history of the scheme

ATAC have concerns that the established practice of away ticket distribution is being changed to the detriment of members.

The bundling of an away ticket (Wembley) with home season tickets is contrary to previous practice and has been done purely to sell season tickets. We believe that the 20,000 allocation would have allowed existing members of the SSC the opportunity to access a ticket without the requirement of purchasing a season ticket. What comment do you have

KM acknowledged that the decision to bundle was a commercial one and stated that there was a "commercial element" to most decisions made by the SFA in relation to games and ticketing

SR stated the England game was a one-off opportunity and had been a great success in that it had helped boost season ticket numbers to a level well beyond that in the previous campaign, which included a game against Spain

JM informed the meeting that approximately 50% of SSC members had bought a season ticket, with 90% of those opting for an England ticket option

We appreciate that 5,000 tickets were held back for members with points. However our view is that members on zero points had the right to access those tickets, as members understood upon joining that when there was sufficient supply then this would be the case. Is that your understanding of the rules?

There was much discussion around numbers and after JB detailing how he felt the cascade should have worked i.e following the existing points system all the way through zero points. KM expressed the view that the reality around the numbers was that everyone who wanted an England ticket would get one. He said he made no apology for using this 'bundling' approach to maximise season ticket sales and felt this approach was common in all walks of life

ATAC proposed the points system to the SSC a number of years ago and this was adopted.

It is now widely accepted as the fairest way of ticket distribution. It does however have its potential flaws – a practice known as 'harvesting' where a member purchases a ticket, gains the point but does not attend the fixture, either discarding the ticket or passing it on (then existing controls of knowing who is at the game are lost). Working with the SSC, ATAC has encouraged either 100% collection at the venue or a significant proportion of members randomly selected to collect in person. This has reduced the harvesting issue and again is now widely accepted practice. In addition it allows the SSC a 'face' to the membership, which has assisted in the creation of a 'club' feeling. The membership strongly believes in this, as it rewards loyalty it may or may not be a big issue, but when members at zero or low points levels lose out due to it, it causes frustration and is causing a large number to question future membership of the SSC – How do you view this?

KM stated that in his view nothing had changed and that random and/or 100% pick-up would still be deployed at carefully selected games, although not at all games

SR acknowledged that although the SFA were aware of and certainly did not condone harvesting there had perhaps been a breakdown in communication. He asked if ATAC could convey this to their membership and gave an undertaking to ensure that future SFA/SSC communications would carry this message. He also said that the SFA/SSC would re-start putting messages about them reserving the right to invoke random and/or 100% pick-up as they deemed appropriate

At the recent fixture in Belgium there was no SSC Customer Service and consequently no random selection of members for collection. And equally as important no customer service support – In Belgium unfortunately a number of members suffered muggings, theft etc and the SSC historically would have been able to assist. The SSC presence on the ground is the closest many members will 'get to the SFA' they are your public face and to date have served you and the members well.

Is this what we can expect in the future – no or little customer service, no pick up of tickets?

KM - There will be a Customer service representative in Luxembourg, on this occasion however they will not be distributing tickets. It is fully anticipated that there will be Customer service representation at future matches and as stated previously random collections can be expected at selected matches

We have a fixture in Luxembourg in a few weeks, as it is planned and known that there will be no SSC presence then this is opening this game up for 'harvesting'. Now, we accept that this will have little financial impact on the Association, apart from some possible interest rate gains. It is however a level of service that members of ATAC and indeed the SSC expect and did expect when renewing their memberships. ATAC strongly encourages the SFA to ensure that the level of service we have paid for is maintained.

- a) Can we today arrange for a random pick up of a percentage of tickets? – ***NO – there will be no pick up on this occasion, but we will implement random collections at selected future games.***
- b) Will you arrange for all ticket stubs to be collected and matched to sales and those not matching selected for future pick up? – ***JM said that if tickets have barcodes this may be possible and she would investigate***
- c) Will you disclose the numbers entering the Scottish sections –v- ticket sales? – ***SR said "understood" and if this info is available it will be shared***

There was a lengthy discussion on the 'harvesting opportunity' at the Luxembourg match, with ATAC strongly stating their disappointment at no random collection. KM acknowledged that the numbers in the Scottish section will probably be some way below that of ticket sales.

It has also been disappointing to see that 'pocket guides' prior to away games has been removed. Why is this? We can accept that there is a cost, if that cost is excessive then it should be put out to tender. This is a cost / benefit that again members signed up to and expect to be delivered.

SR said the SFA wanted to get information out as much as possible in digital format as it was generally quicker and less expensive

JM said that initiatives such as the z-card pocket guides were not only costly but they also benefited a relatively small percentage of the overall membership. She said that they were keen to appeal to a wider membership base by allocating costs in a manner which benefits more members on a regular basis. She cited the fact that in the last recruitment campaign approximately 13,000 new members joined the SSC. JM said her team intended to send out regular newsletters and surveys to canvass attitudes and get feedback on possible initiatives from members (the number was not queried at the time but is suspected as being wrong, clarification will be sought)

DB said he took on board the comments received from JB and suggested setting up a joint steering group to explore initiatives relating to the way forward for the SSC. This was welcomed by ATAC and JB asked that the SFA/SSC also look at ways to foster better links with Tartan Army clubs, i.e. attending club meetings and events

There are a number of discussions under way within the membership regarding the cost of fulfilment and postage. Is the Association making a margin on postage? Will you supply the figures to allow the membership to see this? We are supposed to be members of a club – in my own Club WESTA, the treasurer requires to display full cost and expenditure to members. A lack of transparency opens the SSC up to criticism rightly or wrongly?

JM said that the SSC lose heavily on postage because sending by DHL to overseas members can cost as much as £18. She explained that they couldn't have a tiered system depending on a member's location and that £6.50 was an 'across the board' standard charge. She acknowledged that this has not been communicated to members. Assurances were given that the SSC make no margin from postage and fulfilment. Special delivery was presented as the only option for the Luxembourg match – this was due to a combination of a software issue and restricted timing, we should not expect to see this going forward.

We welcome the new online ticket ordering processes that have been adopted, however without a visible SSC presence at away fixtures, members are starting to take the view that everything is automated and that they are merely being viewed as 'cash cows'. It cannot be denied that significant revenue is being generated through SSC memberships for what is a diminishing return to members – how do the SFA view this ?

KM – as previously stated the budget hasn't changed we are trying to use it differently

The members can't see this, the perception is cost cutting

SR – That's a fair point and we will revisit the communications and information

In Belgium I was liaising with SFA security and the Strathclyde Police team, I was surprised to learn that they did not know there would be no SSC presence until four days prior to the game, why was this?

AJ said that she wasn't sure why the Police team were unaware but stated that in general there is not much interaction with them anyway at away games

Can you give us guarantees today that at no point in the future will away match tickets be packaged with travel offers outwith the recognised points system?

KM said "YES"

How do you see the SSC developing over the short to medium term?

KM said he envisaged it being much the same as at present but that parts of it needed "refreshed". He said the youth/kids side needed a strong focus to increase numbers going forward as he felt that at present they were basically treated like "mini adults" and their needs were not properly catered for. KM stated that the SSC budget had not changed and with only circa 500 or so youth/kids members, efficiencies in, for example, printing z cards could be directed at hosting childrens parties in say Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen amongst other initiatives.

JM said they were looking at the possibility of having a "two tier" setup to cater for fans who don't go to games but who are very interested in the national game, a fan club of sorts, but went on to say that she doesn't like phrase 'tier' as it suggests a different status.

Have contracts been exchanged with the Maltese FA for the fixture in June? IF there were to be a change of management would this impact this fixture? And why Malta, was this Craig Levein's choice or was it driven by the commercial department?

KM said contracts had not been exchanged and the questions moved into the realms of 'hypothetical' as a result. In relation to who had chosen this proposed fixture KM said these decisions were always driven by the Football Department, although he acknowledged that it was the job of the Commercial Department to provide costed options for consideration and in this occasion that was exactly what had happened. KM said he hoped the June friendly would be confirmed "soon, hopefully next week"

The return qualifying fixture with Serbia, potentially requires special attention from the security team on behalf of the fans, can you advise what steps are being taken to ensure supporters' well being?

SR said that David Brand starts work with the SFA on 14 November and that would be a question for him to address

SR left the meeting at this stage to take a call

Craig Levein has said on a number of occasions that he will be judged by results, was there a performance / improvement plan established prior to the start of the qualifiers that the Association is working to? Can this be shared with members of ATAC and the SSC, who are after all the very people who generate revenues for the Association?

DB explained that all Departments within the SFA have annual plans and these are reviewed regularly, with the National Team Manager being no exception. He said that in relation to campaigns all factors are considered before and after and he acknowledged that the current campaign had been “disappointing” to date

There have been reports in the press that the SFA viewed third place in our qualifying group as progress – is this the case?

DB said he had no idea where The Scotsman journalist got this information from but it wasn't true

Hampden will be out of use during refurbishment for the Commonwealth games – where can we expect Scotland matches to be played during this time?

KM said that at present their focus was solely on competitive ‘A’ Team matches and the Scottish Cup Final and that a Tender was being prepared. After being pressed on the issue KM stated that the games would stay within the ‘football family’ and then reluctantly admitted that the Tender would be between two venues

SR rejoined the meeting at this juncture

A statement was directed to the Commercial team, highlighting the need for communication and understanding of members needs and wishes. That change can be good, but to recognise that the members have gone through constant change since the inception of the travel club/supporters club and that the only constant through that time is the members, so listen to them.

In closing, we want to register the disappointment of our membership at recent results and performances and trust that this will be attended to with the utmost urgency. The manager is not carrying the support of the majority of our membership.

SR said he noted the comments, thanked us for our time and attendance and closed the meeting

The above are notes of the meeting, they are not verbatim – the questions were not asked exactly as written nor the answers delivered as written.

The meeting was held within the Boardroom at Hampden. At all times the conversation although forceful was courteous and ATAC believe that the Chief Executive understood the issues, grasped the points quickly and acknowledged that communication from the Commercial team could have been better in explaining what they were doing and why. It was agreed that there be future dialogue with ATAC on future thoughts and plans. In addition more engagement with the SSC membership was encouraged and recommended by ATAC.

At the outset and at several times through the meeting ATAC emphasised that they represented their membership, but did believe that their membership was representative of the SSC as a whole.