

Summary of meeting

This is a summary of a meeting between ATAC and the SCOTTISH FA. It is not designed as a verbatim minute of discussions. The summary has been agreed as an accurate reflection of the comments made by both parties.

Meeting between Association of Tartan Army Clubs and Scottish FA Tuesday 10 November 2015 Hampden Park, Glasgow

In attendance:

ATAC – Jim Brown, Chair (WESTA) Martin Riddell, Vice Chair (ETA) and Gareth Finn, Secretary (WESTA).

Scottish FA - David Thomson (Commercial Director) Jules McGeever (Head of Marketing & Digital)
Anne Marie Bannon (Head of Supporters Centre) Siobhan Boyd (Acting Head Supporters Centre)
Steven Romeo (Head of Retail & Kit)

ATAC - The Association of Tartan Army Clubs (ATAC) has recently consulted with its members, almost all of whom are members of the SSC, regarding the forthcoming renewals of SSC membership, ticket pricing policy and other matters. Today we welcome the opportunity to share the thoughts and suggestions of our members. In all issues we have relayed the majority position, as one would expect, there is seldom full agreement on any issue.

We wish to look constructively ahead without replaying concerns or issues from the last campaign.

Scottish FA - *We thank you for taking the time to attend and share your thoughts with us today. Your input and that of all supporters of our national teams is important to how we shape the future of the SSC.*

Euro 2016 campaign review

ATAC – We are obviously very disappointed with the failure to qualify and our view on the ticket pricing policy has been previously discussed, we have no wish to dwell on this and wish to look constructively to the World Cup qualifying campaign.

Scottish FA - *We share the disappointment in not qualifying but look forward to a new campaign and a pricing structure we believe the supporters will find favourable.*

SSC Renewal

ATAC - We fully recognise that SSC subscription fees are a valuable revenue stream for the Scottish FA. Our members are of the view that there should be no change to the subscription levels as charged during the last membership period.

Notwithstanding the above we have one recommendation. Many members have commented on the inclusion of merchandise within the membership fee. There can be arguments for and against the quality or value of said merchandise, we do however believe that SSC members should be given a choice. We propose that an 'opt out of merchandise' facility be available. This could be a token amount, for example £5, this should have little bearing on the income realised by the Scottish FA after having deducted the costs of production, post and packaging etc. it will however have presented SSC members with a choice which would be welcomed. In reality, we would expect the majority not to opt out. By presenting members with the choice it lends itself to a feeling of membership and control.

SCOTTISH FA – *Your point about merchandising is understood. However, due to a lead time of some eight months and a significant outlay invested in the production of items, it's not something that we can accommodate on this occasion. It will certainly be taken into consideration for future renewals.*

It is not our intention to change the membership fee this campaign. However, we are reviewing postal charges. Costs for postage and fulfilment have increased over the years for the distribution of membership packs, any cost passed on will be on a like for like basis.

(An example of a merchandise item for inclusion in the membership pack was displayed – it was favourably received by the ATAC representatives present, a very unique styled polo shirt, which all present believed would prove popular).

SSC email communication

ATAC - Currently SSC members have the opportunity to 'opt in' that is to receive all email communications from the SSC or to 'opt out' that is to receive NO email communications.

We propose that this be changed to include an additional 'opt in' communication. One that is titled at all times *Ticket Alert* and is relevant only to those emails that contain information regarding ticket sales, at all footballing levels. So in simple terms members may opt in to all email, only to those with ticket information or none at all.

Members have expressed frustration and the feeling of being 'spammed' with some of the mails received, others who have opted out have missed ticket information.

SCOTTISH FA - You raise valid points. As part of our ongoing review of the services we provide, we are currently redeveloping the Scottish FA website, which is due to launch May 2016. Members will be able to set preferences in terms of email communication.

Ticket Pricing WC Qualifiers

ATAC - Ticket pricing was an emotive subject during the Euro qualifying campaign, we do not wish to dwell on that and would prefer to suggest a pricing policy for the World Cup qualifying campaign which reflects, we believe, the timing of fixtures i.e. day of the week and kick off times, the opposition, the economic climate and feelings of the fans.

For all qualifying home fixtures (bar one) we propose that an individual adult ticket price of £25 (North and South stands) and £20 (West and East stands) be levied with an appropriate discount for children.

SCOTTISH FA - We have not, as yet, finalised our ticket pricing policy for the forthcoming 2018 Russia World Cup campaign. A ticket pricing proposal will be presented to the Scottish FA Board for consideration. We are considering classifying the individual fixtures, based on FIFA rankings, into three categories one, two and three with a different price point for each.

ATAC - England at home there are many who argue that this fixture is no different from the others)

We fully recognise the commercial opportunity presented to the Scottish FA through this fixture and that there will be a demand for tickets that is unlikely to be realised by the other home matches. Accordingly we would expect and support a differing pricing structure for this match.

We propose that this match be priced at £40 (North and South stands) £35 (West and East stands) again with appropriate discount for children.

SCOTTISH FA - We refer to our previous comments regarding potential categorisation of fixtures.

Season Tickets

ATAC - ATAC initially proposed the season ticket concept a number of years ago and we are fully supportive of its continued use.

It is recognised by all that the purchase of a season ticket has a number of benefits, not least the guaranteed and advance income to the Scottish FA. We have a number of proposals to accompany the sale of season tickets.

- a) A discount of at least 15% be offered below the cost of purchasing individual tickets.
- b) At least one full calendar month of notice is provided prior to sale – this allows an individual to budget / prepare for the outlay AND allows groups of fans to organise themselves and payment.
- c) The launch and sale of season tickets is kept away from the period when fans traditionally will be purchasing club season tickets.
- d) The introduction of a 'payment scheme' whereby fans can purchase a season ticket but spread the costs over a period of time. We propose a six month period, with no interest payments.
- e) Our members would be opposed to any form of 'bundling incentive' with away match tickets for the purchase of a season ticket. We cite the example of the last sale of ST's with access to a ticket for England challenge match.

Season tickets available at a discount with notice and payment scheme

SCOTTISH FA - *It is our intention to continue with the Season ticket offer for our home matches. We acknowledge your comments regarding financial incentive. Your feedback regarding the notice period in advance of sale are valid and will be accommodated.*

The introduction of a payment scheme is a good idea and one which we have explored before, however we have encountered a number of issues, not least IT and software capabilities. We have spoken with existing and other providers who service, for example, a number of club teams. The interest charges, sometimes in the region of 16%, are excessive and would not be of benefit to our members.

There then followed a lengthy discussion on alternatives: This included consideration of payment in two instalments before the first qualifying game, i.e. for the next campaign March and July – *outcome* –

Following a suggestion from ATAC – with sufficient notice, a number of months, and a purchase window of an extended period the members would have sufficient time to place funds aside to purchase a season ticket. This was accepted as a solution.

No consideration is being given to any form of bundling of season tickets with away tickets.

Additional Season Ticket benefits

ATAC -The discount and convenience of a season ticket is a benefit of course, however we propose an additional measure that can be taken to increase the appeal of purchase and assist the sale / marketing of tickets.

- a) We propose that a season ticket is an “All International ticket” allowing free access to Scotland international fixtures at all levels. It is appreciated that many free ticket offers are made available to SSC members for differing levels of the game. This supports our view that this is a ‘no cost’ benefit for members and encourages fans to turn out. With current software and ticketing systems fulfilment is not an issue and we accept that there will be postage etc associated with this. Of course, the SSC membership is geographically dispersed and this may benefit some more than others, however as a marketing tactic it is undoubtedly beneficial.
- b) Season ticket holders be afforded discounted admission to any home challenge match. We propose a £5 discount on the cost of individual tickets.

SCOTTISH FA – *We fully understand the thought process and welcome input to assist in the sale of season tickets, however, the logistics could prove cumbersome. Let us take this away for consideration. We should add that the current free ticket offers for games work well and this is something we may consider expanding in future.*

International Challenge Matches

Scheduling

ATAC - Whilst we understand that there are a number of factors determining the scheduling of challenge matches, the team Manager’s needs, the commercial considerations and performance / results from matches played, members would benefit from sufficient / plenty of advance notice for matches both home and away.

Dates are available in March and May 2016, what are the plans for these dates or when can we expect information?

SCOTTISH FA – *We always seek to give as much notice on fixtures as possible. It should be recognised that the scheduling of challenge match fixtures can be fluid recognising the factors that you highlight and others.*

The Commercial Director will be meeting with the Team Manager later this week to discuss future international challenge matches. The current thinking is that, for the available dates in March 2016, there will be a warm weather training camp in Europe with a challenge match scheduled. For May and June there are a number of dependencies - recognising opposition views and the European Championships, however, a match at home and one away (Europe) is being considered.

International Challenge match pricing

ATAC - Everything possible should be done to encourage as many fans as possible to attend any scheduled challenge match, we would propose that the SCOTTISH FA consider a pricing policy that reflects this. Regardless of where the match is played a maximum ticket price of £15 should be adopted.

SCOTTISH FA- *Your comments are noted and ticket pricing will be considered as part of our overall policy, opposition and scheduling.*

SSC Away Points System

ATAC - Again this was a system proposed by ATAC and was adopted for the distribution of tickets for away fixtures.

We propose that the current system be adhered to. A review of away matches over a number of years displays the fact that fans wishing to attend away matches can obtain official tickets, with only a few exceptions when demand exceed supply, it works !

We do however have some observations which we believe will assist those fans either travelling or wishing to travel with official away tickets.

- a) Our fixtures for the WC qualifying matches are known. In the majority of cases the venue will be known many months in advance. We can see no reason why the minimum allocation of tickets would not be known, therefore members with sufficient points should be afforded the opportunity to reserve tickets, not necessarily purchase tickets – although payment could be guaranteed on a credit / debit card, it has been done before – we sincerely appreciate that the SCOTTISH FA /SSC may negotiate for a larger allocation, however, these can be dealt with separately. By advising members in advance they can make travel and accommodation arrangements in confidence.
- b) The random selection for pick up tickets is a practice we support, we have no intention of labouring on the reasons why. We would propose that there is a consultation with ATAC on the timing and venue of all ticket pickups, we have received numerous adverse comments on a recent pick up.

SCOTTISH FA - *As with any system or process which we operate, it would be remiss of us not to continually review. However, we believe that the current process for allocation of away match tickets is understood, operates well and there is no reason to change it.*

We understand and appreciate fully the needs of members regarding away match tickets, we do everything possible to ensure as much notice as possible is provided. We are however governed on all occasions by the processes of the opposition associations, as well as FIFA and UEFA protocol. It would not be acceptable to raise expectations of members regarding an allocation of away match tickets. A recent example is that an opposition association advised that we would be receiving an allocation of x tickets within a specified area of a stadium. We discovered on arrival for the customary pre match inspection visit that those seats did not exist.

We acknowledge your comments and will continue to provide as much notice as possible.

The random pick up process is designed to maintain the integrity of the away points system. We should state at this point that the process is subject to internal review. At recent matches (Dublin, Georgia and Gibraltar), Supporters Centre staff were subjected to abusive and threatening behaviour, unwelcome comments and drunkenness. The situation at the pickup points in Portugal for the recent match against Gibraltar (and in Georgia) was particularly concerning and distressing. Two well-travelled members of the Scotland Supporters Club, have had their membership terminated as a result of unacceptable behaviour towards Supporters Centre staff.

ATAC expressed its disgust and concern and offered to be of whatever assistance possible. Suggesting that they re-establish the 'Fan's Embassies' as a possible ticket distribution location. ATAC were thanked for the offer and advised that it was subject to internal review and not appropriate to comment at this time.

SSC Home / Away Memberships

ATAC - There has been suggestions that the SSC are considering separate Home and Away membership clubs, is this the case and if so what is your thinking?

***SCOTTISH FA-** As stated earlier, we review all of our operational systems and processes. We have no appetite to change the existing structure..*

Other

The new home team kit will be launched later this month – ATAC jokingly asked to see it – it was not available.

CLOSE

ATAC – ATAC thanked those present for taking the time to meet and trust that they found it useful and constructive.

***SCOTTISH FA-** The Scottish FA thanked ATAC for attending, relaying the thoughts of their members and looked forward to future meetings and discussions*