

SMiSA AGM - Recap

Wednesday, 10 October 2007

On Sunday, 30th September, prior to a disappointing 3-1 defeat at home to Hearts, SMiSA held its 6th Annual General Meeting in Suburbia, Shuttle St, Paisley.

SMiSA Chairman David Grier opened the meeting, detailing the achievements of the trust since its inception.

Since it was founded to assist in paying the wages of Ludovic Roy and stop players such as him and Alex Burns leaving the club due to a lack of cash, the trust has raised close to £100,000 from supporters for the club, passed to it in various forms and for various things, from investment through the purchase of shares which assisted with the transfer of Stewart Kean from Ayr Utd, to raising money for youth development through the annual Saints Aid events.

He also made the point that since the trust was founded in 2002, St Mirren's fortunes have improved dramatically and it is surely no coincidence that it has come with the trust's assistance.

David however, sadly stated that he would be stepping down as the Trust's chairman, citing a combination of both work and personal reasons as to why he felt he could no longer dedicate enough time to the role. Trust secretary Wullie Bell paid tribute to David, as well as to both Eric Balfour & Ken Mathie, who were similarly standing down from their positions on the trust board, for their hard work and commitment to the trust in their time on the committee.

After this, Wullie went on to say that the trust had invited volunteers to stand for election to the post of Chairman as David's successor, and that one volunteer had come forward, and as such he invited Alistair Colquhoun to accept the post as new Trust Chairman. In his acceptance speech he paid tribute to David and his work to advance the cause of the trust, as well as that of both Ken & Eric. He also made mention of while the trust has faced, and does face some difficulties at present, that it had achieved far too much to quit or turn back now.

There were a number of administrative issues to take care of in the trust as well, which Alistair introduced.

David White, who has acted as auditor for the trust's accounts has offered to do so again for this year, and his re-appointment was unanimously agreed upon, as was a motion to make 3 constitutional changes which

were:

- To amend the required approval on voting issues from 2/3rds to 51%

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- To amend the type of accounts the trust prepares from full professional audit to unaudited

A vote was also passed on allowing the trust board to spend up to 10% but not more than Â£1000 of society funds on specific projects without seeking a mandate from members, such as player sponsorship and community projects.

By far the biggest talking point of the internal discussions however, was a vote to decide on whether to reduce the monthly standing order subscription of the trust, from Â£10 a month to Â£2 a month. This was proposed in light of the inability, at this time, for the trust to acquire more shares in the club, despite the trust having a mandate to buy up to Â£25,000 worth of shares.

This is a situation which Wullie Bell elaborated on â€“ saying that it meant that the trust board felt they could not at this time justify asking members to pay this level of money with it being a stated aim of the organisation.

It had always been intended that as the trust increased its shareholding in the club, that the subscription figure would come down in stages to that of an administrative only fee. It was never the intention to maintain the figure at Â£10 for so long. Those who wished to pay more or existing members who wished to continue their Â£10 per month subscription could still do so, specifying how they would want their extra contributions to be spent by the trust.

Finally in the internal discussions, the new Supras Paisley group were mentioned and it was made clear that SMiSA will offer support where possible, as the trust believes their aims in providing a better, more colourful atmosphere to games should be encouraged.

Following this, John White gave a brief appeal for help in SMiSA's community dealings. Over the past 12 months there have been a number of initiatives taken by the trust in order to raise both its and the club's standing in the local community, including the Show Racism The Red Card poster competition that saw hundreds of entrants from local schools be exhibited at Paisley Museum & Art Gallery.

After this, Stewart Gilmour and Bryan McAusland were introduced to the meeting and the question & answer session began.

On the stadium, Stewart sadly confirmed that there could be no assurance whatsoever given that the stadium would be ready in time for the start of season 2008/9. The delays in work commencing have been frustrating to all at the club, with them attributed to among other things issues over road junctions around both the Greenhill Road and Love St sites. The delay has not however been an expense to the club. The club are currently waiting for a schedule of works which should arrive within 2-3 weeks, and after this, more information on the move should be officially available. The construction time is expected to be in the region of 10 months and the specification has, for the most part, been agreed.

It is likely therefore that the stadium move will take place in mid-season. However if this is indeed the case then the SPL are likely to say the club must play all the teams at Love Street before we could move to the new stadium, which would put a move date likely in January, even if it was to be ready before then.

This point raised a fear that Tesco could force Saints to ground share at another venue, with them wishing to take possession of Love St and start work there earlier with the new stadium completed. However for this to take place it would need to meet with the board's approval, and cover the massive expense of such a move.

As far as configuration of the new stadium is concerned, there was no real info to come out of the meeting, though it is understood that it is likely to mirror Love St, with a home and away end, a Main Stand side and an opposite side which will primarily be given to the home support with possible provision for an away support overspill.

One piece of good news is that the interest on the deal money is coming to St Mirren at the end of the process, though there is almost certainly going to be no surplus available for the playing budget. Stewart & Bryan said that this money would be better used for the new stadium to ensure any details/concerns that arrive late in the build can be dealt with and resolved. The deal will deliver the club a new stadium which will be as good as possible for the club and ensure that the club is debt free, which we currently are.

Talk then turned to that of the training complex, which Bryan mainly talked about. It will be at Allanton, and should be ready in a basic form in around a year's time, though it is a long-term project and may take as long as 4-5 years to get everything done that the club want it to have at the desired standard. The site is approximately 8 acres in size. The current blaes pitch will be converted to astrograss and there will be one full size grass pitch on the site, with the trust understands a number of smaller artificial pitches. The rest of the free space will be turned into a dedicated training area, with the plan for the manager and team affairs to be based at the facility which will include improved changing facilities and coaching equipment.

St.Mirren will have a 20 year lease on the facility from the council, as has been reported in the press and the club will be the sole user of the facility. However it was made clear that community groups will be able to apply to the club to use it and they will be looked upon in a favourable manner. One thing which was mentioned was the club plan to run a community camp there in the summer. As far as finance is concerned, money is ring-fenced for the project, though the club are hopeful to receive grants to help pay for it.

There were also a number of questions relating to team affairs. The injury situation regarding Craig Dargo was clarified, with the injury apparently being where the back of the knee meets his hamstring. It is an awkward injury and it was feared with him not responding to treatment that the injury had been misdiagnosed. Craig was then sent to youth team doctors at Man Utd where the original diagnosis was confirmed. There is no set timescale for his return but Stewart was quoted as saying that Craig is desperately eager to get into the side and playing " he is noticeably always present at Love St.

A question was also asked about Franco Miranda and what his status is as a Saints player. It was clarified that he is currently on loan from his Argentinian side much as he was with Helsingborgs last year, though it is understood this will only be until he turns 23 come next year. He is however well settled in Scotland and is very happy playing for Saints, so it is hoped that he could be signed after his loan spell is up.

No further insight was given as to why Tcham Ntoya was not signed, despite impressing all who watched him in the two reserve team matches he played in. It was said that perhaps Gus just didn't rate him highly enough and it is on these types of decisions that he will have to stand or fall by. It was made clear that there are a number of spaces left on the wage bill and it is Gus's decision not to bring in players that aren't definitively better than we have as it can be a source of unrest in the dressing room.

Gus's PR ability was also the subject of debate. Both Stewart and Bryan had to agree that he is not the best at it and that he is still a young manager learning his trade. It is expected though that club General Manager, Brian Caldwell, will look to assist in dealing with the press in future and that there should be improvements in the club's press dealings as a result.

On this note, talk turned to exactly what the new General Manager is doing at Love St as little has really been seen of him in the support thus far. Stewart went on to say that he has been dealing with a lot behind the scenes and is working to improve many things in helping the club to make the transition from a small, to a medium sized business, ensuring that the club's procedures are up to standard. One area where he has looked to make an immediate difference is in the ticketing arrangements as that has been the subject of much frustration and anger from all parts of the support. It was conceded that there had been a major

problem with season books this year and that it really was not acceptable.

On the subject of ticketing, calls for the abolition of the all-ticket policy for games where it is not required were made but it was reiterated that this was outwith the club's control. The turnstiles at Love St are not fit for purpose and if the club were not moving to the new stadium then they would need to be replaced. It is hoped, though, that when the new stadium arrives this problem will dissipate.

The last section of the meeting was taken up with relations between the club and SMiSA, and of particular note was a discussion relating to this year's Saints Aid and the disappointment that all felt with Gus & Andy being pulled out of the event to go on holiday, with only 4 days notice and the trust being left to find replacements on its own after those participating had raised close to £6000 for Saints youth development. While it was acknowledged that it should not have happened, and was very much regretted by the club, it was said that there will always be a problem at the end of the season with players and staff wishing to go on holiday. It is very much hoped that this incident will be a one off though, with fans paying as much money as the cost of a season ticket to play in the event and the money being very valuable to St Mirren's youth programmes.

It was also asked as to when SMiSA could look to purchase shares in the club, so as to once again put money into the club. It was said once again that the club is unable to put a valuation on shares and therefore cannot offer them for sale until the deal is completed and Tesco have taken ownership of Love St, as there are a number of financial calculations which need to be made, and not all figures are yet present. This puts the earliest such a purchase could be made at likely between 18 months to 2 years.