

WISA Meeting with CK 02/12/2000

This is a repeat of a posting made to WISA chat by Kris Stewart of WISA, outlining the details of a meeting with the club in December 2000.

On Saturday December 2, before the West Brom game at Selhurst, Peter Bowles (WISA Club Liaison Officer) and I were invited to a Vice Presidents' meeting which was due to be attended by David Barnard (WFC Chief Executive) and one of the WFC owners. In the event, it was Charles Koppel, Deputy Chairman of WFC and a significant shareholder in WFC, who attended with David Barnard.

The following points are a summary of the views expressed by David Barnard and Charles Koppel, on behalf of the club.

David Barnard started by giving the meeting his view of how the club had come to the position it is currently in - this was very similar to that given by him to the WISA General Committee meeting of Thursday November 23 (see minutes elsewhere on the site).

Charles Koppel then explained the owners' current intentions. He said that they are following a three-year plan, devised when Terry Burton was confirmed in his position in the summer. They believe that Terry is the right man for the job and are committed to him as manager for the duration of the three-year plan.

The goal of the plan is to support Terry in building the right team to achieve promotion to the Premiership, to maintain that status and to challenge for honours. Promotion this season would be an unexpected bonus.

A necessary part of this plan is to place WFC on a firm financial footing. Currently WFC is a First Division club, receiving First Division income (aside from the Sky "parachute" payments), but with Premiership costs. This is not acceptable to the owners of WFC.

Although the club must be put on a sound financial footing, the owners have not given Terry a list of players who must be sold to achieve that.

Another important part of the plan is the building of a new training facility on Prince George's Playing Fields in Raynes Park. The owners purchased this land shortly after Sam Hammam sold his remaining shareholding in WFC. The club has recently submitted a planning framework document, outlining its intentions, to Merton Council. The local residents have raised a number of objections to the building of any kind of facility on the land, and there will be an inquiry in May 2001. WFC cannot begin any building works until the outcome of this inquiry is known.

The clubs which currently play at PGPF have been given permission by WFC to continue playing there for the remainder of this season. WFC are now conducting training sessions at top-quality facilities at the Bank of England training ground in Roehampton.

The lease agreement on Selhurst Park has five years to run. The owners expect to see out the term of the lease, although there is a clause allowing WFC to leave sooner on payment of a fee.

The owners are aware of the importance of WFC's having its own ground. There are many, well-known difficulties associated with finding a suitable site. A new ground will take three years to build once the site is identified and purchased. Finding an acceptable site will get progressively more difficult as time goes on.

The owners realise that their communication with the fans has not been as good as it should be. They intend to use formal and informal channels, including the match programme, to correct this.

On behalf of WISA, I asked Charles Koppel about the situation which arose earlier in the season regarding the proposed transfer of Richard Dunne. Dunne appeared ready to sign for WFC, when according to reports, Bjorn Rune Gjelsten vetoed the deal because of the level of wages wanted by Dunne, which Dunne believed he had agreed with WFC.

Charles Koppel stated that the problem which was revealed by the Dunne situation was one of communication between Norway and London. Koppel, Gjelsten and Rokke take full responsibility for the breakdown in communications and they have taken measures to ensure it doesn't happen again.

I further suggested to Charles Koppel that, when rumours surface about WFC being linked with a new ground in, for example, Milton Keynes, what WISA would like is for a club spokesperson to state publicly that such a move will not happen.

Koppel replied that the club would not make such a statement. He wanted to emphasise that the owners want WFC to be located in Merton. Should it prove impossible to find a suitable site in Merton, then the owners want WFC to be based as close as possible to Merton.

Koppel then asked the question, should somewhere such as Milton Keynes prove to be the nearest possible location to build a new ground, what should the club do? This was a rhetorical question. I did however answer, by saying that any club based in Milton Keynes would simply not be WFC. WISA would campaign vigorously against any such plan, but should the club complete such a move, I would wish them luck with their business venture and do what I could to build a new Wimbledon Football Club, playing in Merton, in whichever lowly league would be appropriate.

Koppel said that he understood this, but that we should also understand their position, as owners of the club.

Due to a shortage of time, the meeting ended there.

Following the meeting, David Barnard informed us that, following Peter's letter to the club complaining of discriminatory drinks pricing at Selhurst, from the Bolton game, all bar prices will be the same for Crystal Palace and for Wimbledon "home" games.

All information supplied here is correct to the best of our knowledge. Contact webmaster@wisa.org.uk for any errors or corrections.

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