

Charlton Athletic Fans' Forum – Thursday, November 4th 2022

Chair

LB – Lucy Bishop – Fan Adviser

Fan representatives

PC – Peter Cockle – Charlton Athletic Official UK and International Fan Group, LL – Lars Liljegren – Swedish Addicks, AH – Adrian Howlett – Charlton Fans In Scotland, MS – Marc Stellmacher – International Addicks, AF – Adam Ferris – Dubai Addicks, PV – Peter Vickery – North American Charlton Supporters' Club, MG – Mathias Gerdes – German Addicks, AP – Ad Poot – Dutch Addicks

LC – Lewis Catt – Fan Adviser

Club

TS – Thomas Sandgaard – Owner, CEO, RM – Dr Raelynn Maloney - Ownership Representative, TR – Tom Rubashow – Head of Communications

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Raised by</u>
<p>Castore</p> <p>Various supporters at the meeting highlighted the club's challenges with Castore. LB encouraged supporters to send through specific challenges they have with Castore to fans@cafc.co.uk and fanadviser@cafc.co.uk. PC highlighted that on the Castore US site Charlton isn't listed under partnerships and that you can buy Rangers and Newcastle clothing but not Charlton's. RM said the club have been in conversation with Castore on this for many months and it is one of many website items the club are chasing Castore on. RM said that Castore have referenced that they are working on it. RM said the club would continue to update international supporters. LL said the supporters understand the club are chasing on this and want to get it sorted. He said it leaves a sour taste when supporters at the stadium can't purchase merchandise in the club shop. LB said she is aware there are various people chasing on this and that little by little things are coming through but not as much as people would like. PC asked if people in the club had reached out to other clubs with the same issues. TS said staff within the club have spent many hours over many days, with meetings in person and over zoom with Castore. He said the club have had contact with other Castore clubs too. He said it has been a challenge. He said while it keeps getting a little better, it was also getting a little better three months ago but that was just to get kit for our players for the pre-season tour. He said it has got better but online and the store at the stadium needs to be much better. He said many people at the club have put in an extreme amount of effort to try to get things moving forward. He said unfortunately the lead time to get things done mean it is a slow process. PC asked if the club would look for an alternative supplier. TS said the club considered that and looked at options but decided against it because switching supplier would come with its own challenges and mean further delays, which would potentially impact next season. He said the club are pushing hard to get a good experience for the club's fans with regards to purchasing merchandise. He said it is getting better but that there is still a long way to go. He apologised and said the club would keep working on it. LB said that the Fan Advisers have been helping and that improvements supporters are starting to see now have taken months to get in place. She said the lag between taking action and seeing results is frustratingly long.</p>	<p>Various</p>
<p>International Supporters Weekend</p> <p>The club's International Supporters' Weekend took place from October 28th – 30th, including a visit to the training ground, at The Valley for the men's first-team game against Ipswich Town and The Oakwood for the women's first-team game against Bristol City. LB said there would be a separate meeting to look at learnings from the event. LL said it was a great weekend and he looked forward to the debriefing. He highlighted a few individuals who came separately and did not behave in the spirit of the weekend. MS and LL recommended that supporters attending are advised to go through their international supporters' group. MS said the supporters from Iceland were fantastic, especially the individual who did the CrossBEER Challenge.</p>	<p>LL, AH</p>

AH said the hosts looking after the supporters were really good and that the whole package was excellent. He said it was great to meet and see everyone.

AH said it would have been nice to see some of the key players. He said they were pleased to meet Scott Minto.

AH said the speed of staff serving is very slow. He said it is frustrating for fans and for the club it is lost revenue. He said it would help if the day was planned further in advance. AH said it would be great to have more fans in attendance at the stadium too. He said it was a great experience but there are opportunities for improvement.

TR said the club would look to add to the schedule for future weekends. RM said it was great that people enjoyed it and the weekend could work as a template to be built on with supporters' feedback.

AF suggested an International Fans' Day may work in August or December when international supporters are back visiting family. He said having better trained bar staff would help around the stadium for fan experience and driving revenue.

Footballing questions

PV and AH asked about the status of The Valley and training ground.

TS said the club made massive investments in the training ground this year which is an indication that he is still as ambitious as he was two years ago when he got in to the club.

TS said the question provided a good opportunity to provide context to questions he is getting from supporters about cutting expenses and the impact that will have on getting out of League One. He said the expenses throughout this season will maybe be a little less than in seasons before. He said that is simply because the club is becoming more efficient, he used the example that some travel expenses have been adjusted in the academy. He said that the academy is running at close to the same expenses as last season but now they have their own building after the investment in the training ground during the summer. He said the academy has been so successful because of the catchment area and the fantastic coaches Charlton have. He said he has been very impressed when he has watched the academy coaches. He said the coaching and catchment area, rather than how much money is spent, has determined Charlton's incredible academy, although Charlton have spent more on their academy than most Category Two academies. He said the club have got a lot better at securing on long-term contracts the players that have real promise, so Charlton doesn't end up in the situation where they have been previously losing young players for less than they are worth. TS said overall the academy is in a better position than it was a few years ago.

TS said in terms of men's first-team expenses, £100,000 has been saved by being more efficient with travel expenses. He said he is trying to slowly make the club more efficient. He said the club had a good budget on men's first-team players last year and that it is even bigger this year. He said he gets asked by supporters not to cut expenses on the playing side otherwise the club won't get out of the division but he said that on the playing side the budget has been increased.

He said he has been told that the club can't get out of League One if trying to break even. He said that break even doesn't mean cutting expenses. He said generating revenue is also part of that. He said that Charlton is in a great situation with a large fanbase in a good location in London. He said the club can more than double the revenue with similar expenses. He said the club have tripled, nearly quadrupled sponsorship revenue. He said the club can continue to generate revenue from hospitality, tickets and streaming and the focus is on increasing these revenue streams. He said people talking about cutting expenses throughout the club is not what he is talking about when he talks about break even. He said unfortunately it takes time though, like on the footballing side, where he is seeing improvements and a more defined playing style. He said it longer to turn things around on the business side.

PC said he is a business owner and no one likes to lose money. He said that TS doesn't own The Valley or training ground. He said that is a concern. He also asked about Jake Forster-Caskey and why he hasn't been playing.

TS said there is an increase in Jake Forster-Caskey's contract if he plays but that winning games and getting points is the priority, so the potential increase does not impact selection. He said Ben Garner has no instruction from him on whether or not to play Jake

PV, AH

<p>Forster-Caskey. He said the fact Forster-Caskey hasn't been playing has nothing to do with the clause in the contract but instead is based on the manager selecting a team that he feels is best for each specific game. It was referenced that Ben Garner had said the same to the South London Press.</p> <p>TS said in terms of Sparrows Lane and The Valley that the club has a good relationship with Roland Duchatelet, so there is no uncertainty or noise when it comes to the use of the facilities. He said it helps that he takes care of all the maintenance and repairs at both sites. He said he has had several discussions about potentially acquiring the properties and it could well happen one day. He said the quarterly rent is very reasonable which doesn't make it an urgent matter. He said there is much more urgency to get close to break even and to get the club in the top six.</p>	
<p>Strengthening the squad in January</p> <p>AH asked what progress had been made on strengthening the squad in January.</p> <p>TS said he, Ben Garner, Martin Sandgaard and Steve Gallen are already talking on how the club can strengthen in January and strengthen better than our competition.</p> <p>He said the club lost out on a lot of players in the summer, which he believes all clubs go through, which is why clubs have to pivot. He said the club has been working on building relationships with agents and sometimes clubs to put Charlton in a good position. He said he was pleased with the players Charlton were able to bring in during the summer. He said Charlton have a stronger squad than last season. He said that additions at centre-back and left-back are high on the list for January and that a striker is too. He said the club have to consider how they balance adding depth with top-level quality.</p> <p>He said the process includes looking at analytics, sending scouts to games and that the process is a lot more than just the four final decision makers. He said while the window is closed, Steve Gallen is still on the phone with clubs and agents etc to get everything prepared. He said you never know for sure which positions/players you'll have luck with and which ones you'll miss out on but what we do know is that we will be strengthening the squad, we'll be trying to do it to the extent that we strengthen better than the other clubs strengthen. Hopefully we'll have enough depth to put us in a good position this season and to have enough depth to be able to live with any injuries. He said in the worst case it will take another window in the summer. He said he thinks we can see with the playing style and the chances that we are creating and the breadth of different players scoring goals that things are improving and we are getting better at playing out from the back. He said hopefully the last few results are not a fluke and will continue to be more consistent.</p> <p>AH said the MK Dons game probably reflects how it can be as a Charlton fan.</p> <p>PC said if Charlton had performed consistently then they would be higher in the table. He said he hopes the side become more consistent.</p> <p>TS said there is a great atmosphere in the dressing room and looking at a player's mental strength, to help with consistency, will play a role in recruitment too.</p>	AH
<p>Structure/decision making</p> <p>LL asked who the main decision makers are at the club in terms of strategy aside from TS and what football experience they have.</p> <p>TS said over the past few years he has tried bringing people in with outside experience, which didn't work so well but still brought a lot of value and the club was able to learn from it. He said given the level of where the business is at the moment with the current revenue, it is him leading on the strategy. He said long term he can pull back and not be nearly as involved but now, given where the club is at, it is him leading on strategic planning. He said he understands people may not like hearing that but for the moment he is looking after the club's strategy.</p>	LL
<p>Youth Advisory Board</p> <p>AP said the Youth Advisory Board is a great idea and important to have their input for the club's future. He said he knows an individual who is interested about it.</p> <p>TR said the group was set up initially after the appointment of LB as Fan Adviser. He said there is now a second iteration with a few more members, who work closely with the fan engagement team.</p>	AP

<p>AP said the individual would like to become a member of the board. AP to put the individual in contact with TR and RM.</p>	
<p>Ticketing AH asked why there is a premium for booking a ticket the day before the game. He said he did appreciate the recent reduction in matchday prices, the 3-Pack scheme and the £19.92 adult ticket around the 30th anniversary game but wanted to understand the price increase. TS said previously the early-bird price ended two hours before kick-off and the club wanted to extend it to encourage people to buy earlier. He said maybe the club had extended it too much and that it is something the club are looking at it. He said he is aware it gets negativity on social media and in the Fans' Forum but said he isn't convinced that the feeling is the same for all the supporters on the matchday. He said the club are reviewing it.</p> <p>PC said every fan thinks they can run the club and he tells people that if you have the money and takeover the club then you can run the club. TS said the club doesn't get everything right but sometimes things that are set up to help the club run more efficiently are not the most popular things with the fanbase. He said football isn't like a normal business and he has to remain aware of that when making decisions.</p> <p>AH said he appreciated the challenge and agreed social media can blow things up but asked if the increase was really needed, especially when the club aren't selling out the stadium.</p> <p>TS said he was working out if it was a social media issue or a purchasing issue. He added that he did feel there was a small group on social media who take messages coming out from the club and spin it in a negative way which can hurt the club. He said it is an interesting phenomenon but part of being in football.</p>	<p>AH</p>
<p>CharltonTV AH said CharltonTV is excellent and the international fans love it but asked how it performs.</p> <p>TR said there were two topline areas the club look at in terms of performance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The quality of the show - The number of supporters purchasing <p>He admitted he was biased but felt the club's live stream offering was the best in the EFL and explained the club have had numerous EFL teams come to Charlton and ask them how CharltonTV is produced.</p> <p>He said in terms of supporters purchasing, during the Covid period, the numbers really increased with the introduction of CharltonTV and the club were one of the leading streamers in the EFL during that period.</p> <p>He said other clubs numbers aren't shared as freely now so comparison with other clubs is less easy. He said based on anecdotal discussions, the club are one of the leading streamers in League One. He said the international numbers this season have increased compared to last year.</p> <p>He said the club are always looking at ways to improve both the quality of the show and the numbers, so encouraged supporters to continue to push to their international supporter group members.</p>	<p>AH</p>
<p>International outreach AF asked if there was an opportunity to link up with clubs and schools around the world. He said he teaches at a school and does his best to promote the club. TR agreed to follow up with AF to promote the club.</p>	<p>AF</p>
<p>12th man LL said in Sweden it is common that no player wears number 12 as the number 12 represents the supporters. He asked if that would be possible at Charlton.</p> <p>TS said the club would look at it, although obviously Conor McGrandles currently wears number 12. LL said he was thinking for the 2023/24 season.</p> <p>TR said it is a nice idea but the club would need to consult the wider fanbase, as it hasn't been done so much in the UK. LB said it would be a talking point.</p>	<p>LL</p>
<p>Anonymous emails</p>	<p>LL</p>

LL said some emails from the club were sent anonymously around the International Supporters' Day from fans@cafc.co.uk. RM said that those emails were either coming from her or people that are being trained to manage that inbox. She said when people added their names, supporters would contact them individually rather than sending to the fans mailbox, which resulted in the club losing track of the follow up as a lot of queries come through the mailbox.

She said when her name has been added on those emails, people may reply asking her to pass messages directly to TS or Ben Garner, rather than what they initially emailed about. LL said having a name on it makes it feel more personal and RM said the club would look to have responses include a first name.

TS thanked the supporters for attending and said he was pleased to hear about the success of International Supporters' Day. He said he was pleased with the progress and the growth the club has made with international supporters and thanked the supporters' groups, fan advisers and staff for helping with that growth.

Club