

Charlton Athletic Fans' Forum – Thursday, September 14th, 2023

Chair

LC - Lewis Catt - Fan Adviser

Fan representatives

HA - Heather Alderson - Charlton Athletic Supporters' Trust (CAST); TG - Tony Garrett - Charlton Athletic Disabled Supporters' Association (CADSA); CL - Christine Lawrie - Reminiscence Group; LL - Lars Liljegren - Swedish Addicks; JP - John Perkins - Valley Express; BR - Bernie Razzell - City Addicks; AS - Alison Sampson - Her Game Too; IW - Ian Wallis - Bromley Addicks; JW – Jon Whitfield - Fans4Fans; DW - David Wood - West Country Supporters' Group

Club

JR - James Rodwell - Managing Director and Chairman of the Board; AS - Andy Scott - Technical Director; TR, Tom Rubashow - Head of Communications

<u>Topic</u>	<u>Raised by</u>
<p>Dismissal of Dean Holden (DH)</p> <p>HA explained there were quite a few CAST members' questions on DH's departure.</p> <p>AS said the context behind the dismissal dates back to December when he and JR first came in. He said DH was installed in Thomas Sandgaard's time and was someone that was known to the ownership group. He said DH came in and did very well and he worked very well with him through to February when AS left the club. He said DH was on a contract until the end of the season and he was the man that they felt could take the group of players the club had in January and make some changes to take the club forward. AS said, clearly, DH did a good job between then and the end of the season.</p> <p>AS said, from his point of view when he came in at the end of July, the hope was that his relationship would be the same and he would see progress, in terms of areas on and off the pitch, to allow the club to be successful this season.</p> <p>AS said there was a change in the way DH worked based on what he had seen last season. He said the club were concerned but also gave DH lots of options to change things, whether it was recruitment, whether it was staffing. He felt DH wanted to do what he was doing and that it was going to work, which was fine as he was in charge.</p> <p>He said there were a lot of areas that had not improved from last season and a decision had to be made to give the club the best opportunity to be successful this season.</p> <p>CL asked how DH could be expected to succeed. She said he had wanted players in early in the window and robust players.</p> <p>AS said he did not come in until July 26th. He said DH wanted to sign the players that he signed and re-signed before AS came back. He said there were finances available to bring players in and he chose players to bring into the squad. AS said the Miles Leaburn injury was unfortunate.</p> <p>AS said everyone can point the finger but it is not just about one thing, it is about a whole body of work. CL asked if DH was told to play the young players to showcase them with a view to selling them. AS said no coach is told to play anybody. JP said they have done at Charlton in the past. AS said from his point of view he would never tell the coach who to play. He said they have a squad of players and it is up to them who to pick; they are in charge and are responsible and accountable for that.</p> <p>JP asked if anything was said before the Oxford game as he said DH was not the same DH before that game. AS said he had a number of conversations with DH after the game against Port Vale and his comments were just for him to concentrate on doing the best he can in the Oxford game. He said they were here to support DH and they had given DH different options to support him and his staff on the grass. AS said that he and JR noticed a change in DH from their previous time at the club. He said the change was something that was noticed and that it is interesting JP had noticed that change as well.</p> <p>HA asked who initiated the departure and the financial impact of the dismissal. JR said sacking managers is tough. He said he has been involved in a lot and the dismissal of DH was probably the hardest, because of his personal relationship with DH and his family. He said they are hard decisions to get right. He said it was perceptive of JP picking up on that change ahead of Oxford because he and AS saw something similar. JR said DH is a very, very decent</p>	HA

human being which is what makes these things so difficult. JR said the club has to act in the best interests of the football club.

He said there was not one individual who orchestrated the departure. He said the conversations went on for days. He said after the Port Vale game they sat down and discussed what could be done to support DH. He said you do not want to get rid of managers, in part because of the financial implications involved. He said discussions were had regarding whether the staffing structure was correct and if there was enough experience in the coaching staff. He said DH was offered various alternatives. He said he thinks the world of DH and thinks there is every chance he will go on and be successful elsewhere. He said the summer was not easy for him with the state of flux and the takeover dragging on. He said decisions are not taken lightly. He said it was initiated by him and AS, and he said Ed Warrick (Financial Director) has to be aware.

He said DH signed a new contract back in March under Thomas Sandgaard and the current management team would not have given DH a contract at that level. He said the club have honoured the financial obligations towards DH but that has not impacted the playing budget.

LL wanted to confirm that DH did all the signings he wanted to do and that there were funds remaining. AS said there were funds remaining and DH did want to make more signings. He said the club were trying to make signings up until the Oxford game. He said that the lunchtime before the Oxford game the club were trying to get the Slobodan Tedić deal across the line. He said he was a player DH liked and wanted to bring in.

AS said in the summer DH was involved in all the signings that were made and, as far as he was aware, no player came into the club without DH wanting to bring them in.

JR said during the summer, when SE7 Partners signed the share purchase agreement (SPA), he was kept informed as a matter of courtesy about players coming into the club until EFL Approval was granted but it was not within his gift to approve anything. During that period, Peter Storrie was managing the recruitment process from the club side.

Appointment of Michael Appleton (MA)

HA asked for the criteria when appointing MA. AS said they were looking for someone who was good on the grass as there is a squad that we cannot add to until January, so they wanted someone who can come in and work with the group we have got.

He said when everyone is fit, we feel we have a good squad in terms of competition and quality in all areas and we wanted to get more out of that group than we had been getting. He said they were looking for someone who was collegiate, who could work in the infrastructure at the club and who didn't want to be the old school manager that dictates everything. He said they needed to have an understanding that we are trying to build this football club for the long-term future, regardless of who the coach is. He said hopefully Michael is here for a very long time and is very successful, but should he come out then the next person can come in and still work in a very strong infrastructure.

HA asked for the difference between a coach and a manager. AS said a coach works with his staff and the players, mostly on the grass, in the analysis suite, with the individuals. A manager runs everything - recruitment, sports science etc. He said a few years ago that was very commonplace. He said now there are such huge demands on whoever is in charge that it can take away from the time on the grass, which is why they want their coach on the grass, in the analysis room and working with individual players.

AS said a good example is that there is a group of owners and a Board of Directors, rather than MA having to deal with various different phone calls, that MA's time can be better spent, so AS deals with them. He said he wants MA to concentrate on the coaching, analysis and developing individuals and not other elements around the football club.

AS said when interviewing him, MA talked about his experiences and the feeling was, based on that and their research, that he had done best at clubs such as Oxford and Lincoln City, where there was a stable infrastructure in place that allowed him to focus purely on coaching.

CL asked if MA would be part of the recruitment team. AS said of course he would. He said there is a meeting scheduled for Monday on the type of players he wants from a technical and tactical point of view looking ahead to January.

CL asked if MA is solely responsible for picking the team. AS said yes, MA picks the team.

HA

IW asked how many people the club interviewed. AS said six people. He said they spoke to a number more, some to see if they would be interested and some to see if their clubs would be open to it. He said the club put together a long list and shortened it based on looking for someone:

- Who is collegiate
- Who is a good coach
- Has a clear style of play and can communicate it well
- Has achieved success/a promotion
- Knows what excellence and elite looks like. AS said that is what we want to build at this football club, as it has not had it for a long time; AS said he wants to drive standards up to get the best out of staff and players

He said MA fitted on all of those things and ultimately was someone who could come in and try and make us successful this season.

IW asked if MA's player requirements are different from DH's. AS said part of the process was asking how they would get the best out of the current squad, as we have not got the best out of them this season. AS said it is initially how he can get the best out of this current group. MA was very clear on how he would play and liked the squad in place. AS said MA was keen to speak to Charlton because of the opportunity and the group in place.

Backroom staff

JW asked what additional coaching staff Michael Appleton would have following the departures of Danny Senda (DS) and Glyn Shimell (DS). JW said it was clearly obvious that there was a lack of experience around DH and a certain naivety to the football. He said a lot of supporters are keen to see good appointments to the coaching team.

AS said DS and GS had left and Anthony Hayes (AH) had been told by MA that he wasn't going to be part of his men's first-team coaching staff. He said the club are in negotiations with AH about how they use him. He said they want him to stay at the football club as they think he has a lot to offer. He said he has been offered a role that would suit him and the football club.

AS said when they had the conversation with MA, they challenged him to be one of the experienced members of the coaching team, which MA agreed with. He said he wanted to be the leader and that is why he was happy to come in on his own. He said the club have spoken with him about a number of coaches, including Richard O'Donnell. He said the club are hopeful Richard O'Donnell can come in. ([Post-meeting note: Richard O'Donnell has been appointed as men's First-Team Coach](#)). AS said they have talked about what else they need in the coaching staff to help MA be the best he can.

He said the club has appointed someone to lead the football club and to lead on the grass and he said MA is that.

AS said the club still have to appoint a Goalkeeping Coach. He said Stephen Henderson has filled in and has been outstanding. ([Post-meeting note: Stephen Henderson has been appointed Goalkeeping Coach](#)).

JR said they are focused on making the *right* decision with regards to the coaching staff, not the *right now* decision. He said they accept the scrutiny but they want to take their time to get the right people into the club and try to change the boom or bust culture. He said he appreciates the only thing that buys you time in football is winning games of football.

IW asked what the situation is with Jason Pearce (JPce). AS said he will go back to the academy. He said MA was keen to keep him in the men's first-team coaching group if JPce wanted to do that. AS said JPce knows what he wants from his career and he will do anything for this football club. He said that JPce feels at the moment his development will be best suited by going back into the academy and building his career and understanding his coaching pathway. AS said he feels JPce has a really strong future in the game.

Improving infrastructure

HA said AS had said there were areas that had been neglected for a long time. She asked what areas they were including across academy and women's teams. AS said he feels he is six weeks behind where he wants to be. He said his role is to support the Head Coach and the staff and make sure they have the resources they need to go and do the job they can.

JW

HA

He said the other part of his job is to build an infrastructure that is aligned, around the academy, men's first-team, women's first-team. He said at the moment that alignment is not in place. He said the club does not currently have a strong recruitment department or a strong analysis department. He said the current analysis set-up is not suitable for a club that wants to progress. He said the club want to appoint a Director of Performance. He said there are areas that can improve - injury records, fitness levels, nutrition, psychology. He said the players are playing at high levels of physical intensity and the club needs to be able to provide the best support it can.

HA said everyone in the room would agree around injury problems. AS said the club cannot allow things to drift which has happened in the past. He said now is the time to have a plan to improve things. He said the Director of Performance will be key and will make decisions on what the club needs to do to improve from and injuries and fitness perspective.

He said recruitment clearly has to improve and he is overseeing that process - they are looking at what data is used, what scouts we have got etc.

AS said his role is to support the whole football club and he now holds weekly Heads of Department meetings to build professionalism within the football club. He said the club has a great academy, a great Community Trust, the new and developing women's teams and academy. He said he wants to bring in an aligned best practice across the football club which everyone will benefit from. He said what is clear is that the club is further behind than he hoped they would be.

HA asked why the club is further behind. AS referenced because of the infrastructure previously in place. He said the club would look at every department and look at how that department can excel, to help take the club forwards.

TG asked if that infrastructure issue had been going back a few years. AS said with all the changes at the club over the years, there have not been established processes and protocols. He said the club needs robust protocols so people in their roles can continue to learn and develop. AS said there is not blame on individuals but the intention is to improve things moving forward and that will be done in consultation with staff.

JW said it was refreshing to hear what AS was saying as opposed to a finger in the air five-year target, with no substance.

JR said their focus is just on getting better. He said what happened with DH was not part of anyone's plan. He said the focus is getting better in a considered way.

JR said the ownership are experienced people and understand what they have bought into and the people they have employed to make the decisions on their behalf. He said things will get better, although there may be some choppy waters at times. He said the thing that people are interested in is winning football. He said he is full of hope this season and has to be given his role. He said they will not be making any grandiose promises but things will get better. He said some good people have joined the football club to go with good people already in the football club. He said those already in the football club need some help and need to see a plan. He said there is a lot to be done but it is exciting. He said there is real talent in the club on and off the pitch, those working in the academy, the trust. He said they are focused on bringing back a bit of identify and pride.

Recruitment strategy

CL asked if it was policy to only buy young players as there is sell-on value and to not offer older players contracts as there is no sell-on value. JR said the club has an abundance of talent that will play when the time is right. He said the players the club need to bring in are those that can complement all the emerging talent the club already has. He said they have to have the right blend of youth and experience. He said the club have to make sure the clubs signs players that can contribute to the team but also support and be good role models to the young players in the team.

CL said the club needs to get experienced players in. AS said it is about the person, where they have played, the ambition. He said the club cannot have players who just play on a Saturday and do not train during the week, as that is not a good role model for our young players, the coach cannot get the best out of them and they cannot improve. He said if the club can bring in a 24-year-old who is hungry and knows what it is like to win, he would rather that than a 32-year-old who only has a few years left and thinks his career is coming

CL

to an end. He said he wants to see dynamic, athletic, energetic, ambitious, exciting players. He said he wants to see players that want to run, to press, to win the ball back, to counter-attack. He said age is irrelevant to that - he said Alfie May is 31 but runs around like a 19-year-old. He said it is about the character and mentality. He said the club are not going to bring players in that come in and think Charlton is the best they are going to do. JR said players have value in two ways - potential re-sale and contribution to winning. He said winning is how you get people into The Valley.

CL asked if the club would rely on analytics. AS said the club have a lot of data providers. He said his background is recruitment and he would not sign anyone he has not watched live. He said until you have watched a player live you do not know how they react to the coach, how they warm-up, how they move etc. He said the club will put together a recruitment team that watch live players, do video scouting, will rely on analytics to filter the way MA wants to play. He said it is a collaboration of all those things as there is so much information out there, but you have got to use your eyes and your instincts and good scouts use both.

Ownership strategy and motivation

HA asked how they perceive things have gone so far with the ownership, how they feel fans perceive how they have done so far and how they plan moving forward. JR said it has not gone to plan so far. He said those that have invested have tasked the management team with running the football club. He said it is a different way of owning a football club than Charlton have experienced in the past. He said these owners do not run businesses, they own them. He said they task the management team with running the business.

He said the decisions the management team take such as firing and hiring a coach, which have a financial implication on us as a football club. He said they are decisions the management team make. He said the club consults the ownership on matters that have significant financial implications before they become public but that it is them, as experienced, industry professionals, that are tasked with running the football club on budgets that have been agreed with ownership. JR said he and AS are the people to look at if things are going wrong.

JR said the ownership have provided for the club and management team - there is a playing budget that is likely between second and fourth-highest in League One this season, a playing squad that they think is as good as most in the division. He said most of the budgets in place were dictated in the first place as the club had to sign up to a two-year business plan as part of the EFL's approval process. He said he has not seen everyone's playing budget but Charlton's is likely to be in the top two to four in the league. He said at the moment the club is underachieving against that budget.

He said the club's first board meeting takes place on Friday, September 22nd.

JW asked what investors expectation on return and if they are loaning money to the club.

JR said the owners are not loaning money to the club, he said it is their money and they are doing it as equity. He said the owners want the club to get better. He said the chances of anyone getting a return out of football, for a club like Charlton Athletic, is getting to the Premier League. He said clubs like Brentford and Brighton & Hove Albion have spent money to get to the Premier League and others have spent lots of money and not got there.

He said the management team are putting pressure on themselves to succeed. He said if the club can get going there is a lot of potential but there is a long way to go to hit that.

IW said he was encouraged by what he was hearing, he said what has always worried him is the owners' motivation. He asked what is the motivation of owning the club. JR said the appeal of football plays a part. He said the owners see the potential. He said these types of investors invest in management teams; they believe in experienced people who can take their money, work hard in the business and grow the club.

IW said the club needs owners who are going to stay and be stable and a management team that are going to be at the club for a period of time. He said the club has been getting through managers and owners too quickly and you cannot win anything like that.

JR agreed. He said hopefully when fan meetings take place in a year and 18 months there will be more trust, as he appreciated that at this stage there will be some nervousness

HA

<p>given the recent history. He said a quick sale would not work and that it has to be a long-term investment.</p> <p>HA said CAST have had a number of questions on CM's role within the club. JR said that Charlie Methven (CM) is a director for Global Football Partners (GFP) and operates as a conduit between the football club and the ownership. JR said CM is not involved in the day-to-day running of the football club. He said his role at GFP level is purely strategic. He said that CM is helping on the commercial and marketing aspect because to not tap into his ability and his contacts in that sphere would be negligent, but he is not making decisions on a daily basis. He said he is sometimes at The Valley and sometimes at the training ground.</p> <p>HA praised CM for getting the ownership group together to purchase the club. She said some supporters have raised to CAST queries about him talking to media and fans. She said she felt for example him talking on a podcast about the club overspending in the summer window should have been done on the club's channels first. IW, JW and SB also referenced the podcast appearance and said they felt that what was communicated on the podcast, should have first been communicated on the club's channels first. IW said he goes on the website every day without fail but he does not listen to every podcast. TR referenced the podcast appearance was written up on the club's website (the write-up can be found here). TG said it was a very good piece on the club website about the podcast, which explains things well. JR thanked the supporters for their feedback on the topic.</p>	
<p>Ownership of The Valley and the training ground</p> <p>JP asked about the club purchasing The Valley and the training ground. JR said that has to be an aspiration. He said the ownership bought an asset with 13 years left on the lease, so clearly it is something that has to be resolved. He said they have had early discussions with Mr Duchatelet's team to form a relationship. He said the lease is on sensible terms and although it is early stages in the discussion process, the reality is it is something that will have to be dealt with. JW asked if there was a break clause in 2025 in relation to the lease. JR said there was no break clause that could be activated to force the club to leave The Valley.</p>	JP
<p>Shadow board</p> <p>JW asked about the fan engagement and where the club was with regards to a shadow board. JW said supporters need to have a seat at the proper table to have proper dialogue and impact the governance of the football club. He asked what chances there were that a shadow board would be developed at Charlton Athletic. JR said they have a completely open mind on it. He said in the future it is pretty certain that all clubs will have to have a shadow board. He said the club are open to suggestions. He said on the current board there are two independent Directors - former footballer Paul Elliott (PE) and Charlton fan and investor Gavin Carter (GC). JW said not every fan can afford to put the money in that GC has. JR agreed. He said PE and GC's role, amongst other things, is providing checks and balances on the executive. JW asked for a working group to organise the shadow board. JR said that a working group sounded like a matter that should be considered. JW said Cambridge United and others are already operating them. HA said some are working well and some are making mistakes, so the clubs can learn from others. JW said the Everton one is working well, although maybe not on the pitch. HA said the Football Supporters' Association feel there is learning to be done and where it works well and where it does not. She said there could also be learning from Germany and other parts of the world. JR said the club are in listening mode about a shadow board.</p>	JW
<p>Fan experience</p> <p>JW said in various grounds there are different fan experiences. He said Lincoln have a great fan experience area. He asked what Charlton can do to enhance the fan experience. SB said the discussion has been had previously with numerous owners about improving the matchday experience and it has not happened. HA said the group and others have offered to help fan experience with previous owners, but it has not always followed through. LC agreed the changes had not been enough. All agreed the changes in the beer to Meantime had been positive. AS said it is the same as what the club want to do at the training ground - show staff, players, trust, visitors and parents that the club are thinking about things and</p>	JW

making it a better place. He said the club wants to do the same at The Valley and actions are needed, so it is not just being talked about. TR agreed next steps would be introducing Millie Edmundson, who works on fan experience, to the Fans' Forum group on email and she could collate people's suggestions for an improved matchday experience for the club to review.

JR said he would love to get the car park re-tarmacked but given the cost of it that probably will not happen until the club are in the Premier League because it has been bodged up so many times. He said the club has an opportunity in the car park. SB said giving up 10 spaces could actually make the club money. JR said the money you lose by giving up a few spaces is negligible compared to the benefits of an improved matchday experience. SB said that JR was the first person at the club to say something like that for many years which he was pleased about.

JW said at the food tasting consultation there was an issue raised that different stands have different food offerings and in the West Stand you cannot get some food because of the extractions. He asked about having an open space in the car park, that fans can get to at half-time. JP said Reading had a good variety of food options. JR said he would take everything on board and he was not worried about losing car parking spaces as he was more concerned about the fan experience. HA said the club should be serving the best haddock and chips in London. CL said winning a few games improves fan experience. JR agreed and said the club could still make other improvements.

JR asked if service levels have improved. IW said the Fans' Bar is excellent and has improved. Others in the meeting agreed. JW said he did not believe the contract with the club's catering partner was great. JR said, while it may not be the deal he would have done, it is not a bad deal for the club. He said Gather & Gather (G&G) have been flexible and show a willingness to work with the Club. JW said the service levels in the concourses are still not very good, but he agreed service in the Fans' Bar has improved. JR said the club have had people look at how it can be improved - he said it is an age-old question in football with everyone wanting to get served at half-time. He said most football ground concourses are not really fit for it and if you are building a new football ground, you would not build it in the way these stadiums are set up. He said there are things the club can do, for example training of staff, how you float, hawkers, pre-poured beer. He said G&G have responded to the challenges the club has asked of them and the club's margins have got better this season. He said both parties need the relationship to work and the feeling is that it is getting better and the focus will be on continuing that improvement. JR said the club have reports based on the opening games with feedback the club and G&G are actioning.

Club shop

IW said he went to Bromley and their club shop is better than the Charlton one. He said there were much more smaller, cheaper options which are perfect for children which Charlton does not have. JR said he is aware of all the issues and has a follow-up meeting with Castore on it as he is aware it is an unsatisfactory scenario.

JR said he loves the idea of a club shop that belongs to the club, with ticketing in there and some museum items on display. He said he is a big fan of the museum.

SB said the club shop being poor is an ongoing situation and on the first day of the season, the offering was only shirts which he said is not good enough. JR agreed.

IW

CharltonTV

JW asked if CharltonTV will be cut. JR said CharltonTV is an excellent product but it is expensive. He said it was set up during a different time - during the pandemic. JR said from next season there will be no domestic streaming because of the new TV deal the EFL have agreed with Sky. He said the club are looking at what to do this season and there will still be games live streamed, it is just whether it needs to be quite the level of production it is at the moment. He said everything that is done will need to be done in consultation with the stars on CharltonTV such as Scott Minto, Steve Brown and Alan Curbishley. He said the club are looking at it because it requires investment and it is only this season where the club can stream in the UK. He said ultimately the club are spending money and are considering if that money be spent on CharltonTV or something different such as the

JW

academy, the men's first-team budget etc. He said the club needs to think about how they spend their money. He said that next season there will not be CharltonTV in its current format but for the rest of this season, the club are currently reviewing.	
Commemoration of players IW asked about a commemoration committee for when a former player passes away, referencing the club has got it wrong in the past. It was agreed IW would highlight to the club when a player should be commemorated and JR would make the final decision.	IW
Disabled supporters CL said one of the disabled supporters had a query on parking. TG said a process was agreed with the club at the start of the season which he believes is working. It was agreed any follow-ups should go directly to TG at CADSA.	CL
Parking restrictions IW had read about the local council imposing more stringent parking restrictions in the local area. CL and DW both expressed concern. JR said he would follow up on it. DW said with public transport strikes it was even more of an issue. JP said supporters can go via Valley Express. DW said Valley Express did not go to his area, JP advised him to speak to the club about options for it. JW advised a follow up with Greenwich Council.	IW
Free ticket policy CL asked about policy on the free tickets. JR confirmed the club still operates the Community 500 scheme, which gives individuals involved in Charlton Athletic Community Trust programmes and the schools they work with the opportunity to experience a Charlton game and allows the club to collect data and re-market to them. JR said he does not agree with giving away free tickets other than via the Community Trust where it is very controlled and not going to the same people. JW highlighted the council are giving away free tickets. JR said that was likely pre-existing from before the GFP takeover and he would follow up with it. JR said the club wouldn't be doing #FillTheValley-style free ticket initiatives. As a policy season tickets must always represent the greatest value.	CL
International Supporters' Day HA asked about International Supporters' Day. LL said the Swedish Addicks are planning a trip which starts with Carlisle United on the Saturday and then moves on to London for a Tuesday game.	HA
AOB JW thanked JR and AS for taking part. CL wished them a successful tenure at Charlton Athletic.	JW
Date for next Fans' Forum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Currently set for Thursday, November 30th 	Club