

## **FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' FEDERATION**

### **WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN'S COMMISSION ON THE ENGLAND NATIONAL TEAM AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH PLAYERS**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. This paper represents the written evidence of the Football Supporters' Federation (FSF), representing over half a million supporters of clubs and national teams at all levels throughout England and Wales, to the Football Association (FA) Chairman Greg Dyke's Commission on the England national team and the development of players qualified for the England national team.
- 1.2. The Commission will operate without formal written terms of reference. The overriding objective has however been set down – to recommend measures to increase both the number of players of sufficient standard to play for the England national team, and the quality of those players
- 1.3. This paper sets out the FSF's thinking and recommendations on a number of key organisational, technical and legal questions with a direct bearing on the pool of available talent and its nurturing and development.
- 1.4. Firstly we examine the numbers playing the game and the facilities available to them. We then look at the coaching and development of players. We then consider organisational, resource and governance issues. Finally we look at some key legal and cultural questions.

#### **2. GRASSROOTS PLAYERS AND FACILITIES – INCREASING THE TALENT POOL**

- 2.1. The Commission sets about its task against a backdrop of a pronounced and sustained fall in the numbers of young people actively engaged in sport including football.
- 2.2. Despite all the hopes, promises and rhetoric the early signs are that the major success of the 2012 London Olympics has done nothing to arrest this long-term decline.
- 2.3. The participation level is still quite high however, standing at 1.83 million. There does however need to be a clear focus on stabilising and then steadily increasing participation levels. The more who play the game, especially from a young age, the more likely England is to unearth more "diamonds"

- 2.4.** The nations with whom England competes in Europe have many advantages not enjoyed here. One of them is – generally speaking – a higher level of engagement and investment by local, regional and national government in sporting facilities. Public investment in sporting infrastructure in both France and Germany for example shames local and central government here.
- 2.5.** Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is one of the factors deterring the playing of football. One must be pessimistic about public investment in pitches, changing rooms and so on given the current government's public expenditure policies and the likely spending priorities of any future government. That said there is still a public policy case to be made for central and local government investment in sport in terms of public physical and mental health, deterrence of crime and so on.
- 2.6.** However, the unfortunate truth is that poorly maintained public playing and changing facilities, which are increasingly expensive to hire, will continue to be a major factor in deterring the playing of the game. The recently trumpeted announcement of investment in the grass roots game via the Premier League & FA Facilities Fund administered by the Football Foundation concealed the fact that investment by this route has in fact decreased rather than the reverse.
- 2.7.** The FSF proposes the establishment of a permanent, high-level, FA committee with the FA chairman presiding, supported by appropriate officers and external advisors, to monitor participation levels, investment in the national game from all sources, to initiate innovative approaches to increasing and sustaining participation levels and to initiate research and recommend policy and good practice in this area.
- 2.8.** We propose later on that this senior committee be charged additionally with oversight of all aspects of the discovery and development of gifted players qualified for the England national team. The starting point must be stabilising then increasing the number of young players involved in regularly playing the game.
- 2.9.** One observation before leaving this subject. The encouragement of young men and women to play the game isn't assisted by the separation between the professional game and the national game at all levels,. There is a need for much greater joint working and close engagement between professional clubs and their county FAs.
- 2.10.** There are examples of good practice to be observed in Australia in both rugby league and Australian rules football where the elite professional clubs are at the very heart of the game in their districts and cities. Professional clubs should be far more engaged with the national game than they are presently

**2.11.** We now briefly deal with the next challenge facing the development of gifted English players – coaching.

### **3. YOUTH COACHING DEVELOPMENT**

**3.1.** We don't intend in this paper to explore this subject in detail as it is ground already well covered. Suffice to say that England has underperformed in both quantity and quality in the production of qualified youth coaches.

**3.2.** Neither do we intend to comment upon the ongoing controversy around the structure and rules of youth academies and development in the professional game, except to say that it is the FA who should be leading and shaping these policies and rules for the overall benefit of the game as the Fédération Française de Football (FFF) has across the English Channel.

**3.3.** St George's Park must become a world-class centre of excellence in youth coaching and development, establishing regional satellite centres working with the English Schools FA to promote the very best level of quality and quantity in the development of youth coaching. It should take the very best from the FFF's Clairfontaine and the Federazione Italiana Giuoco Calcio's (FIGC, Italian Football Federation) Coverciano.

**3.4.** We believe that the FA should be thinking outside the box on this subject. Whilst absolute numbers are important quality is critical. Why has the Netherlands seen such a massive improvement in the quality and number of top-class players in the last four decades. Why has Uruguay whose population of 3.3 million is dwarfed by those of Argentina and Brazil traditionally been regarded – rightly – as one of the giants of the South American game?

**3.5.** There are similar phenomena in other sports. Why is New Zealand with its population of 4.5 million so consistently dominant in rugby union when all of its established opponents have massively bigger populations and player numbers?

**3.6.** There are lessons to be learned from all these examples. The FA committee we propose should ensure that the game here is in a position to study and to learn from best practice elsewhere in the football world and other sports.

**3.7.** We also observe that the number of English players and managers prepared to move abroad to further their careers has always been very small compared to other nations. A young player not making the grade in, say, Germany, will happily move to another country, learning a new language if necessary to further their playing career. Likewise with coaches and managers.

- 3.8. We believe that the game here would benefit greatly from more managers and coaches working overseas and being exposed to different cultures and ways of working, just as the current England manager Roy Hodgson has with distinction. The FA should examine what it can do to promote prolonged technical exchanges, particularly in the area of youth coaching.
- 3.9. We now turn to the question of the number of England qualified players in the Premier League.

#### **4. GIVING YOUTH A CHANCE – THE PREMIER LEAGUE AND FOREIGN PLAYERS**

- 4.1. The English game's attitude to foreign players has oscillated over the years from an outright ban introduced in the FA's rules in the 1930s to a gradual opening beginning in the 1978/79 season when the Football League decided to permit each club to sign no more than two non British or Irish players.
- 4.2. Before that foreign players were extremely rare as the rules required two years' residency in Great Britain prior to being registered as a professional in England or Wales. This rule never applied in Scotland which permitted Danish international Preben Arentoft to sign for Newcastle United after playing for Greenock Morton in Scotland. He was very much a rarity.
- 4.3. When the rules were changed in 1978 there was no public debate nor fanfare. Many didn't notice the change at all until Tottenham Hotspur signed two players from Argentina. Osvaldo Ardiles and Ricardo Villa had both played in Argentina's World Cup winning side that summer. When they arrived it appeared such a novelty that they could have come from Mars !. Argentine footballers playing in England? Whatever next?
- 4.4. The rules were relaxed again to permit a third foreign player. At the same time both Italy and Spain were allowing bans on new foreign players to lapse. Both had been introduced in the 1960s, both designed to promote the development of players for their respective national teams. It should be noted that Italy banned new foreign players irrespective of nationality despite being a founding member of what was then known as the European Economic Community (EEC).
- 4.5. Indeed the founding treaty of what is now the European Union (EU) is the Treaty of Rome. Britain joined the then EEC in 1973. Spain in 1982. Football simply didn't think of itself as a business subject to European rules on freedom of movement and employment law.
- 4.6. The 1995 ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in the Bosman case took football completely by surprise. Part of the ruling struck down

all rules inhibiting freedom of movement of EU Member State footballers within the European Economic Area (EEA, the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) and Switzerland.

- 4.7. To say that this was a shock to national football associations within the EU, UEFA and FIFA was an understatement. As late as the early 1990s UEFA imposed a limit of three foreign players in every UEFA Champions League, European Cup-Winners' Cup and UEFA Cup match. In the case of English clubs this included Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish players.
- 4.8. It is easy to forget how quickly the situation changed. Arsenal won the European Cup-Winners' Cup against Parma in 1994 with an all-English starting XI and three out of five English substitutes. In 1999 the Manchester United team that won the UEFA Champions League had only four English players in the starting XI although five of their seven substitutes were English.
- 4.9. In that same year Chelsea became the first English club to field an all-foreign starting XI although there were English players amongst the Chelsea substitutes. In 2005 Arsenal became the first English club to field an entire starting XI and substitutes' bench without a single English (or British or Irish) player.
- 4.10. Part of the problem was that the game's national, European and world governing bodies were entirely unprepared for this intervention in its affairs. There was also a technical problem in that sport was not within the EU's legal competence. This is no longer the case following the entry into effect of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009.
- 4.11. Clause 165 of the Treaty of Lisbon provides, inter alia:

*“– developing the European dimension in sport, by promoting fairness and openness in sporting competitions and cooperation between bodies responsible for sports, and by protecting the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sportsmen and sportswomen.*

*3. The Union and the Member States shall foster cooperation with third countries and the competent international organisations in the field of education and sport, in particular the Council of Europe.*

*4. In order to contribute to the achievement of the objectives referred to in this Article,:*

*– the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, after consulting the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, shall adopt incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States,*

*– the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, shall adopt recommendations.”*

- 4.12.** There are now a series of decisions from the ECJ which permit sport to introduce rules which might not ordinarily be permitted under EU employment and competition law if such rules are a) necessary for sporting reasons and b) proportionate and fair.
- 4.13.** The received wisdom is that no restriction can be entertained under EU law which would affect the rights of EU citizens to freedom of movement and labour under the Treaty of Rome. Because the abolition of quotas on foreign players was introduced suddenly and without debate following a court decision this has never been properly revisited.
- 4.14.** The FSF believes that there is scope for re-consideration of this area provided by the 2005 United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Article One of the Convention sets out its objectives including inter alia:
- (h) to reaffirm the sovereign rights of States to maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory;*
- 4.15.** The FSF believes that this Convention provides the basis for the FA to approach other European national associations, UEFA and FIFA to argue for limited national quotas in the context of protecting each nation's football as part of its cultural heritage and expression.
- 4.16.** The European Union acceded to the Convention in 2006. Given the EU's legal competence in sport which post-dates Bosman the FSF believes that the European Commission, Council and Parliament may be prepared to accept a limited re-introduction of quotas provided that they are convinced that they are necessary and proportionate.
- 4.17.** This will require very careful thought. In the context of the FA it would be sensible to include Welsh players in its quotas as does the Premier League at the moment, given that all senior professional clubs in Wales play in the English pyramid.
- 4.18.** There would have to be very careful thought given to how the quota would operate in practice. To merely insist that say four players out of every starting eleven must be qualified to play for England or Wales could be to invite substitutions immediately after kick-off if the club manager concerned wants particular players on the field.

- 4.19. On the other hand what happens if an English/Welsh player is injured and there is no English/Welsh player on the bench to replace them?
- 4.20. We also have to be careful that we neither set up perverse incentives for the trafficking of young players nor promote an explosion in transfer fees/salaries of English/Welsh players. As much effort must go into supply as into creating demand by quotas.
- 4.21. What we do know is that the current UEFA, Premier League and Football League eight from twenty-five squad rules haven't had the effect that their advocates hoped, principally because the rules do not refer to nationality but to where a player spent his formative years being developed. Professional club academies have many young players recruited from abroad.
- 4.22. There is a working model of quotas operating without legal challenge in North America. The Canadian Football League (Canadian football is a close cousin to the American gridiron game with some significant differences in the playing laws between the two codes) operates a minimum quota of Canadian players.
- 4.23. Of each squad of forty-two players a maximum of nineteen may be "imports" of which three are "designated" whose use is highly restricted. Principally these imports are Americans. Canadian football is a twelve a side game with unlimited substitution. Like the American game each team has separate offensive and defensive squads. At any one time in a CFL game therefore at least seven Canadian players out of twenty-four are on the field.
- 4.24. The CFL has these rules to protect the distinctly Canadian nature of the game, falling neatly within the definition of the UNESCO convention as a cultural expression. As the sociologist and commentator Marshall McLuhan (himself a Canadian) once said "Culture is what people do."
- 4.25. Whilst association football is the most universal of games, the FSF believes that a cogent argument can be made that each nation has its own particular approach to the game and that its national side is a fundamental part of cultural and national identity. One only has to see how whole nations get caught up with fortunes of their national team during major tournaments.
- 4.26. The FA Board committee we propose should be charged with instigating and directing a detailed study in this area aimed at developing a fully worked up proposal to take to other national associations, UEFA and FIFA.
- 4.27. A survey of supporter opinion recently undertaken by the FSF shows support for quotas. 49.4% supported quotas, 32% said no with 18.6% expressing no preference. We submit a graphic summary of the detailed findings of this survey as an appendix. We invite the

Commission to note the support for a quota system amongst supporters that the survey demonstrates.

- 4.28. The other road to finding playing time for young English players that is raised from time to time is the adoption by elite clubs of “feeder” clubs from the lower divisions. We examine this in the next section.

## **5. FEEDER CLUBS – PART OF THE SOLUTION OR A BLIND ALLEY?**

- 5.1. From time to time various people within the professional game have raised the idea of so-called “feeder” clubs or, alternatively Premier League clubs being allowed to field reserve teams in the Football League as occurs in Spain.
- 5.2. The FSF believes that the proponents of feeder clubs haven’t thought through the full implications of what they suggest. From all the anecdotal evidence we have supporters are strongly against “feeder” clubs.
- 5.3. One of the unique features of the professional game in England is its depth, replicated in no other country in the world. This would collapse very quickly were Football League clubs to become feeder clubs to the Premier League elite.
- 5.4. Whether owned outright by Premier League clubs or tied into a contractual relationship similar to that which exists in professional baseball in North America where each major league club has a series of “farm” clubs the system won’t work whilst we have promotion and relegation.
- 5.5. Some years ago Sheffield Wednesday would have counted themselves amongst the Premier League elite. What would have happened when they had to play one of their feeder clubs post relegation? Conversely what happens when a feeder club wins promotion to the Premier League?
- 5.6. Aside from this issue the FSF believes clubs whose primary objective is to develop players for other clubs rather than to win games and trophies for their local community will quickly see public support drift away. It is public support and passion which creates the impetus to competitive, meaningful games.
- 5.7. Anybody who has ever been to a match in one of the old regional reserve leagues (the Football Combination, Central League and so on) or the now abandoned Premier Reserve League will tell you that the absence of a crowd and a team selected not to win but who needed a fitness run-out or the chance to step up from the youth team led to meaningless contests.

- 5.8. To work effectively promotion and relegation would have to be abandoned. Fans wouldn't back a club whose primary objective was the development of players for others. The base of the professional pyramid would be destroyed to nobody's benefit.
- 5.9. What should be examined is the loan system. If properly administered and free of abuse, young players being loaned out can be mutually beneficial. David Beckham's short time on loan at Preston North End was an important part of his development as a young player.
- 5.10. Some clubs have a proud tradition of finding and developing young talent who later move on to bigger clubs. Crewe Alexandra and the excellent work over decades of Dario Gradi always springs to mind in this context.
- 5.11. Alex fans regret that they can't hang on to more of the talent that they have produced, but they take pride in seeing players developed at Gresty Road move on to have success elsewhere.
- 5.12. This is one idea that should be immediately dropped. If it is not, we predict that our members will, understandably, demand that we lead a national campaign of opposition to this development.
- 5.13. We also fully endorse and support the written evidence submitted by our partners and friends at Supporters Direct.

## **6. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSION**

- 6.1. The FSF recommends that the FA Board establish a permanent committee with the FA chairman presiding (para. 2.7.) to:
  - 1. Monitor participation levels, investment in the national game from all sources, to initiate experimental approaches to increasing and sustaining participation levels and to initiate research and recommend policy and good practice in this area (para. 2.7.).
  - 2. Study and to learn from best practice in player development elsewhere in the football world and in other sports (para. 3.6.).
  - 3. Promote long-term international placements and exchanges of youth coaches (para. 3.8.).
  - 4. Instigate and direct a detailed study aimed at developing a fully worked up proposal on a quota system to take to other national associations, UEFA and FIFA (para 4.26.).
  - 5. Drop any suggestion of feeder clubs (para 5.12.).
- 6.2. The FSF as the voice of half a million matchgoing fans stands ready to engage on this important issue. We would be delighted to discuss our

ideas and proposals with the Commission at one or more of the envisaged “round tables”

**MALCOLM CLARKE**  
**CHAIR**  
**FOOTBALL SUPPORTERS' FEDERATION**

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