

## Raith Rovers Fan session

A face-to-face session with Rovers fans was held to further explore views of the club and some of the issues raised by the fan survey. An open invitation was made to all Raith Rovers supporters through the local newspaper, the Trust website and the Fan talk website. A total of 18 fans attended the session. There was good representation of the various supporter groupings with attendees from The Supporters' Trust, the Supporters Clubs, the 200 Club, Fife's Finest and Edinburgh Rovers. The session was chaired by Steven Lawther and anonymous quotes have been used to illustrate the findings from the session.

## The Discussion

The discussion initially focused on the good things and bad things about Raith Rovers Football Club. Fans were on the whole positive about supporting RRFC and for many it played a big part in their life. There was not surprisingly a strong emotional attachment to the club and a sense of ownership.

*"I just feel it's my club"*

*"Raith Rovers is a part of your life"*

*"You define yourself as a Rovers fan"*

*"It's like going to church or a religion. I don't go to church but I go to Rovers on a Saturday"*

Some fans talked about following Raith Rovers not being an easy past time and one which required a lot of commitment.

*"It's an easy route to support Rangers and Celtic. Supporting the Rovers isn't easy"*

*"It goes beyond a hobby or an enjoyment. The amount of beatings we have taken over the years especially during the dark days of Anelka but we still keep going"*

The fans identified many good things about supporting Raith Rovers including:

- Back in the First Division
- Good management in John McGlynn
- Good community club
- The attitude of the current Board (especially Dave Somerville)
- Players out in the community (and willing to speak to fans)
- Social aspect of going to games
- Other supporters (people you know, same faces, can make a difference at away games)

*"You feel it's a true community club. It's not like the Old Firm. The club does values its fans"*

*"When we got to the semi's of the cup you saw the whole community get behind the club"*

There was a strong feeling that the club was in a much better position than it had been in recent years (although there remained a belief that perhaps things weren't as rosy as most fans thought)

*"All we need to do is look at what the club was like six years ago. We aren't seeing guys standing with buckets"*

*"It is more stable and going forward it is not in turmoil all the time"*

*"The big difference is we have a chairman who has a lot of respect for the fans"*

*"If Dave Somerville walked away from the Rovers tomorrow we would have a major problem. He has got the Rovers at his heart"*

The fans also identified some things about Raith Rovers that either worried them or could be better including:

- Financially still not 'out of the woods'
- Concerns about Stadium ownership
- Administration at the Club was seen as 'thin on the ground'
- The Club not promoting themselves adequately (not promoting games, not targeting nearby towns like Glenrothes, lottery going 'stale')
- The Club being unwilling to try new things or 'putting barriers up' when fans suggest new things
- Other supporters (lack of patience at games, a section of the crowd using foul and abusive language)
- Lack of evidence of the youth system producing first team players
- Lack of support from the local community (attendance low, apathy towards the club)

*"The club have never really done anything about looking at the marketing of Raith Rovers as a product"*

*"They never sell themselves enough. I think they could sell themselves a lot better than they have been"*

*"We are a First Division Club but we might not be a First Division club behind the scenes"*

Although fans felt that the club was in a much better position than it had been in recent years there remained an ongoing concern about the financial stability of the club. Some were unsure about whether the majority of supporters recognised this fact. The exact financial position of the club was further masked by the lack of an AGM and complicated nature of ownership.

*"I don't know how anyone can understand all the different bits of the pie chart about who owns what"*

*"We are not behaving like a club in dire straits which is a good thing but that may be masking the true situation"*

*"I would hate people to think the club have got no debt. They are struggling financially. There is no money there. I know the cup run gave us extra money but they are not out of the woods yet and I don't think most of the fans realise that"*

Concern was expressed about whether all of the fans groups raising money to simply give to the club is the most sustainable way forward for the club in the long term.

*"If the supporters groups keep putting money in the club are going to start relying on that?"*

The Stadium issue also concerned many fans with most unclear about the exact position as regards Stadium ownership, the future intentions of the current Stadium owner and what returning the Stadium to the fans meant in reality.

*"We know that John Sim owns the stadium but we don't know where that is going"*

The session then discussed a number of specific stadium issues raised in the fan survey including a safe standing area, a family section and re-opening the Railway Stand. Whilst some of these were desirable the financial implications of major investments projects like creating a safe standing area or re-opening the Railway stand were not seen as a priority.

*"I would love a safe standing area but can it guarantee an increase in crowd? I doubt it"*

*"As regards revamping the Railway Stand forget it. The money is not there"*

The fans were mixed on the need for a family section. Some felt that a mixed crowd helped improve behaviour whilst others expressed concern about the behaviour of fellow fans. There was a general sense that such behaviour had always existed in football but that things were improving.

*"My wife and the daughter want to come to the Rovers and I don't bring them because of one reason – people shouting foul abuse at the back of the stand"*

*"I don't think it is as much of a problem as it used to be. It is improving"*

*"It is a problem that you are never going to get away from. It has always been there in football"*

There was a feeling that encouraging more fans along was the only long term solution of the club – but it was recognised that this was difficult in the current economic climate as well as with the attraction of supporting the Old Firm or watching football on Sky at home. Dropping prices or letting kids in free was not felt to be the answer but there was a desire expressed for more flexibility on season tickets (offshore/shift workers) and family season tickets (cheaper).

### **The Trust**

The session then considered the position and work of the Trust.

There was support for the Trust and what it had achieved as part of Reclaim the Rovers and the importance of fans having a voice in their club. The Fan Director was a positive step and most felt it was important we continued to fill that role and have a position at the boardroom table. Some felt that communication between the Fan Director and fans should be improved.

However it was clear that the current role of the Trust was unclear with some feeling the Trust lacked visibility now that the ‘crisis’ had passed.

*“There seems to be less visibility (of the trust). There is no perceived crisis so the Trust is in the background a bit”*

*“It is finding a correct role in the absence of a crisis”*

The session then discussed the various possible roles for the Trust covered in the survey, namely:

- Increasing ownership in Raith Rovers
- Coordinating a campaign to buy back Starks Park
- Working towards RRFC being owned by the fans
- Acting as a ‘watchdog’ to make sure that the club is run properly
- Raising funds for the football club
- Holding the board to account

There was no real consensus what the future role should be and many of the roles above were seen as important. Some felt that the Trust should also be making fans aware of the finances surrounding the club but it was recognised that this might not interest all fans.

*“I think the Trust should be making fans aware that the club is not out of the woods”*

*“There are a lot of people who are only interested in turning up and watching the team on the pitch. They don’t care who is in charge”*

The creation of a ‘rainy day’ fund instead of buying shares/giving money to the club was suggested which the club could use at a future date e.g. in the event of another crisis or at a time when buying a significant stake in the club could come about.

Views were mixed on whether fans owning the football club are an achievable or desirable prospect. Some felt that it should be a long term goal of the Trust whilst others had concerns about fans running the club.

*“I still feel getting a stronger foothold in the club is a good option  
– keep buying shares”*

*“Sports clubs across the world run themselves. Yes you get good  
and you get bad but over time the bad are voted out”*

*“Initially I was all for the idea of Trust ownership but over the  
years I’m not so sure. Anyone reading fan talk you think do you  
really want any of these people running my football club”*

*“When it comes to a crisis of cash flow are the fans going to be  
able to generate the cash to cover that?”*

There was agreement that the club should continue to operate in a financially sensible way and not do anything that puts the future prospect of the club at risk.

*“We still want to have Raith Rovers in another sixty years”*