

## Tottenham Hotspur Supporters' Trust Q & A Event

Thursday, February 27 2003 – 19:00 to 21:15

Venue: Whites, Paxton Road, Tottenham.

Over 100 Trust members attended the meeting.

The Trust invited David Pleat and Paul Kemsley to attend an evening Q & A session and they responded to members' questions in an open and candid manner.

The board of THST would like to take this opportunity to extend our gratitude to David and Paul for coming along.

A number of Spurs related topics were put to David and Paul. For ease of reporting, the conversations have been grouped into those various topics.

Uppermost in Trust members' minds was the subject of players and the transfer market:

David sought to dispel the perception that the Club had deliberately weakened the squad with the January departure of Ferdinand and Rebrov and the last minute collapse of the Ricketts deal. He explained that Glenn made the Rebrov decision and the Club had agreed to release Les as it was clear that he wouldn't get many opportunities of senior football. He went on to comment that players' departing is not necessarily a signal for replacements to be brought in, reminding us that we had Keane, Sheringham, Iversen and Doherty available to us. Notwithstanding the strikers already in place, we were trying to sign Ricketts but the deal was a difficult one due to Bolton's conduct.

Paul felt that allowing players who were not regular first team starters to leave didn't equate to weakening the squad. He added that the manager is the sole person who sanctions targets for the Club to try to acquire and players that the Club can allow to leave. He then stated that the large majority of Spurs fans had faith in that man and that football history had shown on numerous occasions, managers need the time for their plans to come good.

Paul was then asked to expand on the Club's statement at the end of the January transfer window. The Club had stated that a strong reserve squad was present but fans felt there was little evidence to support that due to the poor form of the reserve team. Questions on this specific area were aimed very much at our deficiencies in the striker department as injuries have prevented Robbie Keane and Steffen Iversen from playing at a vital time in the season. Paul responded by telling us that we shouldn't read too much into reserve team results. The reserve games are not merely a forum for up and coming players, but also for injured players to regain fitness and for players not selected for first team football to retain match practise.

As the focus was very much on our activity in the January window, Paul was quite happy to tell us what went on at that time. The Board is reliant on the manager to tell them who they should be signing and that Glenn duly gave them a short list of three players. He stressed that our failure to secure any of them had nothing to do with lack of money, but everything to do with circumstances. Two of the three players couldn't come for personal reasons and the third, Michael Ricketts, was subject to an agreed deal between Spurs and Bolton two days before the window closed. With less than two days to go, Spurs then found out that Ricketts was now on his way to The Riverside and not White Hart Lane. Faced with this information, the club continued to try to get the deal done, but stressed again, that the paper talk about Spurs losing out because of OUR continued changing of terms was nonsense. Paul stated that Spurs drive a hard bargain and are not embarrassed by that admission, but the reality was that an agreement had been struck and the reason it failed was due to issues outside our control.

The meeting then turned its attention to the market in general and Paul told us that things have drastically changed and he also assured us that Spurs are already planning for the coming summer. Glenn has supplied the board with a list of potential targets and as soon as FIFA and FA

rules permit, the club will commence approaches for these players. Like the Ricketts deal, it's a very inexact science, but the will to get targeted players is very much in place.

David added that due to the economics of football on the continent being in a bad way, players with expiring contracts would be unlikely to secure deals as lucrative as those they currently enjoy and therefore, this would generate greater movement. However, this movement would be more likely among players in their late 20s. David then fielded a question regarding younger players who might move to England, in particular, players of the calibre of Djibril Cisse. He told us that realistically, European players of that age and quality tend to go to the Inter's and the Barcelona's.

Paul was asked about just when we can approach clubs for players. He again referred us to FIFA and FA rules that govern this matter. Spurs can make an early approach to a club and ask about the availability and cost of players, but the element of the deal where we negotiate with the player himself and finalise everything must be done within the two annual windows.

David was then asked about his role in finding talented young players and whether it was part of the Club's plans to continue in the same vein that brought the likes of Davies, Etherington and Gardner to The Lane. David confirmed that this is still part of our philosophy. He stated his delight about how well the players mentioned were doing and also reported that Jonathan Blondel is settling in very well. He warned us that young players needed to impress Glenn within around 15 months.

The matter of players' contracts arose and concerns were expressed as to whether we ran the risk of seeing another 'Sol Campbell' debacle. David assured us that contracts are constantly being monitored and also cautioned us to not to pay credence to what we read in the press. He also told us that much of what we hear via the media is started by agents in an effort to put pressure on the club to renegotiate deals. Paul assured us that a Campbell incident wouldn't be allowed to happen again.

Paul handled a question regarding the amount that we've spent on players. He pointed out that between 1991 and 1999, Spurs had actually spent more money than Arsenal and the reason why Spurs haven't matched their success is because they spent wisely and we didn't. Paul was pushed as to whether Spurs would spend £20m on one player if that player were good enough and would be willing to play for Spurs. He responded by telling us that the Club won't discuss the amount of money that Glenn would have for any individual player.

David responded to a query regarding Spurs using agents to buy players. He said that while Spurs haven't done that, it's common practise with foreign clubs to operate that way. He also said that there's no agent involvement until face-to-face talks with a player take place.

Both Paul and David assured us that the only players that are bought are those specified by Glenn. This raised a further query about the purchase of Kazu Toda. David explained that directly after the World Cup, he was offered to Spurs but at that time, there was no need for a player in his position. However, since the summer things have changed. Glenn knew he was training at Sunderland and after some consultation with Ossie and Stevie P (both have sound experience of the J-League) it was decided to bring Kazu in on a 12-month loan deal.

Questions arose about whether Toda was a commercial exercise and also about Freund being released at the end of this season. Paul stated that the Board would never influence Glenn's team selections, nor would they interfere with his decisions on whether to renew a player's contract or not.

The issue of Sergei Rebrov's depreciation arose and whether that applied to the rest of the squad. Paul told us that it's common accounting practise to write off a certain amount from the value of all assets

David was asked about buying players who'd done well in the recent World Cup and responded by telling us that Senegalese players haven't done that well, despite their World Cup team playing very well indeed. He also cautioned the meeting about buying players merely because

they'd played well in a tournament, that being an unrealistic guide as to how they might perform in the Premiership. He also expressed his confidence that the squad had appreciably improved over the last four years. David made the point that there was a time when only Sol Campbell and Steve Carr were of the highest standard and that now, we can look to players of the calibre of Richards, King, Carr, Davies and Keane.

Paul spoke of the thankless task that being involved in football sometimes is. He drew our attention to Peter Ridsdale at Leeds. Ridsdale did what typical fans would like to do and spent millions of pounds but it has put the club in financial jeopardy. Now the fans are at him when it's the shareholders who should be doing so, not the fans. Paul then turned his attention to ENIC, telling us that they have been in charge for two years and they haven't exactly had a fair crack of the whip yet. He also emphasised that there's no 'Jack Walker' to give us £100m

David was questioned about players like Jenas and Dyer, both now with Newcastle. They would have given Spurs the pace that is lacking and the questioner wondered whether we'd had a chance to sign either of them. David told us that Stewart Houston had worked with Dyer at Ipswich and felt it wasn't the right move at the time for the Club.

## EUROPEAN FOOTBALL

A member expressed concern that we might not qualify for Europe and suggested that we should enter the Intertoto Cup as a hedge against it. Paul informed us that Glenn has very firm ideas on what he wants his players doing in pre-season and that is part of his footballing plan. Therefore, it was his decision for Spurs not to enter. Paul stressed that Glenn had made a football decision and the Board will never interfere with that. He then told us that there were no compelling financial reasons for entering either the Intertoto or the UEFA Cup and the revenue raised from a good run in the UEFA Cup would be small compared to a run in the Champions League.

This was countered with a suggestion that Spurs being in European football would act as an attraction for good class players to come to Spurs. David explained that a number of factors affect where a player will move to and he agreed that European football might be one of them. However, occasionally it's a love for the club or a love for the area - London is popular for players from abroad - but the overriding reason for one club over another is salary. David also felt that it was for the sake of the Club's standing and prestige that we should strive to return to the European stage.

## TICKETS

Paul was asked about ST holders' loss of a cup game after Spurs suffered an early exit from both domestic cup competitions. He told us that the matter would soon be discussed at Board level.

Questions were then raised regarding the significant ticket prices in the last two years and what fans might expect for their money.

David told us that the Club is growing but that growth isn't always immediately noticeable. He told us of his role to identify young talent who within around two years, might be good enough for Glenn to select. Obviously, that all happens away from the first team and it's not until a player makes the senior team that he gets really noticed.

Paul then took over and told us that despite the last increase being substantial, it was actually equivalent to around £1m, which doesn't cover the salary of some of our better players. He also highlighted the potential problems ahead regarding the Monopolies Commission questioning Sky's TV rights and if they have the right to screen live matches. He told us that media and TV revenue accounts for £24m a year of the club's income and now, a shadow of doubt is being cast over it. We want to succeed but we don't have a bottomless pit. What we do have is commercial know how, the nous and the ability to increase the revenue which will only be spent on improving the structure of the Club.

Paul added that financially speaking we are solid and the business is running successfully. We've had to clear some dead wood and that has had an effect on the balance sheet but we are trying

to out-perform the market in all sectors with a view to creating a club capable of regular European football. As far as ENIC putting money in, ENIC do not own THFC, ENIC own 29 per cent of THFC, so 71 per cent issued share capital is out there. It is no different from any other company. It's not a case of just throwing money at it. We've seen what can happen with bad purchases and we won't be pressurised into spending money unnecessarily. We will back our manager wherever possible. The market is changing and the playing field is levelling. It's a cracking opportunity for us. We have a very good chance over the next few years not only because we are financially sound, but also because the rewards won't just go to the people who spend money, it doesn't guarantee success anymore. We are building from the youth up. We won't fix it overnight. We know it's frustrating for fans but that's football.

## THE ACADEMY

In light of planning permission for the new academy being refused questions were asked about what happens next, and indeed, with no young players currently coming into the first team, was there any point in pursuing the project at all?

Paul expressed his disappointment with Epping District Council's decision but told us that the project at that location isn't dead yet. At the time the Q & A session took place the Club were yet to see the resolution not to grant consent in writing and when the documents were available, the club would consult a Planning QC and make a decision about a possible appeal. He stressed that Spurs remained intent on building a world-class Academy and alternative locations would be looked at if necessary. Paul also assured us that although a lot of money had been spent on design drawings, pictures and infrastructure, it hadn't been wasted. As this is very much Paul's project, he added that nobody is more upset than him.

David then addressed the lack of players coming through our youth ranks and into the first team, telling us that it's a matter of the manager having the confidence to bring these youngsters in. He cited George Graham taking some time to bring Simon Davies into the first team. Every manager has his own ideas about when it's right to introduce young players and we have to hope he has the confidence in our youth, whether it's Davies, Etherington or Blondel.

## THE STADIUM

We are waiting for local infrastructure to improve but are we going to wait another five years for local tube stations to improve before we go ahead and is there any progress to report?

Paul told us that the stadium development is not just subject to a tube station. Discussion is ongoing about all aspects of local infrastructure and is taking place at the highest level. We're making significant headway. There are a number of schemes that are under consideration at the moment and there are many aspects to consider. We've spent a lot of time on this and the proposals are exciting. It will provide a capacity we think we need, but restructuring traffic is essential. He then confirmed that we are making progress but it's slow and laborious. We're not ready to build the stand yet, but hopefully the two things will catch up with each other. We believe the Club could support 50,000 and we could be ready in terms of submitting an application as early as September. He added that the Club intends to start with the West Stand and will remove the posts in the East Stand as well.

## GENERAL MATTERS

A suggestion was made that the team appeared unmotivated at Arsenal and Southampton and that fans are becoming undecided about the management team. . Paul repeated that history dictates that managers need to be given a chance. David made the point that expectations of Glenn from the supporters were far greater because they it's natural to think that great players become great managers.

Questions were raised regarding the five-year plan, specifically, what were the milestones, how far are we behind and what are the contingency plans?

Paul took this one on and told us that contingency plans are only needed when things aren't going to right. He told us that there are milestones and we have ways of monitoring the success of the various divisions of the Club, whether that be football through the manager, merchandising, commercial, etc, etc, we monitor every department carefully. A lot of departments are out-performing what we had in mind at any given time. The market has changed dramatically. Nobody could have envisaged the freefall there has been. We as a club are in the fortunate position of not paying 70 to 80% of our turnover in salary. Plans have to be altered according to market conditions.

The suggestion was made that the Club should counter negative items that appeared in the press. Paul felt that the media are no more or less negative about Spurs than any other club and cited the News of the World article about our negotiations regarding Ricketts as a prime example. The Sunday paper reported that Spurs had tried to alter the contract, but Paul insisted that wasn't the case. He reported to the meeting that had Daniel Levy commented on that particular item, he would then have to do the same with everything. Paul urged us to use the club's website as our source of information and David added that the press are looking for fans to react to keep the story going.

Paul was asked for a direct response as to whether Spurs would share a stadium with Arsenal. His own view was a very firm NO.

Unsurprisingly, the matter of the near absence of Saturday football at The Lane was raised. Paul was sympathetic but reminded us that BSkyB dictates the position, and that television revenue is essential to us but he added that the Club had registered a complaint taking the fans views into account.

It was put to David and Paul that Glenn had spent big money on Richards and Keane and it had worked. If the Club could repeat that expenditure on a midfielder and striker we might have the nucleus of a Champions League team.

David replied to that by telling us that we've taken the mood of the meeting, we've accepted the points and it's a subjective thing. We have a commitment to improve the Club and we intend to do it. We have the same frustrations. The standards that are set, like the 60-61 team, is why it is so difficult at TH, because we were such a great club. It will take time before we get back to that. We have a proper democratic board that is supporting the manager. We are an honourable board. We want to do well. He wants to go to European games with Spurs. Try to retain a balanced view. We are aware we are not doing as well as we would like to do. Paul added that Spurs are in a market where the rewards won't go to the people with the most money but the people who can use the money the most wisely. We want to go onto bigger things and we are sure we will do that.

It was a very enjoyable evening and David and Paul answered questions for well over two and a quarter hours.