

Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

Be the 12th Man!



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LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD FOR DENNIS

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In this issue



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Mid-Season Report



Reserves Update

www.berwickrangers.org



Newsletter No. 23 Winter 2013

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Hello...

We are gearing up for one of our big events of the year, our sponsorship of the Berwick Rangers v. Peterhead match on Saturday, December 28th, 2013. We are guaranteeing the club more than the expected gate receipts which will allow it to offer free admission to spectators though we will also be taking a bucket collection with a suggested donation of £2 per head.

We will be heavily publicising this match and hope that a crowd well above average can be attracted. All Trust members can do their bit by telling as many people as possible about the occasion. By then, we hope Berwick's fortunes on the field will have improved.

Rangers ended the first third of their SPFL 2 campaign with a disappointing haul of 13 points from 12 games. But, in an extremely tight division, we are by no means out of the reckoning for a play off spot.

I hope you will all find articles of interest in this newsletter. A lot of work goes into its production. You may have seen on the Trust website

our request for articles or letters from members and this invitation remains for the next and future editions.

From certain quarters, there were suggestions that we don't keep members sufficiently informed about what is going on, suggestions strongly rejected by the Trust Board. Via our website, Twitter and Facebook and this twice yearly newsletter, we endeavour to keep members and non-members alike up to date. We have also had some decent coverage in the local press particularly related to our Berwick Library Exhibition.

When I recently met with Mark Reid from Supporters Direct Scotland, we were in complete agreement that the actions and decisions of the the Board should reflect the majority view of members. The Trust is not about a few individuals but what is in the best interests of Berwick Rangers F.C. as perceived by the overall membership.

I will take this opportunity to wish all members a happy new year. Thanks for backing the club by backing the Trust.

Michael

Michael Smyth,
Chairman

FOOT NOTE:

If you have an questions or issues, or any contributions for our newsletter, email:
trust@berwickrangers.org



FROM THE VICE-CHAIRMAN

It has been twenty or so years since the trust movement began working towards giving supporters a real voice in their clubs and in the sport they love.

The movement is only one of a number of aspects that has changed in the game during that period. Many of the changes increasingly marginalised supporters. Super wealthy owners, player power flooding money out of the game as quickly as it goes in, TV dictates and the globalisation of the higher levels mean that the supporter coming through the turnstile is less significant when the balance (unbalanced) sheets are produced at the end of the year.

These are issues that are still part of the greater football debate. However, over those early years, for Berwickers, the concerns were much closer to home. The club went through a financial crisis resulting in administration, albeit not for the conventional spending beyond your means reasons. This was followed by eviction from Shielfield and the real possibility that the future of the club was non-existent. It left an indelible mark on the supporters who had to travel 100 miles just to see a home game.

It was with these experiences very much in mind that BRST began ten years ago. There was a determination that the club would never again face the threats created by owners who saw it as their fiefdom in which the fans had no right of

challenge. Coupled with and the fact that no matter what happened on the pitch, the club's failure to invest cash windfalls and the increasing dilapidation of Shielfield led supporters to band together and form the Trust.

Over the years those threats have dissipated as we fought to have a voice within the board room and have an element of control over the affairs of the club we have all followed. It has never been easy and on occasion it has been distinctly unpleasant. For a great deal of the time we were very much the outsiders, daring to challenge the practices within the club that had seen us stumble from one minor crisis to another. The good news is that the major concerns of those early days have passed and the role of fans within the club is a strong as it ever was. Of course not everything in the garden is rosy and in life, to stand still is to go backwards.

So the challenge remains, as the Trust plays its role in progressing the club while representing the interests of all our members. In some ways this is a much harder task because the battles of the early days acted as a bond to support collective action. The issues today are much more subtle and create a much more softer focus towards solutions.

As we stand today the Trust and the club have succeeded in surviving the biggest financial crisis for many years. Recently the club announced a profit for the fourth year in row.

Sure there have been Old Firm windfalls, but these windfalls have not been intrinsic to planning a black balance sheet. For ourselves we have seen the membership numbers remain at the level of four years ago and the board is as active and more broader based than in any time in our short history. Our support of the reserve and youth teams has been a feature throughout our existence and it pleasing to see the likes of Lavery, O'Brien and Morris making important contributions to the first team this year, with others waiting in the wings. Sure, it's not all down to us but we can be proud of our contribution to the cause.

The challenges for the future are already on us. The league reconstruction events left the league without a sponsor and many lower clubs without a real voice. Globalisation means that many people want to identify with the seductive allure of Champions League without even leaving their armchairs, let alone ever paying to get into a football ground. I'm sure there are kids out there who don't even know that standing to watch a football is normal!

These are just two of the matters that will concern us in the future. Others are up to you, the member. This is your Trust and the future is in your gift. We aim to use it wisely.

All the best,
Gordon Dickson

Trust chairman Michael Smyth recently spent time with long serving Berwick Rangers official Dennis McCleary to learn more about his time at the club...

In May this year, respected Berwick Rangers' servant Dennis McCleary won the Irn Bru / SFL 'Lifetime Achievement Award'. The honour, bestowed at a meeting in Glasgow (pictured below), came as a surprise to Dennis who originally had not intended attending the ceremony until cajoled into doing so by several Berwick directors who received advance notice of the award.



Dennis was already announcing at Shielfield when, in 1970, he was appointed voluntary assistant secretary to Dick Shiel. Harry Melrose was club manager at the time. Four years later, Dennis and his family uprooted to Ashington where he obtained a managerial post at a sports centre but, unable to settle, returned to Berwick the following year and resumed his role as assistant secretary of Berwick Rangers.

In 1976, Dick Shiel stepped down and under the chairmanship of Alec Macnab, Dennis took on the combined jobs of club and company secretary which quickly developed into a full time, paid post. Hard times at the club in 1983-84 meant he reverted to being a part time employee. Luckily, he managed to obtain a second part time job with Royal Mail.

In the mid 1980s, employment at Torness led to another break from the club but seizing the opportunity of full time employment back in Berwick with Royal Mail, he also returned as a part time official at Shielfield. Apart from a further two short breaks, he has been with the club ever since.

Dennis regards Dave Smith as the best player he has ever seen in a Berwick Rangers shirt. "He made it look so easy with a tremendous ability to read the game." Under Smith as player-manager, Rangers won the old Third Division championship in 1978-79 so fulfilling the ex-Ibrox star's promise on his appointment to get the team promoted within 2-3 years. Yet, in some respects, Berwick's winning the 2006-07 Third Division title was even more satisfying as this time the flag was clinched at Shielfield with a 1-0 victory over Arbroath before a crowd in excess of 2,000.

Today, Dennis continues as part time football secretary. Stuart Jones is company secretary dealing with the legal side of running Berwick Rangers plc. Nor is he involved in financial affairs. Lyndsay Flannigan is Finance Officer. His job though is now more demanding with the sudden change from SFL to SPFL. "It is a question of progressing towards stability, working with new people and operating under a new set of rules." To facilitate progress, Dennis suggested the creation of a working party of secretaries from lower division clubs to highlight the particular difficulties experienced at this level. The SPFL accepted this idea.

Dennis works with the Board and manager on all football matters including those pertaining to (now lengthy SPFL) contracts. He liaises with the opposition and match officials leading up to matches and works closely with ground staff. "Sometimes, we need to be at the ground at 7:00 a.m. for a pitch inspection in winter."



■ *Dennis with his 'Lifetime Achievement Award'*

Dennis has an excellent relationship with the SFA whose website has an 'Extranet' page which provides information on all registered players---who has received cautions or is suspended--- Reserves as well as first team. All registration is done online via 'Extranet' which is also automatically linked to the SPFL. "Never take anything for granted. Always check the eligibility of players. Especially in the Scottish Cup, the penalties are severe. Fall down and you're out."

As editor, he is proud of the matchday programmes produced by him and his team of contributors. "Our aim is to at the very least break even on sales and to make money from the adverts and in recent seasons, we have done that."

His role at the club does not involve any particular direct dealings with the Supporters Trust or Supporters Club but he respects what both organisations do for the club. He also commends the prudent management of the club by the present Board under chairman Brian Porteous who have ensured stability. A gross profit of £23,000 was reported for the period from June, 2012 to May, 2013, helped of course, by last season's two home games with Rangers. Always optimistic, Dennis feels the team has

the capability to win promotion this year and believes Ian Little, Robbie Horn and staff can certainly achieve that with the Championship the goal. He thinks a long term aim should be as a stable SPFL 1 club. "There would be nothing wrong in aspiring even higher but costs would increase significantly. Some full time players would be needed and stewarding and policing costs would be up because of more travelling fans, but never say never".

As for attendances, "There are so many other attractions now but we should be capable of building our average to around 600. The Trust's sponsorship of the Peterhead game is a great idea." Also very positive about the Reserves, Dennis thinks that it is possible the club will decide to concentrate on the higher standard SPFL Reserve League as its midweek fixtures present opportunities to give match time to first team fringe players. However, that entire equation including ESFL needs further looking at. Dennis is also a co-promoter (not a director) of Berwick Bandits speedway for whom he works on a voluntary basis. Now 67, he contemplated giving up his dual sport duties when he reached 65 but loves being involved too much. "If I stop enjoying it and felt it was time for someone younger, then I'll finish."

THE DAY WE WENT TO CULTER (Saturday 2nd November 2013)

.....Or to be more precise, Peterculter, as opposed to neighbouring Maryculter. Peterculter lies 8 miles to the west of Aberdeen though for administrative purposes lies within the boundaries of that city.

Arriving at Crombie Park an hour before kick off, the rain had temporarily abated. The pitch was small, no bigger than Warner Park, home of Eyemouth United, if that. The Eyemouth ground is certainly flatter. Crombie Park has a slope (not that we'd know anything about such things!) and the surface in the top half (clubhouse end) was decidedly uneven.

Early arrival provided the opportunity to glean some information about our hosts from one of their officials. They had been knocked out of the Scottish Junior Cup the previous week on this very ground, going down 3-2 to Glasgow side Ashfield. Home attendances average around fifty. The players get a signing-on fee and a

couple of payments during the course of the season but are not paid on a match by match basis. Many of the team had senior experience, Scottish Leagues, not just Highland League but despite the success of Culter in the Junior ranks, they had no ambition of following Turriff United, Formartine United and Strathspey Thistle in stepping up to that League. The travelling involved was cited as the biggest impediment, the trek to and from Fort William given as an example.

The thought struck as to whether Crombie Park would meet Highland League standards anyway. Covered accommodation was limited to a small stand at the clubhouse end with maybe 60 seats and between the dugouts, another small roofed construction. Unfortunately, the latter proved a vantage point from which a yellow flare was thrown two minutes into the game prompting a chorus of 'boos' from Culter fans on the opposite side of the park.



With Aberdeen F.C. not playing until the Monday night, Culter were hoping to attract around 1,000 to the Berwick game which would have been not far short of a capacity crowd. An estimate of 600 was close, the official attendance given as 639.

Undoubtedly, the weather deterred some from coming. The rain had returned well before kick off and continued right through the game despite the optimistic comment of one Berwick fan late in the first half, that it was starting to ease. If it did, it was only for a nanosecond!

Rangers, playing uphill, edged the first half. Hopes were that, with the advantage of the slope, we would kill off Culter in the second. When Stevie Notman scored with a low drive on 53 minutes, that seemed a realistic expectation. Unfortunately, Michael Dunlop, in attempting to clear a cross from the right, headed into his own net. Some visiting supporters felt keeper Billy Bald was at fault for not shouting the ball was his but Dunlop's misfortune could also be seen in the context of the lottery into which the match had become on an increasingly sodden and slippery pitch.

Berwick fans were about to celebrate as a Lavery shot looked goalbound but it squirmed inches outside the far post and a minute later, 'Yano' made his only change, replacing Darren with Josh Morris.

Culter also missed their chance of snatching a late victory thanks to Bald's point blank save on his line close to the final whistle. That blew with the light rapidly fading despite the 2:00 p.m. start. Presumably, the flare thrower (a black one was also tossed on to the pitch at half time), hadn't considered the possibility that the time taken to remove it could have extended proceedings long enough for the game to be abandoned due to the lack of floodlights.

There seemed to be few complaints amongst the travelling support about a draw, perhaps relief that we'd get another chance despite Culter having their tails up in the final 10 minutes. So we wait 129 years to play a competitive match against a Junior side (longer if you still believe in 1881) and then we play one two weeks running!



Mid-Season Report

Society Board member Ron Kirk looks at the season so far...

At the time of writing, Rangers have just defeated Albion Rovers 2-1 to bring to an end a 7 league game winless run in which a paltry 3 points were obtained out of a possible 21. Despite this, as we enter the second third of the league season, Rangers lie only 7 points behind leaders Clyde and are only 5 points adrift of a play off place. It just goes to show how tight the league is this year and if we can keep the leading pack within striking distance and then find a Mo Farah- esque sprint finish then who knows?

After last season's partial success with the play offs being achieved for the first time since relegation back to the third division in 2008, hopes were high at the start of the season that with the right additions, Rangers would not only challenge for a play off spot again but the league title itself. The powers that be within Scottish football decided in their wisdom to rename the leagues and they came up with the novel idea of the Premiership, the championship and Leagues one and two. I wonder where they got that idea from? Anyway, as a result, Rangers found themselves in League two and not the third division.

As is the norm these days, the competitive season kicked off with a Ramsdens Cup tie at home to championship side Livingston. Rangers more than matched Livi although in truth the game was more like a pre- season friendly than a cup tie. That said, it burst into life in extra time with Livi being reduced to 10 men after one of their players queried the stand side linesman's parentage and Rangers edged through 3-2 thanks to Owen Ronald's Gareth Bale- esque winner. Seven days later, Rangers were brought crashing back to earth by Cowdenbeath who strolled to a 5-0 win at Shielfield in the League Cup with their hat trick hero Kane Hemmings in particular, cruelly exposing the gulf between the championship and League two.



Rangers were rewarded for their victory over Livi with a third trip of 2013 to Castle Greyskull for another joust with last season's elephant in the room. Financially, it was a good draw for the club although as it turned out, only 16,000 or so turned up to see Rangers acquit themselves reasonably well against their Glasgow namesakes only succumbing to two quick goals round about the hour mark.

The league campaign kicked off with a disappointing 1-0 defeat at Clyde although sub Josh Morris almost rescued a point when his last minute shot cannoned back into play off the base of the post. Despite that, Rangers bounced back to beat Queens Park 4-0 at Shielfield and after drawing 1-1 at Montrose registered two wins on the bounce against Annan at home (4-2) and Albion Rovers away (2-0). After 5 games, Rangers sat in second place behind surprise early pacesetters East Stirlingshire and no one of a black and gold persuasion foresaw that the next 7 games would only glean 3 points. A last minute Darren Lavery strike rescued a point at home to Stirling Albion but then Rangers lost 3 on the bounce, firstly away to a resurgent Shire bolstered by a number of ex Gers and then successive home games against Elgin and Clyde.

The Elgin loss was particularly painful as Rangers were 2-0 up and cruising after 55 minutes but then suffered a collapse of England batting proportions compounded by the normally deadly Darren Lavery missing the target completely from the penalty spot all of which culminated in a 3-2 defeat snatched from the jaws of victory. The slump was arrested slightly with a 1-1 draw at Peterhead but the slide continued at Annan with a "Fergie time" winner giving the home side a 3-2 victory. Montrose then visited Shielfield for the second time in 7 days. On the first occasion, they had to travel back north without kicking a ball after a power failure resulted in the game being called off.

Upon returning 7 days later, they were welcomed with a storm of driving rain and high winds. I think there is a song about only mad dogs and

Englishmen going out in the midday sun. This was much the same but at the other end of the weather spectrum. To both teams' credit, they produced a decent game in appalling conditions and it was perhaps apt that the spoils were shared in a 1-1 draw although Rangers were somewhat aggrieved to be denied a match winning opportunity from the penalty spot after the Montrose centre half appeared to have palmed an injury time effort from Kenny O'Brien off the line.

As I write this, Rangers' next match is in the fourth round of the Scottish Cup at home to Dumbarton. Rangers got there by despatching Peterhead 2-1 at home in the second round before overcoming Aberdeenshire junior side Culter 3-1 in a replay at Shielfield after a 1-1 draw on a rain sodden day up north. It was so wet that even Noah would have thought twice about stopping in his ark and how





Mid-Season Report cont'd

the pitch managed to stand up to the deluge long enough to see the match through I don't know. All of that with a little bit of history thrown in as I believe that it was the first time that Rangers have locked horns with junior opposition in a competitive fixture. By the time you read this, the outcome of the game against Dumbarton will be known and who knows, with home advantage and a little bit of luck, we may have a fifth round tie to look forward to in the new year.

Looking ahead to the remainder of the league campaign, it is still all to play for. Undoubtedly fans will be looking for Yano to strengthen the squad in the January transfer window. I must admit that I struggled to understand his recruitment policy back in the summer. With the exception of the loan signings, no new players were brought to the club as both Stephen Tulloch and Ross Gray had been at the club before. This led to speculation

on certain fronts that Yano was either unwilling or unable to attract new players to Berwick. I believe that he has his own principles and that he will not sign players if he feels that they are not going to better the club. I was as mystified as most by his recruitment policy in the summer but totally accept that there is no point in signing players just for the sake of it. In addition, Yano's policy of giving young players a chance is refreshing and there is no doubt that the likes of Kenny O'Brien, Josh Morris and Dean Carse all have potential but at the moment they are all work in progress.

In my view, there are some talented footballers in the current squad but it is still 2 or 3 players short of taking the club to the next level and for that reason, I believe that if Yano can add to his squad in January with the right players in the right positions, then we will not be far away come May.



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EAST OF SCOTLAND LEAGUE

Berwick Rangers Reserves have made a hit and miss start to the 2013-14 East of Scotland League campaign.

How else to describe the fortunes of a team who were comfortable 4-1 winners at Kelso but hardly got a look-in as the same opponents beat them 2-0 at Shielfield two weeks later? The Reserves were convincing 5-0 winners at Ormiston yet three weeks on, the East Lothian side won 2-1 at Berwick. After unluckily losing by a single goal at home to First Division pacesetters Hibs Reserves, they crashed to an embarrassing 8-0 defeat to the same side at East Mains. Coach Mark Lamb summed up that one saying, "Hibs had eight scoring chances and took them all."

The season opened with matches in the Qualifying League, the top two sides in each section going through to the quarter finals of the League Cup. To compensate for fewer League fixtures with clubs lost to the Lowland League, the sectional ties are being played on a home and away basis. The Reserves made a fair start in the QL taking ten points from three wins and a draw, the only defeat coming at home against Premier Division Coldstream.

In the League, all the wins to date have been away from home. Hibs are odds on favourites to finish on top. Berwick face a tough battle for the other promotion spot, not only because of their own inconsistency but Easthouses Lily are emerging as strong challengers. It was the Lily who inflicted a first defeat of the season on Hibs, 4-1, on the second Saturday in November.

A number of first team squad members have played EoS football this season. Neil Janczyk made two appearances on his return from a pre-season injury before being restored to the senior side. Dean Carse has bagged a few

goals and the unlucky Jonny Fairbairn has been a mainstay of the side since missing out on selection for the big game at Ibrox in late August.

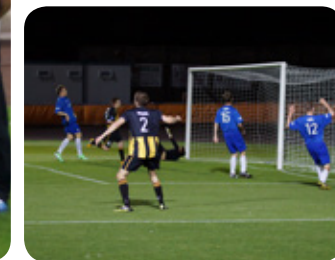
Last season, Dylan Easton, Carse, Josh Morris and Kenny O'Brien progressed through to the first team. Mark Lamb is aware that within the present crop of players there are no obvious candidates to follow suit. Greig Tulloch was signed--for a fee--from Leith Athletic as a proven goalscorer but does not appear to have the pace required at SPFL level. Conor Scott is a hardworking midfielder but like a lot of his teammates is on the small side which could be an impediment to stepping up. Ross Brady is not much bigger but makes up for it with tenacity and energy and some regular Reserves watchers feel he would not let down the first team if given a chance in a competitive match.

Berwick Reserves are also playing in the SPFL Reserve League. More about that below.

SPFL RESERVE LEAGUE

This season, for the first time, Berwick Rangers are playing in a national Reserves competition, the SPFL Reserve League, in addition to their East of Scotland commitments. The League has fifteen teams representing clubs from across all three lower divisions of the SPFL. They meet each other once in the League campaign which is due to be completed by the end of 2013. The second half of the season is devoted to the League Cup.

Berwick joined the SPFL competition for a number of reasons. First, it helps make up for a shortfall of games with the East League down in number of teams. Secondly, coach Mark Lamb believes the prospect of playing on well known Scottish League grounds may help entice better quality players to join Berwick.



Thirdly, as might be expected, the standard is higher than that of the EoS First Division which should aid players' development.

An additional bonus is that, as all games are midweek, players getting only a few minutes for the senior side on a Saturday or sitting on the bench can play a full game for the Reserves before returning to first team duty the following weekend.

Not surprisingly, the team has sometimes been on the receiving end. For instance, with Lamb on holiday, Ian Little and Robbie Horn took charge for the Cappielow game with Morton Res. Berwick lost 4-1 and 'Yano' was moved to say that even the club's first eleven would have struggled against such opposition.

The same would have been true at Dens Park where 6-2 winners Dundee Res. included Steven Doris (ex-Arbroath) and Martin Boyle (ex-Montrose) as well as 16 year old wunderkind Craig Wighton who was on the scoresheet for the first team a few weeks later.

Facing full timers in games like these has proved tough. The boot was on the other foot when Berwick beat Alloa 8-2 at Shielfield. Paul Hartley brought down what was in essence a youth side to play a team which included Ross Gray and Damian Gielty.

Unlike in the East League, the clubs do not pay for match officials, the SPFL meeting the costs of referee and two 'linos'. And a word of praise for the whistlers. Whereas, one or two regular East refs can be extremely officious, in the Reserve League, they have encouraged open play with sensible handling of games and an appreciation that all the players are trying to achieve personal goals. It might be winning back a first team spot, a trialist hoping to impress enough to be signed or a player coming back from injury aiming to prove his fitness.

Berwick Reserves will not play in the League Cup to avoid overuse of Shielfield and so that the players do not 'burn out' through too many matches.



Berwick Rangers F.C. have accepted an offer from the Supporters Trust for it to sponsor the SPFL 2 home match against Peterhead on Saturday, November 28th, 2013.

The club budgets for expected gate receipts from each match based on who they are playing and what sort of attendance is likely. Obviously, an important consideration is the potential away support. Because of distance, 'The Blue Toon' are unlikely to bring a lot of fans that day. The Trust will commit £1,000 on top of the estimated gate takings to the football club in return for spectators being admitted free of charge. However, those attending will be invited to drop money into buckets (a suggested donation is £2) to further boost club funds though the Trust will have a say in how this particular money is spent.

The hope is that the offer of free entry to a match falling during a holiday period will see a bumper crowd at the game and at the same time, boost the profile of the Trust.

We have also pledged up to a further £1,000 towards the cost of another sanding of the Shielfield pitch and to pay for the hire of a specialist, wide vehicle 'spreader' to enable the work to be carried out.

Already this season, the Trust has donated around £1,000 to the football club in return for a regular advert in the matchday programme and the siting of our two 'Be the 12th Man' publicity boards on the turnstile end of the Main Stand and close to the exit from the Ducket on the other side of the ground.

Our support for the Reserves' physiotherapist has had to be suspended because of difficulties in obtaining the services of a suitably qualified person.

All these outgoings are in line with our policy of directing donations to the football club towards specific items or projects.

Here's a look at the season so far...

At the time of writing Berwick Rangers lie in 8th place out of a ten team league, having taken only 3 points from a possible 21 in recent weeks. On statistics alone, it's just about possible to understand the disquiet coming from the terracing, often expressed on internet forums and social network sites. However, as the saying goes, 'there are lies, damned lies and statistics', and I don't think the league position alone is a true reflection of how things are going. In the tightest league for many years at this stage, the top 4 teams have won six games out of a possible twelve, compared to our three. We've lost five games, the teams in third, fourth and fifth have lost four. I think what this demonstrates is that, at present, there are no teams outstandingly better than everyone else. Possibly with the exception of Peterhead, the wage bills of each club in League Two would be broadly the same, so I'd suggest it's to be expected that it's a fairly level playing field.

We're in the second full season of a young and relatively inexperienced managerial team, who would be the first to tell you they're learning something new about themselves and their players every week. Ian is progressing nicely through his UEFA A Licence, Robbie has completed his B Licence, and the addition of Gary O to the staff has brought a new dimension. I'd hope that many fans would agree that for the vast majority of the time, we're playing as attractive football as has been seen from a Berwick side in many, many years. The progression of players like Darren Lavery from raw reserve to established goal-scorer brings a great sense of satisfaction, and others will surely follow in Darren's footsteps. Our reserve side, under the capable guidance of Mark Lamb and Jimmy Rae, has already fed several players into the first team squad, and the current foray into the SPFL Reserve League gives young players a higher standard of performance level to prepare them for first team duties. Frustratingly though, good football does not

always bring the results we'd want, and those fans who witnessed at first hand the defeats to East Stirlingshire, Clyde, and Elgin in Sept/Oct will know that we were just a whisker away from taking nine points instead of none. Perhaps the low average age and relative inexperience of the squad could have been responsible for a failure to turn possession and dominance into points. But overall, we're a team on the up, with plenty to look forward to. Ian Little has tried to strengthen the squad in key areas since the season started, and finds that either wage demands are unrealistic or that players don't have the appetite to fully engage with what's expected of them at Berwick. The first, and most fundamental requirement of a Berwick Rangers player, is that they want to be here and they're prepared to work hard. The recent midweek game against Montrose, played in the most appalling conditions I think I've ever seen a game played in, demonstrated to me that we have a squad with desire and commitment. These qualities are not bought and traded, but are nurtured and developed through a player's coaching and their environment. If we can continue to develop in such a fashion, we have the building blocks for long term success that will see us do well in a higher division. A much respected local coach has the expression "ability will get you here, attitude will keep you here" – a fine mantra for the future.

I would ask fans to look at the bigger picture, keep faith in the direction of travel, and give your all to support those guys who pull on the black and gold shirt. I think they deserve it, and they will pay back your faith in them many times over.

John Bell





News Snippets

GET LOST!

Heard the one about the football fan driver who tried to use his SatNav to find the Scottish 'towns' of St. Johnstone and St. Mirren? Good job he didn't try it in Albania where an even greater number of clubs do not bear the names of their towns. He might have ended up under water or on top of a mountain, even in a different country!

For example, Shkumbini from Peqin and Erzeni from Shijak are named after local rivers. Sopoti from Librazhd are named after a nearby mountain as are Peshkopi-based club, Korabi. But one side of this particular peak is in neighbouring Macedonia.

WHAT'S UP, REF?

Watch a game of Rugby League at any level, from primary school to internationals, and you will never be in doubt as to why the referee made a particular decision. Why? The refs use a standardised code of signals to inform players and spectators alike why they have blown the whistle.

Why can't soccer follow suit? True, the offside signal is in general use and sometimes a ref will imitate the illegal action he is punishing e.g. tugging at an opponent's shirt. Yet, how many times do you see a player booked or even sent off and you don't really know why? Often, the assumption is that the player must have said something he shouldn't. If so, why doesn't the referee use his hand to mimic talking so everyone else will be in the know.

To put it poetically (badly!), on this subject there is no pater from Blatter, he's too busy with Qatar. Still, he could always delegate one of his minions to write to the Rugby League authorities in Leeds and ask for some tips. They would probably be delighted to help.

SUPPORTERS DIRECT SCOTLAND MEETING

Prior to Berwick Rangers' away game at Annan on Saturday, November 16th, Trust chairman Michael Smyth met Supporters Direct Scotland Project Manager Mark Reid for a 25 minute informal chat. Our Trust has renewed its membership of SDS. Mark, who was also at the match, saw it as the perfect opportunity for an exchange of news and views.

He explained that SDS sees three different ways in which supporters trusts can be linked to their football clubs:

1. Trust involvement through regular meetings between officials of the respective bodies.
2. Trust engagement where the Trust has one or more representatives on the football club board.
3. Trust ownership where the Trust owns and runs the football club.

It was explained that we are both involved and engaged primarily through John Bell, our rep on the club board. Ownership of the club was not on Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust's agenda although we do have a significant stake in it, currently holding about 16% of the issued shares.

Mark was very enthusiastic about our Trust's plan to sponsor the game versus Peterhead on December 28th and offered to help publicise it through SDS channels.

A Celtic supporter, surprisingly perhaps, Mark is not a member of Celtic's Supporters Trust which itself is not a member of SDS. Apparently, the Celtic Trust is only about 200 strong.

MEMBERSHIP REPORT

Membership of Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust stood at 239 at the end of November, 2013. Thus, despite some inevitable losses, numbers have remained remarkably constant over the last year helped by new recruits in recent months from Northumberland, Ferryhill (County Durham), Heanor (Derbyshire), Edinburgh and Seattle in the United States of America. A warm welcome to all new members. Membership for adults costs a minimum of £24 per year which can be paid annually or by monthly instalments using a bank standing order. Junior membership for under 16s is only £5 per annum. Corporate membership is also available at £120 per year with advertisements guaranteed in this newsletter and the business name also featured on our website.

TRUST A.G.M.

The Annual General Meeting of Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust is scheduled for Saturday, January 11th, 2014 prior to Berwick Rangers' home SPFL 2 match against Annan Athletic. The probable venue will again be the Black and Gold Club at Shielfield. Our rules allow for up to fifteen members on the Trust Board excluding the secretary. Currently, following several resignations, the Board has nine members.

We operate under a two year electoral cycle so at January's A.G.M., there will be scope for re-election of existing officials and the election of new ones so we would be pleased to hear from any Trust members wishing to stand for election. Confirmation of time and place of the A.G.M. will appear on our website and in the local press.

BERWICK CREATE GOOD IMPRESSION

'Fun and Games in Fife and Gretna: An Englishman's Journey into Scottish Football' by Paul Dixon relates the Durham-based author's visits to assorted Scottish football clubs. The first Scottish League game he ever saw was Berwick Rangers v. Arbroath at Shielfield in September, 2010 so not surprisingly, his chapter on Berwick comes early in this 242 page book.

His impressions of those involved with the club are very favourable, so much so that, near the end of the book, he nominates Berwick as outright winners in the hospitality stakes. Other clubs featured include Gala Fairydean, Queen of the South, Gretna 2008, St.Mirren and the Fife pair, Cowdenbeath and East Fife.

The book also contains eight pages of colour pictures. Three of the photos are from Berwick, two of them taken at Shielfield. The book is published by 'peakpublish' (www.peakpublish.com), ISBN: 978-1-907219-27-6.

NO TRUST CALENDARS FOR 2014

Regular readers of this newsletter may recall a piece in our Winter, 2012 edition which raised doubts about the future of the Trust calendar. After reviewing the situation, we have decided not to produce one for 2014.

Instead, once next season's fixtures are out, we intend to produce a display-sized fixture list which will be sent to all members at the same time as the Summer 2014 issue of the newsletter.



The two main events organised by Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust in recent months were both trailed in our previous edition. The first was the **exhibition in Berwick Library**. Originally scheduled to last one week, at the Library's request, it was extended for a second week.

During the first week, Berwick Rangers' record holder Eric Tait came back to home territory to give a talk on his time at the club. Library staff were pleasantly surprised at the size of the audience on a midweek afternoon. A big thanks to Eric who gave his services free.



Running concurrently with the exhibition was a quiz for under 16s which attracted over 30 entries. Team Librarian Diane Wright made the draw. None of the first five papers pulled out of the box had all the answers correct but the next

one, belonging to nine year old Jess McCleary did, and she won a Berwick Rangers replica shirt.

The cost of staging the event was covered by £250 worth of sponsorship from the Yorkshire Building Society. The display panels were superbly put together by Trust member Paul Smith. Most are now at Shielfield but one, listing this season's fixtures and featuring an action picture of Dylan Easton, is on display in the window of the former Julian Graves shop in Marygate, Berwick by kind permission of Edwin Thompson who are acting as agents for the premises.

In October, Danny Allan returned to the Black and Gold Club at Shielfield for a second **'Elvis Presley Tribute Night'**.

In spite of extensive publicity, the audience was smaller than on Danny's previous visit last year. Perhaps he had been invited back to soon. Also, The Maltings staged its own Elvis event the previous month which possibly affected our numbers. Nevertheless, those attending our event certainly enjoyed it. Danny's stamina as he went through his routine would put some footballers to shame! The evening still raised a sum of £104 for Trust funds.

A report in 'The Scotsman' newspaper of Tuesday, November 26th, 2013 painted a grim picture of the financial situation facing many Scottish football clubs. 'The Football Distress Survey' identified four SPFL clubs which were under 'critical' financial pressure at the end of October with a further sixteen showing early, less serious signs of financial distress. None of the clubs were named.

Contradictory statements then appeared. 'Average attendance and season ticket revenues across the SPFL's four divisions are static' was followed by, 'Rangers' promotion to SPFL 1 has led to a 700% increase in average gates so far this season in that division.'

It was also pointed out that the Ibrox club's brief stay in the lowest tier had been very beneficial to the other clubs it beat to the Third Division title with only two SPFL 2 clubs showing signs of distress after enjoying a massive increase in their average attendance figures last season.

A spokesman for Begbies Traynor, the company which conducted the survey, commented that clubs can no longer rely on wealthy benefactors and need to look hard at their business models. The pruning of wage bills may be required, implying a review of commitments to full time football; in our last issue John Bell referred to the questionability of this for clubs averaging gates of around 1,500.

The prospect of a reduction in the number of clubs either through mergers or by accepting the loss of those which fail was also raised. An alternative would be to reach out into the wider community as with F.C. Barcelona in Spain and in German football generally. However, as our Trust chairman discussed with Supporters Direct Scotland's Mark Reid, fans' ownership of their club involves long term commitment. Rescuing it from oblivion is only the first step.



RAMSDENS CUP

Berwick Rangers' captain Lee Currie may not have been able to get his hands on the Ramsdens Cup but Trust Board member Gary Smith did when the trophy was on display in the Berwick branch of Ramsdens a couple of days before our first round tie against Livingston in July. *(Photo courtesy of Ramsdens)*

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