

BERWICK RANGERS SUPPORTERS TRUST



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Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN...



Kirk explains on later pages.

Our cover picture, courtesy of Caledonia Photo, shows Daryl Healy airborne as he heads in a great goal for Berwick in the Scottish Cup tie with East Fife, a rare moment of joy in what has been a largely dismal season as Ron

Eyre also announced he would be standing down as chairman at the end of May but remains a director.

Last season, the club made a loss of almost £50,000. Accountant Mark McLeman pointed out that £6,000 of this was to allow for depreciation whilst £15,000 raised from the sale of shares could not be included in profit and loss calculations as it is considered to be capital. Nevertheless, the projected loss for the current season is similar to that for 2017-18.

The Trust's AGM was held in November. Berwick Rangers chairman Len Eyre and manager Johnny Harvey pitched the length and content of their contributions to perfection. Another guest, Supporters Club chairman and club director Bill Parkin, also said a few words. Former Berwick goalkeeper Gary O'Connor then took over joking about how, in pre-event publicity, he had gradually been promoted from 'guest' to 'guest speaker' to 'chief guest speaker'. Whatever the title, Gary proved to be an excellent choice keeping his audience engaged with stories about his playing career and offering some interesting opinions on football matters.

The financial position was a key element at the Strategy Meeting which took place a few days ahead of the club's AGM. We carry a more detailed report of this. In it, there is a reference to the possibility of changing the club's legal status. One reason why a switch from public limited company to community interest company is off the table for now anyway, is that such a change would prohibit the club from continuing to raise valuable capital through the sale of shares to the public.

I am pleased that we have attracted some new contributors for this edition. I thank them and everyone who has provided material including Duns-based Alan Raeburn of Caledonia Photo for readily supplying us with pictures. A special thanks too, to David Letham for his technical assistance, Dennis McCleary and Daniel McKenzie for keeping me right on the intricate rules regarding the use of trialists and to Neil Withington for digging into the pictorial archives.

At the same meeting, we welcomed Andrew Allan from Dunbar on to the Trust Board. Inside, he tells us how he came to be a fan of the Black and Gold.

Though we have attracted some newcomers, our membership has dipped. We know in some cases and suspect in others that this is due to dissatisfaction with what has been going on at the club both on and off the field.

Finally, after almost six years and eleven editions during which time it has been transformed from a newsletter into a full colour magazine, I am stepping down as editor of this publication. I will leave it to my colleagues on the Trust Board to determine the next step.

For the time being at least, the situation on the club board appears to have stabilised. At its AGM in January, Ian Beresford and George Mathison were confirmed as directors. Len

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BERWICK RANGERS F.C. STRATEGY MEETING

At the invitation of Berwick Rangers Chairman, Len Eyre, the committee members from both the Supporters Trust and Supporters Club met with the club's Directors at Shielfield Park in early January to hear an update on the club's off-field performance and to discuss ideas for the future direction of Berwick Rangers Football Club.

The session was facilitated by George Mathison, the club's most recently appointed Director (and a Supporters Trust member for over 10 years), who first outlined his personal association with the club since attending his first match at Shielfield Park on 8th August 1971. George then went on detail the club's current and somewhat obvious 'problem statement' which in short is, Berwick Rangers Football Club is consistently making a financial loss and does not have a sustainable business model. George then substantiated this by analysing both the club's on-field and off-field performances over the last 6 years. As everyone knows, results on the park have been hugely disappointing with a win rate of only 32% over the last 240 competitive games (loss rate of 48%). Meanwhile, behind the scenes the financial performance is showing a very concerning trend with losses totalling £220k posted for the last 3 financial years and, as was stated at the Club's AGM in the same week, a 4th loss is projected for the year ending May 2019.

George then advised that in recent times the focus has been on reviewing Commercial Operations where a recent audit of advertising and sponsorship revenue highlighted that sales had been unacceptably low and needs addressing. On the positive side,



George Mathison

George outlined that this is clearly an area of opportunity going forward. An update was also provided following a brief feasibility study regarding changes to the Corporate Structure of the club. George, supported by club accountant Mark McLeman, explained that they had discussed the suggestion of moving from PLC status to a Community Interest Company with several clubs and interested people. Taking on board the counsel from those interviewed it was considered that this should not be a priority for the club at this time.

The first half of the meeting was summarised by George with the clear message that the club must, in the short term, focus on supporting Johnny Harvey and the first team and significantly increase revenue from Commercial Operations

The remainder of the 2.5 hour session was spent looking at the potential future direction of the club with George suggesting a draft club vision with accompanying values, the

key strategic decisions to be made and the following 6 areas for improvement;

- Commercial Operations
- Stakeholder Engagement
- Fan & Community Engagement
- People
- Football Operations
- Facilities & Infrastructure

A good discussion followed during which the attendees were encouraged to take the opportunity to make contributions about areas to which they could add value.

All-in-all a very worthwhile and positive session. However as George stated in his closing comments, "It's not the talking that counts, it's the doing".



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Bobby Thompson – 'the Little Waster'

and also singing 'as himself'

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In aid of Berwick Rangers Supporters Trust

A TRIP TO HONG KONG

by **BRENDAN THORBURN**

In 2018 I was lucky enough to visit Hong Kong, a destination that has been on my bucket list for many years, as I have always wanted to experience the unique culture of 'East meets West'. Hong Kong was a former British colony and was returned to China in 1997 as a special administrative region. For now, it enjoys a high degree of autonomy from China, with its own Government, has its own currency and is still one of the world's leading financial cities.

Whenever I travel somewhere, the one thing on the top of my itinerary is to attend a football game, and obviously, due to the British influence, football is one of the most popular sports in Hong Kong. Surprisingly for a small territory, it has as many as four divisions with a new Premier League starting as recently as 2014. They also have their own football Association (HKFA). Interestingly, one thing we have in

common with the HK Premier League is that it allows one team from a different country to compete, in this case Guangzhou R&F from the south of Mainland China but under certain conditions.

Luckily during my visit, two of the top teams in the Premier League were due to play, Kwoon Chung Southern and Eastern Long Lions. This was the game I had to go and see. A simple underground train journey on one of the best public transport systems in the world, and before I knew it, I was at Mong Kok Stadium. Entry fee was a very modest \$80HK which is only about £8. For a Premier League ground it wasn't the biggest of stadiums with a capacity just over 6500, which isn't much more than Shielfield's 4000!

As I entered the stadium, players



were quick walk around the stadium and take some more photos. During the second half, Eastern turned things around and became the more dominant side, so it must have been quite a tough half time talk. Capitalising on their chances, they managed to score two goals with very little sign of danger coming from Southern. So it ended 2-0 and Eastern remained in their deserved place at the top of the table. Eastern are a team that has been enjoying success for many seasons and have also made history as they were the first male team to win a top-flight continental competition managed by a female coach, Chan Yuen Ting.

were warming up on the pitch before the game, and there were quite a few injured players sitting near the dugout, some even had casts on their legs. There was a very relaxed atmosphere as more fans started to enter the stadium and one thing that felt very strange was being able to buy alcohol at a football match. I got myself a drink and seat with a good view of the pitch before it was time for kick-off.

Southern had a lot of the possession in the first half, with the obvious fan favourite, the Brazilian player De Souza, getting a few attempts at goal early on. As the game went on, it was clear to see how so many players were out with injuries as there were numerous hard tackles and the referee was far more lenient than what you would see in our league. The goalkeeper for Eastern kept his team in the match with some fantastic saves after multiple crosses in just before the end of the first half. At half time the score remained 0 - 0.

Unfortunately, there was no club shop to have a look around at half time so I decided to have

After the game, much like our league, it was nice to see that the players from both teams would talk with their fans. It was great to see such a friendly atmosphere.

Overall, Hong Kong was a fantastic experience and there is plenty to see, such as temples, parks, night markets, food stalls and stunning views across the Victoria Harbour to name a few. It is so much more than a city of skyscrapers!



RESERVES

by MICHAEL SMYTH

Last December, the Trust website carried a review of the first half of Berwick Rangers Reserves' season so most of the details will not be repeated here. Suffice to say that this period of the 2018-19 programme began and ended with particularly entertaining matches.

STARK'S PARK, KIRKCALDY - Berwick Reserves paid two visits to the home of Raith Rovers, once in the League, the other in the Cup, and won on both occasions. Its appearance suggests Stark's Park is a big stadium though current capacity is just



The Main Stand at Stark's Park

It started with an unlucky 4-3 defeat against Albion Rovers Reserves at Shielfield and ended with a 6-2 success over Stirling Albion Reserves. In the former, Rangers made their debut in the newly created SPFL Reserve League 2. In the latter, they rounded off their Reserve Challenge Cup fixtures. After it, official Berwick Rangers media erroneously announced that the team had qualified for the Cup semi finals. Not so, only the Cup's East Section winners, in this case Livingston, went through to the next stage, the Final.

In all, Berwick Reserves played competitive fixtures at six different venues away from Shielfield, all of them with plastic pitches. More about each to follow.

under 9,000. At September's League game, the attendance was roughly one hundredth of that, all located in the Main Stand with its sponsored steps and in one corner of which was a tea bar which was doing brisk business before kick off and at half time. This season, Raith have also instituted payment for entry to second team games at £4 and £2 (Concessions).

The big talking point, however, was Rovers' recently laid artificial playing surface. Furthermore, it didn't cost the club anything, a benefactor living in Thailand meeting the bill. It means the club's two groundsmen have much less pitch work to do and can spend more time on other duties in and around the

stadium which also has the McDermid Stand (usually accommodating away supporters) at one end and, at the other, a stand containing the ambiguously named 'Preferred Families Area'.

LESSER HAMPDEN, GLASGOW - Nestling in the shadow of Scotland's national football stadium, many Berwick Rangers fans will have seen this ground on their way into big Hampden for Queen's Park games. Fewer are likely to have been inside it.

With Queen's selling Hampden Park to the S.F.A. for what seems a paltry £5 million, Lesser Hampden is destined to become the permanent home of the Spiders in the near future. As such, it will need a fair bit of upgrading and that surely includes a pitch which looks as if it has seen better days. Currently, spectators are confined to one side of the ground where covered (standing) accommodation is both rudimentary and limited. There is a bank of seats rising steeply from pitch level but a good view of the action can be obtained by standing on open paving immediately behind the highest row of seats.

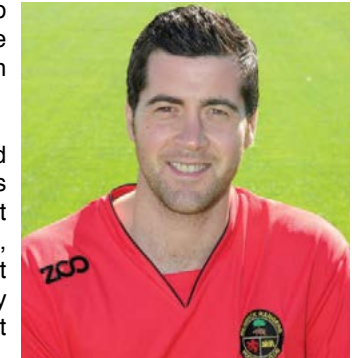
Changing rooms are small but there is a proper cafe which, on the night, was staffed by a young lady who was very knowledgeable about the history of Scotland's oldest club. (She explained the reason that the Scotland national team wear blue shirts is because most of the country's first international team came from Queen's Park who at that time wore blue.)

TONY MACARONI ARENA, LIVINGSTON - The name may cause a giggle but the stadium formerly known as Almondvale looks in pretty good shape. Another with a brand new whatever G it is playing surface, its laying the reason that Berwick' early season Betfred Cup match v. Livi was switched to Linlithgow Rose's Prestonfield. To think that Berwick's young Reserve team (except for 35 year old emergency 'trialist' Billy Bald) played here just a couple of weeks after Livingston downed

Glasgow Rangers in the SPFL Premiership.

On the field, trialist Jordan Allan scored all three goals as the hosts won 3-0. Bald's saves and organising of the young men in front of him moved Berwick coach Daniel McKenzie to describe the veteran keeper's performance as 'magnificent'.

K-PARK ACADEMY, EAST KILBRIDE - Situated just inside a 'Country Park' (What, in East Kilbride?!), our team had already played there in last season's City Cup semi final held over to the start of this one. That game was lost 3-1 as was this one, a stunning shot from Jamie Longworth being the clincher in Kilby's 3-1 win. Yes, that Jamie Longworth of Queen's Park and Stranraer fame. Before kick off, one of the home coaches confided that Longworth couldn't get into the E.K. first team. He was there later though to score the stoppage time winner which put Gala Fairydean Rovers out of the Scottish Cup at the same venue in November.



Billy Bald

Ground capacity is small. At this game, just about everybody took a seat in a long, low, narrow

running parallel to one of the touchlines. Another pitch which, because of frequent use...East Kilbride is a 'community' club... has a well worn look about it and the lighting is probably not up to SPFL standards either. Important points. Lowland League E.K. have a good chance of meeting the Highland League champs at the end of this season to determine who plays the SPFL's bottom club in the two legged Relegation/Promotion play off. The South Lanarkshire club came close

against Cowdenbeath a couple of years ago. If they were to make it this time, improvements at the K-Park would seem to be obligatory. It's doubtful that having somewhere selling refreshments at Reserve games would be a priority. A walk deeper into the Country Park was required to fulfil that need.

FORTHBANK ASTRO, STIRLING - Players and officials get changed inside the main Forthbank Stadium but come out via a back door to make the short walk to the Astro pitch. Another surface which looks weary. On this occasion a good part of it was strewn with fallen Autumn leaves. We won't use that as an excuse for Berwick's 7-2 defeat.

Theoretically, spectators are meant to watch from outside the fencing. Whether inside or out, viewing is at ground level and complicated by even poorer lighting than at East Kilbride. It can be nigh impossible to identify the numbers on those players on the far side of the pitch.

MICHAEL WOODS SPORTS AND LEISURE CENTRE, GLENROTHES - A Soviet style obelisk with the town's name written downwards (fortunately in Roman rather than Cyrillic letters) indicates entry into the new town. Berwick's second XI had played here once before; an away game v. Raith in the Development League on a freezing February night earlier in the year when the likes of Sibir Novosibirsk or Tom Tomsk would have felt quite at home. This time, the weather was less unkind for what was officially Berwick's home Challenge Cup tie. With first team matches scheduled for Shielfield on successive Saturdays, Rangers had to find an alternative venue for this match sandwiched in between. See above why there was reluctance to consider requesting a switch to Stirling. Michael Woods was the only alternative venue available.

In fact, it's pretty good. It was only opened in 2013 and the lighting is fine. The only potential impediment to spectators' viewing from the 'pavement' along one touch line are spare full

size goalposts positioned at intervals waiting for use next time the pitch is split into three areas to accommodate five-a-side games. So pick your spot carefully.

Entrance to the pitch is through the main sports centre which houses a cafeteria. Only problem is that it was a Tuesday night with an 8:05 kick off and it closes pronto at 7 o'clock. You get the message when the staff soon start stacking the tables and chairs. Still, a small hardship to suffer when the team wins 6-2. Yep, a few weeks earlier against the same team it had been a very different story. As Jimmy Greaves would continually remind Ian St John, 'It's a funny old game'.

...INTO 2019

Berwick Rangers Reserves resumed League action at the end of January with a third visit of the season to Stark's Park, Kirkcaldy. It should have been a home game but was switched to protect the Shielfield pitch as first team home fixtures were scheduled for the next two Saturdays. Berwick lost two goals inside the opening ten minutes and were four down by half time. Rovers added three more before the end including one from Euan Valentine, on loan at Shielfield but able to play for his parent club at this level against Rangers. Grant Rose scored Berwick's consolation goal but the 7-1 margin was identical to that which had been inflicted on the senior squad by Queen's Park at Hampden just four days earlier.

However, in their next outing on February 5th, Berwick's second team clipped the wings of League leaders Livingston Reserves, who had already beaten them twice, by holding them to a 1-all draw at their own Tony Macaroni Arena. Both goals came late on, Dougie Brydon marking his reappearance in a Berwick shirt by scoring the equaliser five minutes from the end.

TWO LADS FROM DARLINGTON

We recently received this e-mail from a couple of Berwick Rangers supporters from further south.

Hi Berwick Supporters Trust. Thought I would share a story of how myself, Rob (Shabba) Rutter and Chris (CJ) Jackson, both from Darlington, started following Berwick Rangers. Although not as far away as some supporters, far enough away to be a strange one. It started in 1987 when I met Chris. He had started at my school in the second year and we became friends.

As I was a Man United fan and him a Liverpool fan, we decided to follow a team together but we couldn't make it easy and go for our home town club as we both attended games regularly. So we set out with a well known football magazine and went to the results section and started looking down the league standings. After looking at several clubs, none from the North East appealed to either of us so on we looked and, after watching the local North East News and football results, saw they covered Berwick's score. I forget the game and actual result but they were a North East team apparently and playing in the Scottish League. We both knew this was for us. This was that team. In the early years we would look for results and keep an eye on the league standings and we made a pact to one day attend a home game which was not something two school boys had the know how to do. After leaving school and the usual changes that bring further education, training, jobs and then family we kept putting it on the back burner.



Two lads from Darlington, Rob in the hat

As time went by and technology changed we would often talk about the results and how Berwick were doing. Then in 2018, we finally did it. We travelled up to Berwick to take in a game at the famous...to us anyway...Shielfield Park. A 3 nil loss and some sendings off against Cowdenbeath didn't put us off.

Really, a great day if not the best result. We have since bought shares in the club. We are both coming back to take in another game and will up our support of the club that has helped keep us good friends for coming on 32 years. It's a pleasure to be part of a great club.

TWEEDMOUTH: UN POINT

Berwick East of Scotland League club Tweedmouth Rangers picked up their first point of the season on Saturday, January 5th when they came back from 3-1 down to draw 3-all with local rivals Coldstream. Seven minutes from normal time, Berwick Rangers Reserves player Evan Smith (loaned out to Tweedmouth for weekend games) scored the goal which brought the score up to 3-3. The hosts had to endure around five minutes of stoppage time before being certain they had finally got off the mark in their Conference 'A' campaign. A crowd of over 140 helped ensure a great atmosphere at Old Shielfield.

CAN'T DEFEND, CAN'T SCORE, SAME OLD STORY

says **RON KIRK**

The half way point of another season has come and gone and the script for this mid-season review unfortunately follows the same theme as recent seasons. Another struggle at the wrong end of the League table, another change of manager after a poor start and yet another battle to avoid the dreaded relegation play-off spot. It is perhaps no surprise that this has proven to be the case following the shambolic boardroom shenanigans last summer which by all accounts had a major impact on the playing budget afforded to the manager at the time, Robbie Horn. This reportedly culminated in Robbie being unsuccessful in his efforts to sign a number of players on his wish list with a number of these players ultimately signing for other clubs in League 2.

The season as it does these days kicks off with the revamped Betfred League Cup group stages. This at least guarantees every club 4 games in the competition but, as the group draw is seeded, the chances of progression for League 2 clubs like Berwick are limited. As a consequence, Berwick were drawn in a group with two Premiership clubs in the shape of Hamilton and Livingston along with Airdrie from League One and League Two compatriots Annan. The first game in the group saw Berwick crash to a calamitous 4-0 defeat at Annan which could have been a lot worse had it not been for debutant goalkeeper Ally Adams, a summer signing from Musselburgh, who was awarded the man of the match award which says it all really. 3-0 and 4-0 home defeats followed against Airdrie and Hamilton respectively before Berwick rounded off their Betfred Cup campaign with a 2-0 loss v. Livingston. The outcome of these 4 games was not really surprising but it was concerning that Berwick rarely threatened to

lay a glove on any of their opponents which was reflected in their failure to score at all in any of the 4 fixtures whilst their defence was breached 13 times.

As luck would have it Berwick were also drawn at home to Airdrie in the Irn Bru Cup. This resulted in the Diamonds repeating their 3-0 success from the Betfred Cup although in truth they did so at something of a canter after cruising to a 3-0 lead after 20 minutes or so before deciding to use the rest of the game as a training exercise.

Berwick kicked off their league campaign with a home game against Stirling Albion. After surviving a first half battering from the visitors when it is no exaggeration to say that they could have been 4 or 5-0 up, Berwick managed to turn the tide in the second half and win the game thanks to a composed finish from debutant Ross Brown who had been signed earlier in the week. Unfortunately, Berwick were not able to use that result as a springboard as they fell to a narrow 1-0 defeat at Queen's Park the following week before crashing to heavy 4-0 and 3-0 defeats against Cowdenbeath and Annan respectively. Berwick then bucked the trend by scoring 5 goals in an 8 goal feast against Albion Rovers at Coatbridge but the defeats continued thereafter including a sickening injury time loss at home to Clyde after being two goals ahead at half time. Ultimately, it all got too much for Robbie Horn. The club's struggles on the pitch were beginning to affect his health and he resigned as manager immediately after the 3-0 loss at Edinburgh City.

The Board moved quickly to replace Robbie with another former player in the shape of Johnny Harvey. Like Robbie, Johnny has a



Jordan Orru attacks in November's Cup tie at home to East Fife (Photo by Caledonia Photo)

good track record at Junior level and came to the club following a successful stint as manager of Penicuik Athletic. He was to enjoy a winning start too, a 3-1 home win over Gretna 2008 in the Scottish Cup. Berwick's reward in the next round was a home tie against League One East Fife. After a disastrous start to the game which saw the hosts 2-0 down inside the first 12 minutes or so they rallied, especially in the second half after Daryl Healy scored to breathe fresh life into the game. Unfortunately, they could not force the equaliser their endeavours deserved and the Scottish Cup was over for another season.

Johnny's first taste of league action at home to Cowdenbeath saw him lose 3 of his men to red cards, the first of those being after barely quarter of an hour. Not surprisingly the handicap proved too great and culminated in a 3-0 loss. A further 3-0 defeat ensued at Stirling before Johnny made his first real impact at Elgin where a 4-2 win had most fans rubbing their eyes at disbelief at their TV screens as news of the result came through. Prior to the game, Johnny had also made his first moves to strengthen the team by recruiting 3 of his

former players from Penicuik, two of whom played as trialists at Borough Briggs and both scoring. A 2-0 home win over bottom club Albion Rovers then followed before a humdinger of a 3-3 draw against Clyde at Broadwood which saw Rangers pegged back from being 3-0 up at half time. In addition, between them, the teams hit the woodwork a total of 8 times. Clyde manager Danny Lennon later described it as one of the best games he has been involved in.

Unfortunately, the performances at Elgin and Clyde proved to be false dawns with 5-0 and 4-0 losses being sustained against Peterhead and Annan with further defeats following against Cowdenbeath, Clyde and Peterhead again. In between these losses was a remarkable 2-2 home draw against Edinburgh City where two late goals, the second with the last kick of the ball, saw Berwick snatch an unlikely point from 2-0 down.

The statistics for the season so far make grim reading. Berwick have failed to score in 13 of the 20 league games played so far. At the other end, they have conceded 2 or more goals in 16 of these 20 games. Indeed,

they have conceded 3 or more in 12 of these games. Sadly, this statistic has just continued the trend from last season hence the heading to this review.

Looking ahead, the prospects for the rest of the season and beyond unfortunately look bleak. Although Johnny Harvey always try to put a positive spin on matters and urges fans to keep with him and his team as things will get better, it is difficult to see how. I have to say that I am concerned about his recruitment policy. As I mentioned earlier, he has already brought with him some of the players whom he had at Penicuik. After a promising start, these players are now beginning to struggle and fans are beginning to question if the step up has been too much for them. The January transfer window is passing by without any injection of players with SPFL pedigree into the playing squad. If rumours are true, Harvey's signing targets for the summer include two players who are currently with his previous club together with others who at the moment are at other former Junior clubs now in the East of Scotland League. If we do avoid bottom spot, and at the moment that's a big IF, then, I am sorry, but the recruitment of players from the East of Scotland League will not take us any further forward. If the FC Board are serious about retaining a club with SPFL status in the town then they

need to seriously address the recruitment policy. They need to find the finance and a way to attract several players with proven track records at League One and Two level to come to the club. Signing players from clubs at East of Scotland level is not the way forward if you want to be competitive in League 2. If we do manage to retain our league status this season then that is likely to be at the expense of Albion Rovers. I think we all agree that neither Rovers nor ourselves have sufficient quality to overcome either East Kilbride or Cove Rangers in a two legged relegation play off. If Albion are relegated then we will not have them to fall back on next season. A major injection of SPFL quality players is required or we will fall through that relegation trap door and I fear that our descent will not stop at Lowland League level.

Footnote: Since concluding this article, Berwick were thrashed 7-1 by Queen's Park in their latest league fixture. I have been watching Berwick for in excess of 40 years and this was without doubt the most inept, gutless and embarrassing performance from any Black and Gold team that I have had the misfortune to witness and I have seen a few horror shows over the years. As other fans have alluded to in other forums, the rot set in a few years ago and our decline is now picking up speed at an alarming rate of knots. In truth, we are now like a patient on life support who has just been told by the doctor that there is nothing more medically that can be done.

BERWICK RANGERS ST ANDREWS SUPPORTERS UPDATE

by DAVID LETHAM

Well it's been a tough season and league survival is the target again. It seems relentless and makes for some difficult games to watch. St Andrews Berwick Rangers Supporters have still been active though. It's in these times that the club needs support. We try to assist how we can but we are only a small group. We have our banner in the stadium, advert in the programme, player shirt sponsorship etc. but we also try to help with small things throughout the season.

At the start of it, Berwick Rangers were kind enough to give Northern Soul Kitchen (NSK) a shirt to hang up in their cafe. We paid for a mounting frame and mounted the shirt and presented it to the café who were very happy to receive it. It's also a nice bit of advertising for the club.

We have also sponsored 2 reserve players. At £25 each it's a good and affordable way to support the reserve team. It can also be a good gift to buy. One of these sponsorships is for a new born baby girl. What do you buy a baby girl? Well, sponsorship of a reserve player of course. Let's face it, the family will no doubt be swamped with baby clothes and toys...

We then went on to sponsor the shirt of the reserve team keeper and present him with £100 towards his kit expenses, specifically

gloves. Gloves can be expensive and are an extra cost that a keeper has over an outfield player. Often overlooked but a crucial item of match day kit.

We have also purchased shares in the club and personally, I've bought several sets of 25 shares for various people. They are great for birthday and Christmas presents and I've even bought one as part of a friend's wedding gift! The club needs the money, there's no doubt about that so why not buy some shares? I purchased another 25 around Christmas 2017. I now own a total of 1025 shares in Berwick Rangers to date. Membership of the Trust is another suitable present.

Plus of course, there are still smaller things that can help the club such as selling tickets for the Christmas raffle and volunteering on match days. The club is heavily reliant on volunteers to help operations run as smoothly as possible and while it can't offer payment, free admission is granted to volunteers as a token of the club's gratitude. Among the various tasks carried out by volunteers are selling 50/50 halftime tickets, selling match programmes or working the turnstile. It's a nice way to become more involved with the club and at no cost other than your time. (You also get early access to the chip van!)



Millie Stanford, co founder of the Northern Soul Kitchen, shows off the framed Berwick Rangers shirt

Lewis Barr sets up a chance against Clyde at Shielfield in January (Photo by Caledonia Photo)



MY ALTERNATIVE XI

by **STUART BELL**

I guess that the great Boardroom war of 2018 will have been covered elsewhere in this issue. With all the intellect and sophistication of Brexit, it has scuppered our season, destroyed our previous Manager and left us grateful for the demise of Albion Rovers in yet another season of incompetent tosh.

It remains to be seen, but with Johnny Harvey mercifully getting the support from above that the very unfortunate Robbie Horn could only dream of, I have a certain deranged optimism that a forward line of See, Healey, Knox, Barr and Willis might just raise a smile or two before the grass starts growing again. (Er, I won't mention the defence.)

On to other matters.

The club recently invited nominations and votes for the all time best Berwick Rangers XI and a cracking line-up was duly selected via Twitter.

I thought I'd share with you an alternative XI from my 39 years of support. They are not necessarily the best - or the worst - but each of them has a small place in the organ rattling around my head, and I'll tell you why. Some were involved in little incidents, others leave a more memorable general impression and hey, maybe a few memories have been distorted over time. Don't write in.

1. NEIL YOUNG

Gary O'Connor understandably won the all time great poll, but for me Young was even

better. He travelled up from (I think) Goole. He was a wonderful shot stopper but my abiding memory was at Falkirk in the Cup when he got a late call-up. Very late. He arrived at the ground at 5 to 3, and ran out on to the pitch in the nick of time having never even met the manager, Jimmy Thomson. Of course he had a blinder and had to introduce himself to the gaffer at half time. The bemused Thomson probably wanted to know if Crosby, Stills and Nash were any good, too.

2. DAVE SMITH

The most glaring omission in the Twitter poll. Most older fans will tell you he was our best player ever. Period. My own memory confirms just that. A great player, a big guy, a huge heart and a personality the size of Jupiter. It was as if there were 3 of him and each one of them filled and dominated the penalty area.

3. GARY MORGAN

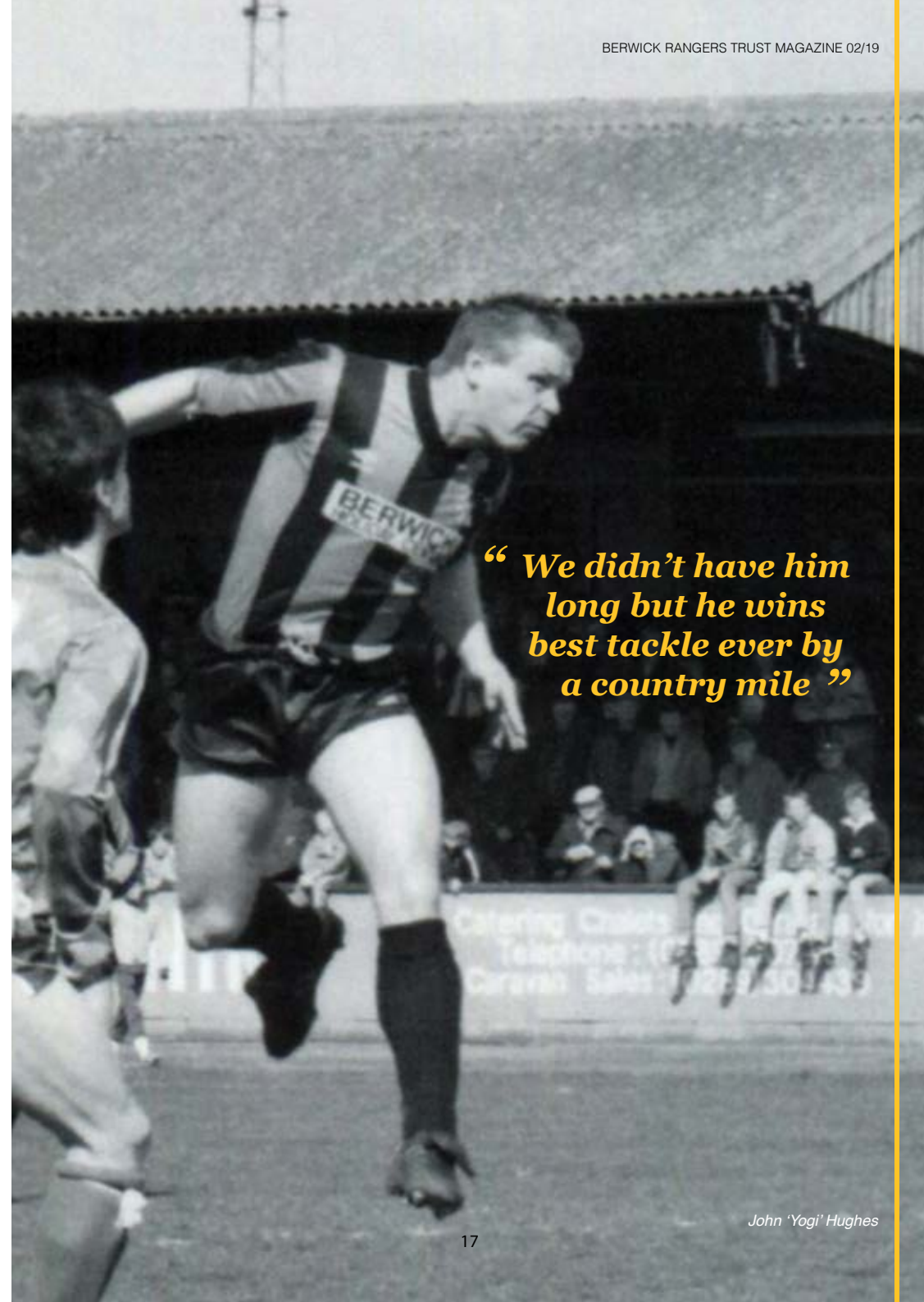
A left back from the 1980s. I described him in "The Absolute Game" as someone who ran up and down the touchline kicking anything without a flag. I believe we got him from Consett FC and he was as hard as nails with a great engine and a sweet left foot. A joy to watch.

4. NEIL MARTYNIUK

Still plying his trade for Bonnyrigg, we got him on loan from either Hibs or Hearts. His debut is etched in my memory as the single worst individual display I've ever seen at Shielfield. (And I've seen Damian Gielty many times.) He was very young and clearly very nervous, but



A glaring omission from the Twitter team, Dave Smith was inducted into Berwick Rangers Hall of Fame in 2017



“ We didn't have him long but he wins best tackle ever by a country mile ”

John 'Yogi' Hughes

think of all the collective cock-ups we made against Hawick in the Cup, and imagine one man showcasing the lot.

5. ALAN NEILL

Started as a left back and had all the grace and mobility of a drunken giraffe on roller skates. But injury to others meant he was forced to play centre-half for a few weeks and what a transformation. He was soon winning player of the year awards and became a genuine club legend. Good on him.

6. YOGI HUGHES

We didn't have him long but he wins best tackle ever by a country mile. On a soaking wet day at Shielfield, Yogi launched himself at an opponent who was dithering on the ball about 20 yards away. He slid in on his backside like a supersonic torpedo and his prey, sporting a look of increasing fear and panic, tried desperately to get rid of the ball. Too late. A huge crash, a giant ball of spray, legs and arms spinning through the air, and then.... Yogi sprinting goalwards with the ball past a bewildered ref who wanted to blow his whistle, but couldn't think of a reason why.

7. MARK CAMERON

"Fatty" Cameron gets straight into my midfield for an incident involving promising local lad, Kevin Shell. Shelly beat 2 men in a piercing run down the right before cutting into midfield and heading for their box. He pushed the ball a fraction too far ahead of himself and the immobile Cameron decided to intervene. Unfortunately, Cameron's cargo shifted as he nicked the ball off Shell's toes, and he fell over as he sent a feeble shot bobbling in the general direction of the corner flag. Shelly, hand on hips, shook his head, walked slowly back into defence and by the following Friday he'd emigrated to Australia.

8. TONY HALL

Bit of a character was Tony, lots of interaction with the fans, plenty of red cards, that sort of thing. I include him because I bumped into a friend of his in the gym (no, really) on Teesside

some time ago. This guy also claimed to have played for Berwick but I don't really believe him. He had lots of extremely lurid tales of exploits with his pal Tony, usually involving Bedrocks, women and the outer boundaries of the law. I haven't seen him for 18 months. If I do, and ask him what he's been doing, I suspect he'll say "18 months".

9. JOHN CLARK

UEFA Cup finalist, scorer against Barcelona at the Nou Camp and wearer of the biggest football shorts ever manufactured. In the late 90s Clark was assistant Manager and played 26 times in a midfield role that consisted of him barking orders at the youngsters picked to do his running for him. He visibly put weight on during each game and only received the ball due to having his own gravity. But, there was a secret weapon - his free kicks. Clark hit the dead ball harder than anyone I've ever seen and it was joyous to watch the terror in the eyes of anyone selected to stand in the wall.

10. PAUL CAVANAGH

Many will not remember this winger, but he has reserved a place in my brain that seems as though it can never be erased. Cavanagh's modus operandi was simple and never ever changed. Belt the ball miles down the wing, close your eyes and run like mad. He usually wouldn't open his eyes again until he'd run into the perimeter wall.

11. BLAIR HENDERSON

I've been slagging him off for being useless for some years, and he continues to make a complete idiot of me by scoring for fun every week for Edinburgh City. For that reason he deserves his place in my most memorable XI, but if he ever stops scoring and proves that I was right all along, I'll sub him with the wonderful Tommy 'Tiger' Graham who very unluckily didn't make the Twitter XI and deserves a mention somewhere along the line. And lo, he's got it.

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WE ARE ALL IN IT TOGETHER, AREN'T WE?

by GORDON BAXTER

The recent BBC report on the fortunes of Tranmere Rovers made for interesting reading. After appearing in the League Cup final in 2000, the club slid down the tables and by November, 2017 were lying 17th (out of 24) in the National League. Three seasons in non-league football resulted in losses of around £3.5m. That set me to thinking about the state of league football, particularly SPFL2, in Scotland...

The decision by so many clubs to leave the Junior leagues last year, and compete for promotion to SPFL2 is likely to increase pressure on teams in SPFL2. There is not a vast amount of money sloshing around in SPFL2, with one or two possible exceptions. Clubs are mostly playing in front of crowds of between 300 and 600, and up until Christmas, attendances were down on the previous season, mainly due to the drop off in attendances at Queen's Park and Albion Rovers.

The levels of money involved in the Scottish Leagues are clearly much lower than those in the equivalent English league. The SPFL/SFA seem to care little about what happens outside the top two divisions. Talk of an SPFL3 has recently been revived, this time with four Premier League club B teams (instead of colts teams). This shows just how out of touch they are at the top level of Scottish football. It would make far more sense to have a rationalisation of the lower leagues. Fans in SPFL1 and SPFL2 often bemoan having to play the same teams home and away twice a season. Travelling from Berwick to Elgin, for example, is a full day's journey and does not come cheap for the club or the fans. While fans at this level are (generally) pretty loyal, there is a limit to how much they can afford.

The decision to introduce relegation from SPFL2 has increased the pressure on clubs too. The example of East Stirlingshire,

currently struggling in the Lowland League with crowds of 150-200, serves as a stark warning of what could happen. The club chairmen are acutely aware of this, as you can see from the longevity of the current managers in SPFL2. Jim McNally has been at Peterhead for over seven years (at the time of writing); the next longest is Annan's Peter Murphy, at about 19 months. The longest serving manager among the four bottom teams is Mark Roberts, given the reins at Queen's Park only last October.

We all know that money talks, even at this level: teams like Kelty Hearts can afford to pay players wages that are often as good as, and sometimes better than those in the senior leagues. A more extreme example is the case of Adam Rooney who left Aberdeen to play non-league football in England for more money.

If the SPFL/SFA really care about the game in Scotland, they need to consider how they can help clubs become more financially viable in the lower leagues. To me, it seems obvious that the best way would be to create a new SPFL1 and SPFL2 by merging the bottom two leagues, with 16 teams from the first tier of non-league football. So each league would have 18 teams, playing each other on a home and away basis.

How would the restructuring help? Well, for one, it would make things more interesting because teams would only play each other twice a season. It would also potentially increase club revenue, because there would be a few more 'local' derbies, which would increase gates. Another 100 bums on seats may not sound like much, but it means an extra £1K+ per game, which is a lot at this level. At the same time, it could reduce travel costs for the club. It would also make the clubs more attractive to advertisers, since it would effectively double their reach, because there would be twice as

many opponents as there are currently.

The changes may also help offset the reduced attendances for mid-week games if there are more local derbies. The SPFL/SFA could even go a step further and find a way for the lower league teams to play games on a Saturday on 'international weekends' (which seem to last most of the week). Clubs in SPFL1/2 very rarely field current international players anyway, and the international games never kick off at 3pm on a Saturday, so there is no danger of a clash.

The clubs also need to try to help themselves too. I believe the number of followers on the Berwick Facebook page has significantly increased over the last year. If this does not lead to more money coming into the club, though, it all amounts to a hill of beans. There are other ways to entice people to part with their money too. Where was the January sale in the club shop? Even 10% off a selected range of merchandise would be enough to entice a few people to part with their cash. Similarly, there are still a lot of players without kit sponsorship, so why not offer it at half price for the remainder of the season? That would potentially raise another £700 or so, which is much better than nothing!

Coming back to Facebook, there are several people who regularly show up to criticise, and say things like, "I won't be going back until they start winning." The trouble is that becomes a vicious circle. To improve, the club needs money, particularly as things get more competitive, so by staying away you are helping to deprive the club of the chance to improve. If you want to stay away, fine, it is your decision (and your money) after all. If you want the club to improve though, why not find another way to give money; maybe buy some shares, or invest in one of the club's fund-raising schemes. If lots of people just give a little bit, it quickly mounts up. If, for example, everyone who subscribes to the Facebook page gave just £5 a year to the club, that would mean an extra £20K+. And that is a lot of money to a club like Berwick.

There are no easy answers to the problems of football in the lower leagues. What seems clear

is that the only way to solve it is for people at all levels to work together and take action. In the long run, the current situation is unsustainable, particularly while the vast majority of money goes to the clubs in the Scottish Premier League (and the Championship). If things stay as they are, in the long run I can see more clubs at the bottom falling out of the league before folding altogether.

Postscript: the Tranmere story does have a happy ending. They are now back in League Two, although nobody knows exactly how much money chairman Mark Palios has pumped into the club to get them there.

EX BERWICK MAN LEADS ON GOALS

It must be galling for many Berwick fans to see that former Ranger and Supporters Trust Player of the Year in 2015-16 Blair Henderson is out in front in the SPFL 2 Leading Scorers Chart (as at Feb. 8th). Now with promotion chasing Edinburgh City, the Borders player has already surpassed his total for Berwick in all competitions four seasons ago when he netted 18 times. Seventeen of those goals came in League games and were crucial in helping Berwick avoid the bottom spot and subsequent promotion/relegation play off against Edinburgh City, at that time members of the Lowland League.

His 23 goals so far in SPFL matches are more than Berwick managed in all of 21 League games put together and is more than double the number claimed by next player on the list, Peterhead's Rory McAllister. Also annoying for Berwick supporters is that three of Blair's haul came against the Shielfield side, two in a 3-0 win at Ainslie Park in October and another in the 2-2 draw at Shielfield at the end of December. When his goals in other competitions are included, Henderson's tally increases to 31 (in 34 matches).

RULES IS RULES

In October, Berwick Rangers signed 16 year old Danny Fletcher for one day. At home to non-league Gretna 2008 in the Scottish Cup, they were without a sub goalkeeper. Neighbours Tweedmouth Rangers came to the rescue by offering to release Danny to fill the void. So, on the Friday night, his Tweedmouth career was temporarily interrupted by his release from the East of Scotland Leaguers. On the Saturday morning, he signed amateur forms for Berwick. Twenty four hours later, he rejoined Tweedmouth.

The fact that he wasn't called upon to play meant he was not Cup-tied though in his case that was academic as Tweedmouth Rangers were not involved in the William Hill sponsored competition. Matters were more complicated at the next stage of the Cup (Berwick having seen off Gretna 3-1). Berwick listed Reserves' regular Shea Dowie (injured at the time of the Gretna tie) as their standby custodian but first had to make sure that, despite being on the team sheet, he had not taken the field for Whitehill Welfare in an earlier round.

Non-playing appearances on the bench DO count in SPFL games. Here, any trialist is allowed a maximum of three games but any club can only list two trial men for any one fixture. Thus, when Penicuik Athletic players, Lewis Barr, Andrew Forbes and Craig Hume left the Midlothian club outside the official transfer period, Berwick boss Johnny Harvey had to juggle his team selections astutely so as not to fall foul of the regulations.

Had they remained registered with Penicuik, none of the trio could have played as trialists. Current rules forbid players with clubs within Scotland's football pyramid from turning out on trial. That includes the East of Scotland League to which Penicuik switched from the Junior ranks this season.

30 days after their last games for Athletic each was able to change his status to amateur by applying for reinstatement as such within the SFA/SPFL rules. Once such a change is rubber stamped, no restrictions apply. However, in their cases, time as born again amateurs was short. When the 'transfer window' opened in January, they completed professional forms at Shielfield, all signing 18 month deals to June 2020.

Regarding Berwick Rangers Reserves, there is more flexibility. Although only four trialists can be listed for any particular match, each can be involved in up to six League games plus a further three in the Challenge Cup. However, the prohibition on trialists from pyramid clubs equally applies. As in the SPFL, amateurs (e.g. from Border Amateur League clubs), Juveniles (Hutchie Vale, etc.) and unregistered men (free agents) could all be given a run out. So could players with those clubs which are still in membership of the Scottish Junior FA.

A different rule prevented Berwick from recalling Grant Rose when on loan at Haddington Athletic, like Penicuik, newcomers to the EoS. When Daryl Healey was injured in training, Rangers hoped to bring the Borders lad into the first team squad. The reason they couldn't was because players farmed out to non-league pyramid clubs can only play at Reserve level for their parent club (usually meaning midweek games) when the 'transfer window' is closed. This meant Grant had to wait a little longer until January before coming back into Rangers' senior squad. This is a rule Berwick Secretary Dennis McCleary would like the SPFL to look at again to enable a recall of sorts into a first team squad if necessary.

(N.B. An SPFL club CAN sign a goalkeeper from another SPFL member on a seven day emergency loan.)

Danny Fletcher displays athleticism for Tweedmouth Rangers (Photo by Caledonia Photo)



BERWICK RANGERS: AN ODE TO A FATHER

says **MICHAEL CONBOY**

I wake up shivering for the second day in a row. Pulling the duvet over my head, I release a big sigh and curse him once more.. Has the old man turned the central heating off again? Surely not?

It's the 8th December a day after my 47th birthday. Spent the day in Berwick town centre with my Father. The Castle, The Curfew, Barrels, The Leaping Salmon, to name a few followed by an Indian take away. No offence but I am not 5 years old anymore but the old man took great pleasure in telling every man and his barking dog that it was my birthday. Still fair play to him. After a few festive drinks, we did get free food at the Indian restaurant near the Old Bridge.

We are staying at West Sunnyside House under the friendly watch of Kathleen, the property owner. It is about a 5 minute walk to Shielfield Park if you take a short cut through the car park of the sports centre.

We have been here since Thursday and it's now match day. Berwick Rangers v Peterhead a tough prospect, but under Johnny Harvey

there seems to be a positive injection in the dressing room and some of the recent results reflect that.

It's 8.00am. I flick the central heating back on and mutter some profanities under my breath. I hear movement in the apartment. He is up and lively. Soon, me too. We have coffee and cereal. He is twitchy. He loves being outside, a seasoned golfer, birdwatcher, walker, a general outdoors man. I have just about slurped down a cup of Nescafe instant and he is stood there in front of me fully fleeced up..."I am going for a walk". I wonder whether I should be searching his pockets for the remote control for the central heating!

A few hours rest to get sorted before the big game against Peterhead. The hours pass. The door opens and a jubilant voice shouts up, "What a walk. I went to the football ground, met a guy from Paris who worked in IT in Glasgow. He was meeting the club secretary about writing about the club".

Both ready, we make our way to Shielfield Park but thirsty, we head for the Black and Gold bar. Always a friendly

atmosphere, there are some Peterhead fans having a drink also which is lovely to see.

Me and "The Central Heating Controller" make our way through the turnstiles and head to the club shop. I always like to visit it. I am an impulse buyer so I need to buy 'things'. He buys himself a badge and treats me to a club polo shirt, a belated birthday present. We wander down to the food van. It's always great to be in the ground and see the players warming up in the background. It's got to be fish and chips on a cold December afternoon so we stand in the ever growing queue for the Chippy van. They smell amazing! I turn to Dad only to find he has turned himself the other way and is talking to a woman behind us in the queue. Always the conversationalist, he loves to chat to random strangers. But the common ground here is the football. I join in and it turns out she has driven down from Scotland and does some work with the Peterhead players. As we chat, the sun has come out and she comments that she has brought the sun down with her from Scotland.



The Central Heating Controller inside Shielfield

Fish and chips in hand we make our way to the stand as the whistle blows for the first half. I will refrain from giving what would be a painful match report but the first goal to Peterhead came after just 2 minutes! We were 3 nil down at half time. The blow was made slightly more palatable as, with our fingers, we ate the best fish I have had in a long time.

We need a half time beer so we head out of the ground and back into the Black and Gold only to be greeted by the barman handling a blow up doll. I can only assume there must have been a hen do in the function room that evening...unless she is the team mascot.

We sup up and head back into the ground for the second half. My Father makes a comment about where we sit. He wants to be higher

up, I could have suggested he brought his binoculars but in the current climate of "Bielsa Spy Gate" it was a good job I didn't.

51 mins. goal number 4 to Peterhead. We don't seem to playing that badly with a fair percentage of possession, 48% to be precise. We just haven't had enough shots on target. 78 minutes the final nail in the coffin, 0-5 Peterhead.

The final whistle blows and we make our way back to the cottage. I am cooking a chilli for us both. On our return, I head upstairs and hear a clicking noise. That bloody central heating!! Turns out its programmed to go off after two hours...oops!

I shout down, "Pour me a glass of red".

SUPPORTER OR FAN?

by **ANDREW ALLAN**

Growing up in the metropolis of East Linton; some distance from West Linton (with Mid Linton having gone the way of Atlantis), fitba' was a way of life. From Primary School, where I sported a magnificent hand-knitted black roll-neck sweater for the School Team, to games further afield between the sticks for school and juvenile teams with more varied attire (and the introduction of gloves – Peter Bonetti; green cotton), I was a Rangers supporter.

Never went to a game; but as a wide-eyed 10 year old, the minute I stole a look at my brother Dave's scrapbook of pictures and hand-written descriptions of the players and scenes capturing events at the Camp Nou in 1972, I was hooked. From that moment on, I was either The Girvan Lighthouse (goalkeeper Peter McCloy) or Colin Stein. Some years later, I was lucky enough to be invited along to a Champions League match v Sturm Graz. It was my first Rangers match, and a great occasion, but did I feel connected? Of course not.

Fast forward to an early career-ending leg-break, a family and my burgeoning 9 till 5 job as a Facilities Manager, and fitba' was a thing watched on Sunday afternoon, hoping to see the expected outcome of 'on comes the hatchet-man' or the more regular 'stramash in the goalmouth' of halcyon day commentary. Living in Edinburgh then, there was an occasional foray to Tynecastle or Easter Road with other brothers or pals but there was no stirring, not even one akin to the slow gyration of a spurtle in porridge.

Moving to Dunbar and with an 8 year old son, the spurtle moved. Might Stuart, having started playing with Dunbar Colts under 9s, fancy going to a game with his auld man? Mmmmm. It was early days and, frankly,



Andrew (left) and Stuart

he didn't seem that keen on fitba'. So, off to the local Juniors where the full vein-exposing tirades of vitriol was brought into sharp relief for young Stu and his Dad resulting in him looking up thoughtfully over his tea that night, and asking his Mum what the word 'thicking' meant.

And so, with the thought of somewhere else less of an assault on the ears, particularly those of a nine year old, I wondered if Easter Road or Tynecastle might be worth another visit; or might the crowds put him off. Now, is there not a fitba' club in Berwick that we could visit? Another leap of faith was in order, the spurtle gently turned again.

We parked on the grass, walked in, met by smiling people and a hot grub van. So far so good. The match started, Stu happy with his fish supper and not an oath to be heard, just a nice atmosphere, if a somewhat oaty aroma from I knew not where. We returned. Stuart started collecting the programmes and we also started having discussions about players." How can such a large man move so fast, score so many goals and be sent off so often?" "Damn!", Stuart declared (he was allowed that...) "We might even have had a

shout for a promotion place if we'd had fewer suspensions."

Seasons came and went through promotion, with immediate relegation, the golden years of Gribben goals, and the spurtle was whipping my football ardour and internal organs into a lather; this was different!! Away matches, Cup days out and season tickets for the boy and made me reflect on what I had been missing as a Rangers supporter. Was it the visceral feelings invoked by closeness to the park, clearly hearing almost every shout, boot and bodily impact? Was it the welcoming atmosphere of the club officials? I don't know, but I was making a transition.

The next and most influential element of my metamorphosis was when Stu pulled on the Black & Gold (well the green, red or deep-plum, see below) after a recommendation by, of all people, a Rangers scout! The warmth of welcome into, what felt like a family, was wonderful. Being a local lad, and then joined by two other Dunbar lads was fantastic; all

being clearly valued alongside the other, even more local lads in the 20s.

That was it. That was the moment that a supporter's connection with their club seemed to me to be clearly more than the team, any success and hand-written descriptions of the erstwhile 'Backstor' (sic)...(Jim Baxter)... in even earlier scrapbooks – sorry Dave. My reflection here is of what motivates anyone to become a supporter. Is it a scrap-book or even which church one attends? Then of how that early affinity develops. Is it about results and, I guess, from where prawn sandwich season-ticket holders derive, spending hard-earned cash to see expected success?

Here's the thing though, am I a fanatic and so a fan? What's a fanatic? I think we all know great people who are more worthy of the kindest interpretation of the word and I've met a few in the past few months as the spurtle spins like a gyroscope, compelling me to help the Trust Board and my club progress the very best I can--- because I'm a fan.



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