

Realgrassroots

PE1319/HH

Tuesday 10th April 2012

Ms. Anne Peat,
Clerk to the Public Petition Committee,
TG.01,
The Scottish Parliament,
Edinburgh.
EH99 1SP

Dear Ms. Peat,

PUBLIC PETITION PE1319

We acknowledge the responses submitted by IFK Gothenburg, Sportscotland, the Scottish Government, Scottish FA, Falkirk FC and Mr. Gibbons.

The response from IFK Gothenburg was highly informative and by way of placing some context to their reply, our own research reveals this is a professional club in Sweden who have won 18 national championship titles, 5 national cups and 2 UEFA cups, they are arguably the most successful team in Sweden.¹

At international level Sweden with a population of 9.4 million² is currently ranked 17th in the world³, behind France. Scotland by comparison presently sits in 51st place with a population of 5.2 million.⁴

It was interesting to note that Gothenburg do not consider players to reach 'elite' level until the age of 16 years, until then they are developed and indeed encouraged to participate in different sports including involvement in schools football where the matches are co-ordinated between club and school. IFK 'guarantee' a player membership of the club until the age of 16 unlike our Scottish counterparts who are not bound to offer a player security for any period of time.

IFK state there are no contracts for players under the age of 16 years. They clearly state there is no restriction placed on young players, which appears to suggest that the Swedish youngsters enjoy far more freedom of choice, than those in Scotland.

¹ IFK Göteborg - Wikipedia

² www.google.co.uk/publicdata

³ FIFA Ranking statistics March 2012

⁴ <http://www.scotland.org/facts/population/>

In respect of the submission from Sportscotland, we are keen to gain some detail on ‘the robust plans which contain specific outcomes for the sport’ and ascertain if these have been achieved? We would be eager to see what return the invested public funds are providing for our national game at all levels and all grades of football.

Realgrassroots welcomes the Scottish FA Facilities forum as way of delivering artificial pitches across the country in consultation with local clubs and we have seen tangible results in our own communities where new pitches are have been built.

In response to the letter submitted on behalf of the Scottish Government, we take issue with the comment that the Scottish FA and member clubs have a duty of care. We dispute that this duty of care is being met in that players are facing restrictions and can be retained against their will by clubs in Scotland. It is our belief that there are potential breaches of Scots Law and European law, a view shared by Tam Baillie, Scotland’s Commissioner and Children and Young People. How therefore, can the Government simply pass off these concerns to the clubs without fully investigating the issue?

We were pleased to read that the ‘Take Life On’ campaign highlights the importance of at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day for children, yet cannot comprehend how a mere two hours per week is acceptable during school time. Given the well-documented subject on children’s health in Scotland it is imperative for our youngsters to receive physical activity every day; the adage healthy body, healthy mind is not far from our thoughts.

Realgrassroots acknowledges the progress the Scottish FA is making with regards to ensuring clubs are being more transparent with players and parents who are asked to sign or register. We note the new Declaration Form is required to be signed at five separate points which perhaps indicates the extent to which the governing must go to guarantee players and parents are being made fully aware by member clubs of the implications. We do however maintain that if a club can release a player with no minimum period of time, the same mechanism should be afforded to the youngster. Similarly, no amount of form signing should permit a club to retain a young player for three years against his wishes, when the club can dispose of the player any time. This form of contractual restriction is simply not fair.

With regards to providing a system to ‘reward clubs investing in the training and development and education’⁵, we agree that it would be reasonable for any club who has incurred costs in nurturing a talented player is rewarded, but this must surely be done in accordance with Regulation 20 of the aforementioned FIFA Regulations, whereby compensation is paid ‘when a player signs his first contract as a professional’? This would reward clubs who have produced a player and not simply encourage the buying and selling of youngsters with potential, leading to the ‘children’s transfer market’ that has been created.

In closing, the Scottish FA have taken steps to review the scouting procedures to protect young players. Can they advise as to the reporting mechanism and the mandatory punishment for coaches/clubs who circumvent the process, by failing to contact a recreational club secretary in the first instance?

⁵ FIFA Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players – Introductory Provision - Scope

Realgrassroots would like to thank Falkirk FC for their detailed reply; however, can we gain clarity on two areas? Do they or have they ever used a 'C' Commitment Form to sign young players? What is their position on players participating in schools football?

In the closing paragraph, Falkirk FC state 'the compensation rewarded is insignificant in comparison to the future value of the players.' If this indeed the case, why does this controversial system exist? Would it not make better business sense to receive a higher level of compensation when the player first signs a professional contract as stipulated by Regulation 20 as previously mentioned?

Finally, we acknowledge the courage shown by Mr. Gibbons in writing to the Committee detailing his experiences. Whilst we know there are many such examples, few are willing to come forward publicly. Mr. Gibbons' letter illustrates the real life situation facing talents young players in Scotland.

At the time of submitting our letter, there was no response from Compass Chambers.

Kind regards,

Scott Robertson

William Smith

(On behalf of Realgrassroots)