

# Meeting of Association of Tartan Army Clubs (ATAC) and Scottish Football Association (SFA)

26/09/2008 – Hampden Park

## MINUTES

### Attendees:

**SFA:** Gordon Smith, Derek Kirkwood, Colin Banks

**ATAC:** Jim Brown (WESTA), Stevie Imlach (LA), Scott Pilmer (HEBETA), Maurice Hickey (BASTA), Scott Rae (WEBATA)

### 1. Introductions

Jim Brown opened the meeting, introduced the delegates, thanked the SFA for agreeing to meet with ATAC at such short notice and explained that this meeting had one primary agenda item which was the events surrounding the recent Macedonia match in Skopje which have raised a number of concerns amongst ATAC members, but that if there was time, there are one or two additional, unrelated questions ATAC would like to raise.

### 2. Macedonia

Derek Kirkwood gave a very detailed explanation of all the preparation that precedes any Scotland away match and also of the events leading up to and surrounding the Macedonia match on 6<sup>th</sup> September. This followed the outline as proposed in the agenda.

#### Pre-visit

Ahead of making a visit to the host country, a comprehensive dossier and profile of the country is prepared by DK.

This includes contacting: -

- Foreign and Commonwealth Office for country info
- Police and security contacts
- British Embassy staff in the host country
- Travel agencies (ie, Passport Travel, etc...) to gauge levels of interest from the fans

Other information compiled includes looking at surrounding territories to establish potential routes into the country likely to be taken by fans to reach the host country.

#### Visit to Host Country

The intention of DK's visit to the host country is to ensure that he has a comprehensive insight into every aspect that needs to be considered for such a trip.

Information gathered includes: -

- Details of airports (security, local processes, visa's, any potential problem areas for either the team or fans)
- Levels of accommodation in the host City

- Stadium information
  - Where will the Scotland fans be sitting
  - What ticket allocation will the SFA receive
  - How many stewards / police will be on duty on the day of the game
  - Are adequate facilities (toilets, refreshments, etc...) in place in the away supporters end
  - Are turnstiles / entry points suitable to deal with the number of fans
  - Will there be a "hold back" of fans and, if so, how long will this last?
- Info regarding home support (ie, are they classed as "risk supporters")
- Assessment of the surrounding areas (bar's, restaurants, etc...) and whether there are any areas which could give rise to trouble for fans

In the case of the Macedonia match, DK gave ATAC a clear overview of how his dealings with the FFM in the lead up to the game. He spent 3 days on his visit (and had the option to re-visit again should he deem it necessary) and during this time met with representatives from the Police (although they were unable to appoint a match commander at this time), the FFM and the British Embassy. He stressed that the Embassy did as much as they could to assist, however the Macedonian parties were very difficult to deal with on any subject.

Discussions took place regarding the allocation of tickets, with the SFA complaining about the "derisory allocation" and pushing the FFM to give the Scots an additional section in the South Stand. The FFM would neither agree nor disagree to this, with a simple "maybe" being the answer on each occasion. At this point, the SFA were still hopeful that they would receive this additional allocation hence when the deadline for printing the Guidance Notes neared; the decision was taken to include this information. It should be noted that, at this point, the Embassy staff believed that Scottish fans would be allowed into an empty section of the ground which had not sold out as this has happened in the past.

At this point it was inferred to the SFA that a large TV screen may be placed in the City centre. They (the SFA) were only informed that this wouldn't happen shortly after their arrival on the Friday.

In addition to the ticket numbers, concerns were raised regarding the state of the East Stand and the lack of facilities (refreshments, additional toilets, etc...) to which the FFM gave assurances that these facilities would be in place.

Once his report had been compiled, DK circulates this to all relevant parties (including the Police and Embassy staff).

### **Arriving in Macedonia – Friday 5<sup>th</sup> September**

The SFA party included a 6 strong security team. This comprised Derek Kirkwood, a Senior Officer from Strathclyde Police and 4 stewards from Group 4 Security. The Officer from Strathclyde is a serving Match Commander who was attending in a Police Liaison Officer capacity. DK highlighted the Officers wealth of experience and high profile within the the Football policing community throughout Europe and beyond, however the Macedonian Match Commander refused point blank to deal with him insisting that he needed "neither help nor advice" from the Scottish Officer.

The Group 4 Stewards perform a number of functions including security for the team and SFA staff (SSC staff distributing tickets), presence at entry points and pinch points around the ground and "Customer Care".

On arrival it was immediately apparent to the SFA that, despite assurances to the contrary, tickets were freely available to those Scotland fans without an official Away End ticket. This was immediately raised with the FFM and the (now appointed) match commander who remained insistent that no Scotland fans would be allowed into the home sections. The reason for this was consistently given as "public safety".

Requests were made on a number of occasions (from DK, the senior Police Officer accompanying him and also a senior Police Officer from the Met Police who is currently working with the Macedonian Riot Police) to allow Scotland fans into the South Stand section immediately beside the East Stand. The Met Police Officer offered to use his officers to create segregation between Scottish and Macedonian fans, however the Macedonian match commander steadfastly refused!

On Friday evening, DK and his colleagues mingled with Scotland fans around the bars in Skopje and used the Fans Embassy to try and spread the word to as many fans as possible that they were not going to be allowed into the ground without an official Away End ticket. ATAC agrees that the word was certainly out and was spreading amongst the Scotland fans.

### **Match Day – Sat 6<sup>th</sup> September**

Meetings between all parties (SFA, FFM, British Embassy, Match Commander, Macedonian Police and FIFA delegate) were ongoing till close to kick-off with repeated attempts from the SFA to persuade the FFM and the Match Commander to give Scotland fans the extra section, however, again, these requests fell on deaf ears.

Scottish fans were congregating in the bars beside the stadium from early in the day and were happily mingling with each other and Macedonian fans. At one point the Macedonian Match Commander insisted that all Scots were moved from the bar as "this area is for Macedonian fans". This didn't happen and fans remained where they were, but was indicative of the type of requests being made by the Match Commander.

Present at the stadium (whilst fans were trying to get into the ground) were DK, the Strathclyde Police Officer and the 4 Group 4 Security stewards. One of these stewards was guarding the team dressing room and, when the team were on the pitch, another was stationed at the tunnel. The remaining two were at the two "pinch points" (the entrances to the East and South stand) and were trying to help Scotland fans. While the team were in the dressing room, the 3<sup>rd</sup> steward moved to be close to the gates to assist fans. ATAC highlighted the fact that none of the stewards were visible. DK explained that they had been wearing high-visibility jackets, however due to the heat, they had removed these. ATAC suggested that high-vis bib's would have helped, however it appears that these were not available. It was also pointed out that had the stewards been more vocal, they may have been more prominent and been able to help a number of fans who were being mis-directed all over the place.

DK and the accompanying Police Officer, were present at the pinch point on the way into the East Stand prior to kick-off. He pointed out that shortly after this he was being subjected to a lot of abuse from a number of Scotland supporters as he was trackside inside the stadium. He went on to explain that both himself and his colleague had been removed by Macedonian stewards as they were "interfering" and had been placed on the touchline. At this point he called for the Match Commander, the FIFA delegate and the Embassy representative to complain at the treatment of the Scotland fans and, again, request that they open the additional (very empty) section, again, this was refused.

ATAC asked the SFA what action, if any, they are taking. GS advised that they have already written to FIFA to "complain in the strongest terms" about the treatment of the

Scotland fans, the condition of the stadium, the lack of facilities and the lack of organisation surrounding the entry points to the stadium. It was made clear that this complaint is purely about the circumstances and events around the stadium and **not** an attempt at complaining about the result.

GS offered to read this letter (which was sent to FIFA on 18<sup>th</sup> September) to ATAC and proceeded to read the full four pages to us. ATAC agreed that the letter covered all points raised by our members and more. It was suggested that this is information that needs to be distributed to the members as it is confirmation that someone is standing up for the fans and taking some action.

**ACTION - Colin Banks: The SFA will consider distributing to ATAC and the SSC in general, a copy or extracts from the letter of protest issued by the SFA to FIFA dated 18 September 2008, any such action will be notified to ATAC no later than Friday 3 October 2008.**

The SFA assured ATAC that they were doing everything they could to try and resolve the situation in favour of the Scotland fans until every possible avenue had been exhausted. Based on the feedback and information from the SFA, ATAC accepts this is the case.

The issue of some form of redress for fans who had official Away End tickets, but failed to get into the match was raised. ATAC offered a number of suggestions for ways in which the SFA may wish consider this, and CB has agreed to look into it.

**ACTION – Colin Banks: The SFA will consider a gesture of goodwill to those SSC members issued with "official tickets" whom did not gain entry to the ground. Again it was agreed that ATAC be advised of the SFA's intentions in (a) Identifying those members and (b) what the proposed gesture may be, no later than Friday 3 October 2008.**

The specific letter to Jim Brown (as WESTA rep) from Dario Walker was discussed. It was suggested that it would be useful for DK to meet with Dario to explain the events of the situation on a one to one basis, and DK agreed to this.

**ACTION – Derek Kirkwood: To arrange a time and date to meet with Dario Walker with reference to his letter. To be arranged via Jim Brown**

At this point it was agreed that all points surrounding the events in Macedonia had been covered and the remaining time should be used to cover a number of additional items. Jim Brown thanked the SFA on behalf of ATAC again for seeing us at such short notice, but also for being so thorough and open with the information surrounding the Macedonia match.

### **3. AOB**

#### **3.1 Norway Away match Date Change**

The issue of the rumoured changes of date's was raised along with a lack of official comment from the SFA (the story has been in the Scottish press and the message boards for a number of weeks now and "whilst you're happy to send me information about the latest Scotland tat, the SFA haven't made any comments to their members" regarding this possible change. This has become a more pressing issue in the last week as flights are now available for booking and fans are looking to make arrangements asap.

GS informed ATAC that the date is indeed in question and explained the background to this. There are 10 teams who are scheduled to play World Cup qualifying games on this date and therefore discussions are still ongoing (with UEFA/FIFA) to try and prevent this change. The immediate advice from the SFA is to **not book any travel until this date has been confirmed**. He suggested that the match could move to 12<sup>th</sup> August (not ideal with the SPL starting on the 8<sup>th</sup> Aug) or a date later in the year. He also stated that he believes the tie will be moved from the original date.

**ACTION – Colin Banks: The SFA agreed to notify SSC members via email that the possibility of a date change was under discussion and that members should not make any travel plans until such times as the date was officially agreed.**

### **3.2 Norway Home – Family Tickets**

The issue raised by John Kaylor (PTA) around the number of tickets which can be purchased for the family section was raised. It appears that SSC members are only able to buy tickets for 1 adult and 1 child. It also appears that in the public sale, non-SSC members are able to buy tickets for 3 adults and 1 child.

CB highlighted that it was NOT the case that members could only buy on a 1 adult to 1 child basis. He explained that all family applicants must be members but for example if Mum, Dad and 2 kids were all members they could apply together.

**ACTION – Colin Banks: To look into this matter and to contact John Kaylor directly regarding this.**

### **3.3 Website**

ATAC asked for an update on when the new release of the Website would be ready. CB explained that this remains a work in progress but has been held up due the two members of staff responsible not being available (one who's left, one who's on maternity leave).

The new version should be ready shortly. Future developments will include a "Member Centre" facility which will enable members to check their own points tally, update all their personal details online, etc... This will not be part of the initial website, but will be added at a later date once it is fit for purpose.

### **3.4 Allocation of points for members unsuccessful in the ballot**

ATAC raised the question of whether the SSC have considered favourable treatment in any future ballot (ie, priority for a ticket) as they have now lost out on not only a ticket for the match, but also for gaining another point which may be important at the next fixture. This idea was positively received by the SFA and will be looked into.

**ACTION – Colin Banks: To look into the above to determine whether it is feasible.**

Jim Brown thanked the SFA again and closed the meeting.

## **APPENDIX:**

### **ADDITIONAL UPDATES SINCE MEETING**

#### **2.0 – Macedonia Follow Up**

**ACTION - Colin Banks: The SFA will consider distributing to ATAC and the SSC in general, a copy or extracts from the letter of protest issued by the SFA to FIFA dated 18 September 2008, any such action will be notified to ATAC no later than Friday 3 October 2008.**

**UPDATE: Complete** – Email sent to all members of the SSC to provide an update on actions taken by the SFA in the lead-up to and at the time of the Macedonia match on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2008. Copy attached. Updates also posted on the Tartan Army Message Board by Rob.

**ACTION – Derek Kirkwood: To arrange a time and date to meet with Dario Walker with reference to his letter. To be arranged via Jim Brown**

**UPDATE: Ongoing** – Meeting will be facilitated by Jim Brown.

**ACTION – Colin Banks: The SFA will consider a gesture of goodwill to those SSC members issued with "official tickets" whom did not gain entry to the ground. Again it was agreed that ATAC be advised of the SFA's intentions in (a) Identifying those members and (b) what the proposed gesture may be, no later than Friday 3 October 2008.**

**Update: Ongoing** – The SSC have looked at the options available and are keen to invite those who had official tickets yet still failed to gain access to the ground to contact them with the background info concerning their experiences. They (the SSC) will look at each submission on its individual merits and consider each on a case by case basis.

#### **3.1 – Norway Date change**

**ACTION – Colin Banks: The SFA agreed to notify SSC members via email that the possibility of a date change was under discussion and that members should not make any travel plans until such times as the date was officially agreed.**

**UPDATE: Complete** – Communication of current Norway situation went out to all SSC members on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> 2008

#### **3.2 – Norway Home Tickets**

**ACTION – Colin Banks: To look into this matter and to contact John Kaylor directly regarding this.**

**UPDATE: Complete** – Colin Banks has now spoken directly with John Kaylor and the situation has been resolved.