Fisher Football Club Update

Last Saturday saw the official start of the 2020-2021 football season and we felt it was a good time to update our members and supporters of the situation of your football club going into the new and unprecedented season.

**Ground Matters**

We have been working with the Millwall Community Trust to pave the way for a safe return to playing at our St Pauls Ground. The government guidance currently allows clubs at our Step 5 level to play friendly matches on their ground, but these must be strictly behind closed doors with no spectators present. Despite this, Southwark Council who own the site, have not yet signed off use of its premises by third parties and so we are unable to play or train at the ground. We have however had our risk assessment for playing agreed with the trust and signed off by the league as required by the Football Association. We hope therefore to be able to make immediate use of the ground once the council agrees and signs of the use. Clearly there will be a number of new routines and a limited match day experience to get used to once we are in situ. We have published both our and the Millwall Community Trust risk assessments for the ground on our website.

**Playing Matters**

Without use of St Pauls, in the interim, the players under manger Ajay Ashanike have been making use of Southwark Park for weekly pre-season training sessions since the start of July. We were able to hire a private pitch in Shooters Hill to allow the first pre-season game on Saturday which saw Fisher beat Isthmian League side Basildon United 1-0. The side continue pre-season match action with a trip to Tooting and Mitcham United next Saturday. We are not advertising the home pre-season games for two reasons. Firstly, as mentioned the matches are strictly behind closed doors and we are concerned that third party web sites extensively advertise games, which in turn attracts ground hoppers and casual visitors looking to gain admittance. Secondly, the situation with the council remains fluid and last week up until Friday evening we were unsure whether we could use St Pauls or not and scrambled to arrange an alternative venue, meaning a lot of late changes to the programme are inevitable. However at present, council permitting, we are expecting visits from Hullbridge Sports, Epsom and Ewell, Herne Bay and Saffron Walden Town over the next few weeks. Should the situation change and at any point we are allowed spectators at these games we will advertise the fact on social media and the website.

At present the competitive season is due to get underway on September 1st with the Extra Preliminary Round of the FA Cup. This should be followed with the league programme commencing on Saturday 5th September and a further round of the FA Cup the next Saturday and the FA Vase commencing the Saturday after that. However it is far from certain that this will be the case. The Football Association announced these dates whilst also stating that the competitive season would not commence without spectators present in grounds. For spectators to be present in grounds government approval must be given. It is unclear where the government views non-league football having recently abandoned the pilot for spectators to attend elite sporting events. Without spectators allowed it looks unlikely the FA Cup will take place on 1st September. We have no information whether the dates would be put back or whether the round will be abandoned and Step 5 and 6 clubs removed for the competition. The league have taken a view that they will make a decision on August 22nd as to whether it is realistic to start the league programme on September 5th and will put the season back in week by week blocks if required.

The draws for the cup competitions are expected on August 13th. A fixture list for league games is more complicated due to clubs ground sharing and clubs like ours wanting to avoid clashes with larger neighbours. The league will therefore require the fixtures for higher leagues to be published before they can prepare their own. With this in mind the league will only be issuing fixtures on a weekly or fortnightly basis to commence with.

**Players**

We are pleased to announce that the majority of the squad that finished last season so strongly have signed league registration papers for the new season. Despite the fanfare some clubs give to signings it should be noted that these are not contracts and ‘signing’ a player in such a way only gives clearance for that player to play in league and cup fixtures rather than secures him to the club in any way. We have also a number of players of a good standard training with the squad, some of which will be added to the league registered players in the next few weeks.

Of players leaving the club, goalkeeper Tommy Taylor has moved to Sheppey United, centre back Ade Olowu is trialling with Chelmsford City, midfielder Jacob Kalonda has joined Welling Town and striker Louie Clark has joined Corinthian. We wish those players well at their new clubs and thank them for their efforts in black and white last season.

We also welcome Ashley King to the club as first team coach and Ajay has added former player Luke With to his backroom team.

**General Matters**

As with many aspects of society COVID-19 has presented a huge challenge to the football club. Whilst during the lockdown period the club was able to ‘mothball’ and had very few expenses, we now face a more challenging financial situation. Our income streams are likely to be severely affected in the coming weeks and months. Typically a pre-season fixture involves incidental costs in the region of £150 to stage (match official fees, physio fees, kit washing, etc) and where an alternative ground is required this cost needs to be met as well (we were fortunate to secure a ground for Saturday for £100). With no spectators present we miss out on gate monies which would usually allow the pre-season games to pay their way and cover costs. Without spectators we are not able to hold our traditional curtain raiser with a Millwall XI which usually sees the largest crowd of the seasons at St Pauls. Even when spectators are allowed back in the ground we are likely to see reduced revenue with a possible cap on attendances, a limited operation in the clubhouse, no programme sales etc.

With this in mind we would urge those who have not yet re-joined as members to consider doing so. The membership fees are vital income stream. We would also encourage supporters to try and convince friends and family to also become members. Membership can be purchased online via the link on our website: <http://www.fisherfc.org/membership/>

One of the benefits of membership is £10 off the price of a season ticket. We have set season ticket prices at the same level as last year at £100 for adults and £60 for concessions (before the £10 deduction for members). With two extra sides in the league this year (Balham and Tower Hamlets) this covers 20 home league games so is giving football for a fiver! Purchasing a season ticket will support the club in more ways than just financially as it will ease the logistics of match day admittance where we are going to have to record the names and addresses of all those in attendance and reduce the burden on the gate of handling card payments at the same time as we move to cashless entry. We would urge as many members and supporters to consider supporting the club in this manner.

Finally, as ever we are interested in hearing from any supporters who may be in a position to provide any sponsorship or contact details of prospective sponsors, whether of matches, advertising banners, digital programme pages or players. Player sponsorship proved popular with supporters last year and we will shortly open up this year’s sponsorship list.

We hope to shortly see you all back pitch side cheering on the side.

Up the Fish