

# **Newport Rugby Supporters Trust Fund**

## **Inaugural Meeting**

**Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2003**

**Rodney Parade**

The meeting was opened at 19:30 by Andrew Cox. There were approximately 150 attendees.

The accompanying documentation describes briefly the material presented by the working party set-up to form the trust.

This document provides details of the comments of the guest speakers and also a summary of the various questions that were put forward by the participating supporters of Newport RFC present at the meeting:

### **Jacqui Forster - Supporters Direct**

Supporters Direct was initially set up to provide football supporters with an organisation to help them back their respective football teams but recently there has been a lot of interest in the scheme from Rugby League and Union supporters.

Jacqui was employed in local Government and became involved with Supporters Direct based on the experiences she had in setting up a trust fund at her own local football team.

The models are based on a 'not-for-profit' principle and were adopted in 1987. Some key objectives of Supporters Direct are:

- ◆ To have influence
- ◆ Ownership of shares
- ◆ Representation on the board
- ◆ Fully democratic organisation
- ◆ Not for profit principles
- ◆ No individual gain
- ◆ To be affordable for all supporters
- ◆ Organisation should be professional, diplomatic and credible.

It advises that trusts are set up as Industrial Provident Societies similar in principal to the Co-op with a 'one member-one vote' system regardless of financial input. Working with other similar trusts locally will be beneficial. Supporters Direct encourages trusts to have an aim of a member to be included on the board of the team that it is supporting to develop a mutual trust and to increase beneficial participation.

Funds raised by the trust should be reinvested based on the views of the members.

The first supporters trust was set up in 1987 at Northampton FC. The club was in a financial crises and the supporters felt that they could contribute to help saving it. The local council became involved and soon members of the trust were involved in the board installed to over see the FC. There are now 104 trusts including four Rugby League and one Rugby Union. 32 have a director from the trust on the clubs board. 53 have a shareholder stake in the club they are supporting. In total there are 65,000 members.

Jacqui closed by wishing the Newport trust committee well for the future and by encouraging the supporters present to accept the motions that would be put to them later in the meeting.

### **Jake Greenland –Bris Trust**

Jake addressed the meeting to explain how the recent setting up of a trust fund has been achieved.

The trust was set up in June of 2003 when Bristol RFC were in dire financial trouble and there was talk of selling the club or even merging with their nearest rivals Bath RFC. The supporters felt that they were being ignored during these times and wanted to be able to contribute so a trust was established.

They took advice from a contact within York FC who had been through this process and registered their constitution during July. At first it was tough to make progress due to the internal situation of the club but momentum is now picking up.

The initial focus has been to get out into the community with a stall at local markets, the balloon festival, local university fresher fairs etc. and distributing leaflets and membership forms at these events as well as on the terraces at games. They have tried to identify a target audience outside of the regular supporters. Over 20,000 leaflets have been distributed to local pubs, clubs and gyms.

They have just started their Corporate plans to get local companies on board to support the initiative and hope to work with the 52 other junior rugby teams within the Bristol area as well as schools and youth teams. Their first venture at sponsoring a local youth event saw over £5K raised from local companies who backed the event and it is expected that the initial cash raised will be used to support the day to day activities of Bristol RFC rather than a specific project.

They have started to make progress with getting a representative on the Bristol RFC board and are eagerly looking forward to a meeting with the board during December 03 and Bristol RFC board members are already attending meetings with the trust.

Jake closed by wishing the Newport fund good luck and by saying how delighted he was that another rugby union trust was being established.

### **Roger Eady – Newport RFC**

Roger gave the trust fund the 100% backing of Newport RFC. He explained how all of the recent events regarding the Newport Gwent Dragons was obviously very straining on all those involved and said that the positive intentions of the trust fund was exactly the sort of good news that Newport RFC wanted to hear about and get involved with. Recently some of the Newport board felt as if they had no friends within the rugby world and that the news regarding the trust was a 'great, great moment.' With all of the WRU's sniping comments Newport RFC has felt isolated but the efforts of the supporters club and the new trust fund were greatly appreciated.

Roger paid particular compliments to the efforts of Dennis Bennett and the supporters club.

The club is going through difficult times having to financially support the team and the Rodney Parade facilities whilst also maintaining its commitments to the educational projects such as Gateway Rugby and the Second Half. The WRU has withdrawn funding for such initiatives even though it continues to push the importance of junior development and anything the trust can do to support such efforts would be appreciated.

Roger's thoughts regarding the use of funds supplied by the trust fund are in line with those of the trust committee. He believes that funds should be directed towards specific projects rather than be absorbed in the general on-going expenses and that he would be only too willing to submit such ideas to the trust fund.

Roger closed by saying how proud he was of the Newport RFC team achievements this year and of the fantastic support that the team has been given. It was the supporters who were keeping moral up and the community approach being put forward by the trust would have a positive impact on Newport RFC as a whole.

### **Question & Answer Session**

The following questions were raised from the floor:

John Samuel – Does the formation of the trust fund infringe on the existing efforts of the supporters club?

Answer – No. There have been excellent communications between the two groups and the trust has the written formal approval of its efforts from the supporters club. The trust is hoping to run its efforts in co-operation with the supporters club as a complimentary partnership.

Robin Kerry – Is the trust fund able to claim Gift Aid tax relief on any donations?

Answer – No. Due to the wide aims of the trust not specifically targeting one group but a instead a wider audience.

Lawrence Cullen – How much finance is going to be needed to set up the trust fund before it can start to raise any cash?

Answer – Approximately £700 for the registration and a further £120 for costs associated with the website.

Annual on-going costs should be in the region of £500

? – The person asking the question stated that he was still confused about how we differed from the supporters club. It looks as if both groups are competing for the same resources.

Answer – The points raised above were reiterated and emphasis put on the fact that the trust is trying to raise larger sums of cash via different means.

Steve Williams (a member of the supporters club) clarified his opinions of the trust fund by stating that he could see no possible conflict between the aims. The strategy of the trust would enable Newport RFC to grow and develop.

Graham Jarvis – Asked if anyone from the supporters club committee was prepared to say a few words at the meeting to clarify the explanations given by the trust fund committee.

Dennis Bennett (Chairman of the supporters club) did so by acknowledging the meeting and endorsements between the two organisations. He underlined the fact that the supporters club runs events for the benefit of its members where as the trust funds events will primarily be cash raising events for the benefit of Newport RFC.

? – Does the trust fund support the Newport Gwent Dragons.

Answer – The trust fund has been primarily set up to support Newport RFC. It's aims and objectives will have a wider scope to enable any future developments between Newport and Newport Gwent Dragons to be monitored and acted upon accordingly. Any positive actions to support Newport RFC will obviously have a knock-on effect to the Dragon as they are 50% owned by Newport RFC.