

# **CARDIFF BLUES SUPPORTERS CLUB AND CF10 ARMS PARK RUGBY TRUST**

## **NOTES OF AN OPEN MEETING AND QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH BOARD MEMBERS OF CARDIFF BLUES LIMITED**

### **HELD AT CARDIFF ATHLETIC CLUB, CARDIFF ARMS PARK ON THURSDAY 14 MARCH 2019 COMMENCING AT 7.45PM**

PRESENT: Alun Jones (Chair); Martyn Ryan (Board Member and Company Secretary); Richard Holland (Chief Executive); Supporters of Cardiff Blues

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The open meeting had been jointly organised by CF10 Arms Park Rugby Trust and Cardiff Blues Supporters Club.

Sarah Hopkins (Chair, Cardiff Blues Supporters Club) welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the newly appointed Chair of Cardiff Blues Limited (CBL), Alun Jones. She stressed the importance of creating a relationship and improved communication between the Board and supporters. Rumours emanating from the Professional Rugby Board (PRB) during the last week had seen a vacuum created which had been filled by speculation due to a lack of openness from PRB members.

She stressed the importance of hearing and listening to the views of supporters, who could make a significant contribution to the solutions being sought for professional rugby. Supporters were the heart of a club. Players, staff and sponsors would come and go but supporters were there for the duration.

David Allen (Chair, CF10) also welcomed supporters to the meeting. He said that representatives of CF10 had met AJ in December following the announcement of his appointment but prior to him taking up post. He said that AJ had immediately accepted an invitation to meet with supporters. He hoped that the Q&A would be the first in a number of regular events which might be usefully held every six months.

Richard Holland said that the date had been agreed a while ago with CF10 in order to share the CBL vision with supporters.

#### **PRESENTATION**

AJ thanked CBSC/CF10 for the invitation and opportunity to address supporters. He endorsed the sentiments that supporters were the lifeblood of the club. He recognised that a vacuum had existed in the last week but there was little that he was able to say as he was bound by PRB confidentiality.

He said that the Board and the Executive were striving to set out a clear vision and purpose for CBL. They were planning for success both on the field and off the field; fail to plan, plan to fail. Some activities were short term which helped to set the pathway for the long term.

RH then made a PowerPoint presentation on their framework for operation. He made the following points:

- CBL had developed a strapline of 'Strength Through Unity' sometime ago and this would be kept.
- CBL's Purpose: Unite Our Region; Engage with People; Collaborate with our Partners; Develop Talent; Share Success.
- The clubs values were embedded in a complementary logo to the main CB logo and would be used primarily for internal purposes and marketing.
- A continuous virtual circle was envisaged for success on the field leading to success off the field which in turn led back to success on the field. This was the principle element of the strategy.
- Success in professional sport was principally reliant on money and its generation. CBL had to become a stable business.
- The fundamental aim was to win the Pro14 and the European Champions Cup and every decision should be aimed at contributing towards this. Next year the objective is to reach the Q/F of the Champions Cup and play-offs of the Pro14.
- CBL had been challenged by the WRU to produce more internationals (by gender and age group).
- A key to the above success will be the redevelopment of the ground. CAP is CBL's home and they want to stay there.
- As well as developing the ground they are committed to developing both players and staff.
- The Cardiff Capital region had huge potential both economically and socially which CBL should seek to capitalise upon.
- The main board was changing with Peter Thomas stepping down as chair and Alun Jones taking over. Sir Gareth Edwards and Paul Bailey had also stepped down and this created room for new non-executive directors (NEDs) to be appointed in due course.
- A new structure is being established to feed into the Board of Directors, this will include a Professional Rugby Management Board and a Rugby Supporters Working Group (involving RH, AJ, MB, CBSC, CF10, Cardiff RFC SC, Merthyr SC and Pontypridd SC).
- Continued engagement with stakeholders in the region was essential and there are work programme plans to achieve the aim of uniting our region.
- 10 work-streams/objectives had been agreed with PRB and these would be reported upon. They include: Board modernisation; redevelopment of CAP; commercial revenue increases; playing targets/success; strengthening academy; developing internationals etc.
- CBL want more settled fixture times rather than varying times as at present.
- 70% of playing staff have education or business links away from CBL and the Board is supporting these initiatives with education and business partners.
- In summary, the fundamental aim was to create the best environment possible for players, staff, fans and sponsors.

#### **QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION**

CBL were asked why CAC should develop the ground when CBL are behind on their rent. AJ said that he wanted to develop a relationship with CAC to enable the redevelopment to happen for the benefit of both companies. MR responded by saying that CBL are two payments behind and finances are currently stretched; the board have to deal with the issue and are trying to resolve the rent

position a.s.a.p. They hope to participate and be involved in redevelopment as do the WRU. Without the redevelopment no partner will succeed in their objectives.

AJ was asked what could be shared in relation to PRB. He responded that he wished he could share more than he could but he was governed by confidentiality. However, most of the issues had been reported and discussed extensively in the media. Final conclusions had not been reached and it had been decided that they needed to get on with the status quo for next year as budgets needed to be finalised and contracts agreed. Work continues on trying to develop a strategy for the professional game.

Cardiff Blues were not party to most of the discussions that took place recently, however, he did say that they were approached about a merger from one of the regions. This was considered but rejected. As far as he was concerned it was important to have a strong capital city team for the reasons discussed. However, all options were still on the table for future consideration.

MR emphasised that the key to PRB was that 5 independent companies operating in an inter-dependent way.

A further meeting of the Joint Supporters Group with Martyn Phillips will be held on 8 April. CBSC will be represented at that meeting and would welcome any questions.

CBL were asked about diversity on the Board and the importance of having a Supporter Director. CBL accepted that there was no woman on the Board and that there were various technical issues about appointing a Supporter Director. Moreover, CAC had 3 representatives on the Board and this should be the route to getting representation. AJ said he was committed to modernising the Board and would have liked to have done the work sooner but the PRB issues have been all consuming to date. Applications for NED posts were still on the table.

Regarding player recruitment, a number of players have been contracted and announcements made. A further three players have been contracted during the week and these will be announced next week after the conclusion of the Six Nations. A further 15 players in the squad are under consideration and discussions are taking place at the moment. Not all will be retained. Also looking at strengthening a number of positions.

CBL were asked about the potential commercial reach to CB supporters who live at a distance. The match-day app was considered to be not very impressive. AJ was asked to give an assurance that he would personally review the social networking reach of the club, which he gladly did.

There was concern about start times for matches and the impact that evening matches had on supporters especially families being able to attend. RH said that this was primarily due to TV income driving the agenda. It is likely that this will increase with the national game eventually moving to pay-to-view.

The Pro14 was considered to be unloved and most supporters wanted regular matches with English clubs. MR explained that English Premiership clubs were not interested in such a structure. However, with the growing influence of firms such as CVC there could be greater influence brought to bear from that direction as a result of amalgamation of commercial rights.

CBL were thanked for their time, presentation and openness in answering questions. An appeal was made that PRB should also embrace such an approach. The problems of recent weeks had been caused by a lack of openness and supporters not knowing the context of discussions or decisions.

With changes taking place in Board membership, CBL representatives were asked about the changing financial position of the company. For many years the club had relied upon PT, MR and PB as benefactors. MR felt that the new approach being adopted with PRB was both significant and important. The short term problems would be sorted out by the Board and he envisaged that private money would continue to be required in Welsh rugby.

In thanking AJ, RH, and MR, DA said that he hoped a further meeting could be held in 6 month' time. AJ said he would be delighted to return then and he expected that the Rugby Supporters Working Group would be up and operational prior to that date.

The meeting closed at 9:20pm.

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