



**It seems quite unusual for a non local player, particularly for an overseas player, to choose to remain in the area around their last professional club. What has made you and your wife want to stay in the Portsmouth area? And , of all the interesting and beautiful places you've been, what made you decide to stay in the Portsmouth area**

As soon as we arrived we were struck by the warm welcome that we got from everyone, and immediately felt comfortable on the South Coast. I struck up a good relationship with the the fans as well and they were all so friendly, it felt the right place to be. And then, believe it or not, the problems that the club was experiencing also had a positive effect. I've always been interested in the governance of football and I really wanted to be a part of the club's recovery.

Now we've got a good social circle too, and we're really happy here.

**It must have been pretty traumatic to have arrived at the club and then to see it looking like it was going to fall apart before your eyes. What made you want to stay when many of those around you were jumping ship?**

It was a difficult time to be playing for the club. There were so many players coming and going - I think I played or trained with over 100 guys - it was difficult to get any team feeling, or to get to know how people played. There were a lot of promises made and broken, and it made things very tough on the playing side. But I was always going to stick around because I had caught the Pompey bug, and as I said I was keen to be a part of the club's revival.

It was incredible to see the amount of passion, dedication and hard work being put into the club by the Presidents, HNWs and other people that saved it, and the reaction of the fans to the call to invest in shares.

While I was still on the playing staff I did some courses through the PFA and FA including one that looked at the transition of players to the governance of football and I knew that was what I wanted to do when I stopped playing, and I wanted to do it at Pompey.

**Clearly you will have to be, if you aren't already, earning a living in order to survive. You've completed a sports business course; you're doing your coaching badges; you're involved with the Academy; you're a board member on the Pompey Trust. What are your personal ambitions for the future?**

I want to be involved in football at the senior administrative level. I'm doing my UEFA B coaching badges at the moment and will go on to do the UEFA A badges following that. But there is so much going on behind running the football club. Just the amount of work that is done in the Academy, for example, is amazing. The club has some local scouting contacts going to matches all over the area to look at young players. The set up is very good and the way the players are schooled in not only the football side of the game but also in the development of them as young men is fantastic. You can see the results in the players that have come through in the past year or so. But for every Conor Chaplin, Adam Webster or Ben Close, there are others who have not quite made the grade for one reason or another.



**Some supporters have suggested that the club has missed out on youngsters that have been recommended to the club by supporters.**

That's possible, but there may be very good reasons for that. They may not have performed when the scout saw them. There may have been problems with the application or behaviour of the boy, regardless of the skill. But I can tell you there are people working very hard to bring the right sort of players into the Academy.

**In your experience how does this compare with the German model.....is it as good?**

I don't think the recruitment side is that much different. But there is a much more competitive nature to the German Academies. The country is split into three areas and they have a league competition in each area in each of the age groups which is very competitive. To win any of the leagues is a big achievement.

**In your election 'manifesto' you stated that you felt that you could bring a different perspective to the Trust Board as an ex-player. What specifically can you offer to the Board. You spoke of 'improving identity' and of 'making it a cult'?**

We really do have to make something special of being a Trust member. We've been working on communications to trust members, and have achieved quite a lot over the last few months. This gives members access to information that they do not necessarily get as an 'ordinary' supporter. We need to give them this kind of thing. Something that they cannot get elsewhere. Special offers. This will help generate the sort of 'cult' feeling that I was talking about. We need to make supporters feel they are missing out on something if they are not part of the 'cult'.

It's something we particularly need to do with young people so that we can engage them early and make them feel special, to have a bond with the Trust and the club.

We need to emphasise the fact that a membership just costs £5 pound a year, currently, and by joining you can be sure that the club will never go into admin again. It will prevent us having owners that might want to change club colours or the name of the club, and the fans will always have a say on key issues such as pricing, stewarding, etc.

Members get to vote at the AGM, to find out what's going on behind the scenes, visit members only events.

**How does your background as a player help you in regard to the board's objectives?**

A lot of the time players can be a little cut off from what goes on in a club. They are focused on what they do - training, playing, recovering, injury rehabilitation, whatever - and do not really get involved in anything else. I can bring a different viewpoint to the way the club, and the board see the playing side. It's important that there is as wide as possible a range of skills across those people that are involved in the club's governance, and I think the current Trust Board has a very good mix of skills. And now the Trust is being invited to meetings of the Presidents, as well as having a President co opted onto the Board, so we are all learning more about each other and planning towards the same aims.



**You recently visited Schalke 04 on a fact finding visit. Aside from bringing back a rucksack full of literature, were there some key points that PCFC could take on board?**

The whole structure of the club, though it is community owned too, is different to the way we are set up. They have a membership of over 130,000 and each adult pays a subscription of between £20 - £35 a year, depending on age, to be a member. To get the chance to book tickets first, they have to be a member, and so it is very important to be a member. They are a Sports Club and provide access to a number of other sports, including women's football, basketball, even table tennis, so it's a big social thing too.

**Schalke's membership stood at over 130,000 in 2014 of which, notably, 20% were female and 14% under ten years old. Why do you think that might be?**

They have made an effort to increase membership over the past few years, and realise that young people and women are important opportunities to increase membership.

**Schalke's membership stood at 10,000 in 1991. Bearing in mind that part of your responsibility on the new board is to increase membership, were there any lessons to be learned from the dramatic increase of Schalke's membership between then and the 130,000+ in 2014, and how important is the involvement of other sports [women's football; basketball; handball; athletics; table tennis etc] in the membership, and maintenance of the current levels, at Schalke?**

I think that the important thing has been to require membership to purchase tickets. It's a big driver. But I'm not sure that Pompey can achieve the same growth - from 10,000 in 1991 to over 130,000 in 2014 - because the culture is different. It's not likely to be an option to ask supporters to pay £20 membership before they can buy a ticket.

I think it is very difficult to compare as Schalke is a 'pure' membership club with different structures.

But for our Trust members' £5 membership we do need to give them something that means they will join and of course renew each year, and we will be working on this over the next few months or so.

One of my board responsibilities is the development of young people's membership, and I think this will be very important in growing the membership long term.

We also need to involve the membership more in the big decisions that face the club. Things like the development of Fratton Park and a strategy for the Trust, for the community club. People will need to know that we are listening to the membership and we are planning a programme of consultation to find out what they want from their club. It's not easy and we can't take all the different opinions forwards, but we need to ask.



**What are the most important issues for the Trust and the Club in the coming months and years?**

We need to plan for the long term future of Fratton Park; we need to have an idea of how future investment within PFC will work and just what a Golden share would achieve; we need to increase our membership; work with younger fans; and we need to have a longer term vision for working with the Academy.

**What do you feel is important about a Community Club?**

I believe that it's a model that more clubs outside the Premiership will be adopting in the future. The structure of football is crazy. I think we are one of only 15 clubs in the 72 in the Football League which are operating in credit. That cannot be sustainable. Pompey is now being seen as a flagship model for community ownership.

I want to be a part of this and to help the club continue to climb the ladder but to retain a community club, even if there has to be tweaks in its constitution along the way. It's exciting and important work. Who with a love of the game wouldn't want to be involved?

*Johnny was talking to Kim Richardson*