

## **Interview With Paul Cook For Trust Matters July 2015 edition**

### ***So, had you ever played for or managed another club in fan ownership before you came to Portsmouth?***

I was manager at Sligo Rovers, and they are a Community Club which is basically run by the supporters. It's an elected chairman, it's an elected committee. They have a very strong 500 club and they rely very heavily on the infrastructure of the club being supported by the supporters.

The 500 club is a £30 a month payment, made by supporters. Obviously that generates a good amount of cash that the club can guarantee.

The biggest problem for supporter owned clubs is that as you actually, hopefully, move through the leagues the finances start to go crazy, as Pompey supporters will know very well.

The finances in football now basically reign. The way it is in the Premier League at the moment I personally think that it gets harder and harder to have fan-owned clubs. Because supporters, without being disrespectful, are normally working class people and there's only so much money they can find. I actually think supporters in this day and age do really well just turning up on Saturdays to support the team, because that's a challenge. If you're a Liverpool fan, and I'm talking about myself now, tickets are approaching £50 so if you want to take your kids, perhaps have a pint or two before the game, the cost of the day out is a lot of money. That's without thinking of midweek games or away matches.

I think the biggest tribute you can pay to our supporters here is that the club is still here, we're up and running and we're good to go.

### ***When you were thinking about taking this position, was trust ownership something that you considered as part of the decision making process?***

I think it was a funny process, because when you're managing another club and a club has asked for permission to speak to you, the dynamics of the situation quickly change about how you feel at your club and you quickly pay more attention to what's going on at the other club.

So certainly by the time you've met the people from Portsmouth, or certainly the Chief Executive and the Chairman and Financial Director, and you've sat down with them, they're all very impressive people in different ways. They've different backgrounds, but the thing you are aware of most of all is the passion that they have for the club. Obviously the Chairman's has been well documented, but certainly Mark Catlin and Tony Brown, they're big Pompey fans as well now, and I think when you have people running the club, they're all intelligent in their own areas and they love the club, there's a better chance.

When I was doing my work on the club, the Trust, the Board, the people on the Board, the way the club is today in terms of training grounds, wage bills and budgets, I certainly thought success isn't too far away.

That can't be highlighted enough for the people in Portsmouth for putting the club in that place from where they were because I think it's well documented that we're in a good place.

I had no doubts and preconceptions about it.

### ***Once you arrived at the club were your feelings about it borne out?***

Yeh, listen, I played football, and I've also been a supporter and been down to Fratton Park as a Liverpool supporter, I've travelled on busses to games here, I've played at Fratton Park, and now, fortunately I'm the manager at Fratton Park....unless we have a poor pre-season!! But I don't think I'll get the sack that quick, to be fair.....

I'm really excited by the challenge. You know, the supporters are ready for success now. It's that simple. In my opinion the club's geared to go and I'm lucky enough to be manager of the club. You know, I think the team will need a little time to gel, and what I mean by that is not long periods, but games. I've always asked supporters to be a little bit patient, they really have to, because pre-season friendlies are not the real deal.

And when some of the lads play their first game at Fratton Park they're not really going to be prepared for what the atmosphere is going to be like, so supporters must be patient. We're all looking forward to experiencing it, but its important to remember that there's 46 games and I'm sure we've got the ability to get us where we want to be.

***When you've been recruiting have the players recognised that this is a supporter owned club, or do they look upon it as just another football club, another employer?***

I think you can never stereotype every player. It would be unfair to do that, because in every walk of life people are different. People should be respected for that. You know at every football club today, there will be a percentage of lads who are aware of the history of the club and the tradition of the club, but there will be a percentage who aren't.

You know at the end of the day good footballers come in work hard, train hard, and love the club. And if as well as that you have an identity and a pride, you'll be one of the few that know a bit about the club.

Certainly I wouldn't be disrespectful to the players and say they all know about the club, about its history and so on, but I know that they will all be prepared to give the club success.

***We've spoken of the issue that finance plays in football. Outside of the Premiership do you see any changes likely in the ownership models of clubs?***

Well, a few years ago I didn't think football could sustain the wages as they were then, and if you look at that it makes me look a fool because the wages have gone even further than they were then. But certainly as a club, and we like to think we are a progressive club now, we've been relying on where we've been and what reasons have been and everything else, but now we're just a positive club; we're just a positive club looking forward.

Tomorrow's a new day for us all. The challenges will be there for the Trust. The challenges will be there for me as a manager; they'll be there for the players; they'll be there for the supporters.

I think history tells us all that the supporters will turn up and that's a very, very big plus you've got in every factor.

*Paul Cook was talking to Trust member Kim Richardson*