



Newcastle Falcons Supporters Club

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2008 / 2009

SUMMARY

The 2008 / 2009 season was a mixed bag for Falcons supporters with poor results up to Christmas, a golden period early in 2009 as the relegation decider against Bristol went decisively to the Falcons and there was some optimism for European Change Cup progress, then a return to early season results saw the supporters once again deflated. The close of season saw many supporters feeling apprehensive as the transfer window saw the departure of many long-standing players, and cautiously optimistic as we get ready to welcome new blood to the Falcons nest.

It was a mixed bag for the Supporters Club as well.

A key objective for the Management Committee over the last few seasons has been to achieve financial control and stability.

At year end we are reporting a loss of £1,163.62 (compared to a loss of £290.96 last year). The increased loss can be attributed to a number of causes:

- Membership income has reduced by nearly £1,500
- Net income from social and fund-raising activities has reduced by £600.
- Living With The Lions no longer provide sponsorship funding of £500 for Player of the Month Awards
- We invested £600 in the redevelopment of the web-site
- We invested £225 in the purchase of 'clappers', to be re-sold at profit in 2009/10

We believe that despite the increased loss, we have maintained a strong financial control over the affairs of the Supporters Club.

The key to regaining financial control has been the management of away travel. And here we have seen the Supporters Club achieve a virtual break-even position on away travel activities for the first time in seven years.

It is disappointing that Membership numbers are significantly reduced – from 379 last year to 207 this year – but this is perhaps more a reflection of the form of the Falcons than disenchantment with the Supporters Club.

Social activities have continued to develop and Supporters Club Members have had plenty of opportunity to lay their hands on memorabilia and other prizes through raffles and competitions.

And the year finished with the Supporters Club coordinating activities that have allowed us to donate nearly £2,500 for various good causes.

During the year we have re-vamped our web-site, providing the opportunity for people to join the Supporters Club, and have also increased the use of e mail as a means of communicating with Members. We have also re-established The Review and made this available on-line. These measures have not only made our material more topical, attractive and, we hope, interesting, but also reduced our postage and stationery costs.

One particularly pleasing feature of the past year has been the growing bonds between the Supporters Club and the Falcons Club. Most evident is the club's sponsorship of coaches to the crucial relegation decider at Bristol as well as the European Quarter Final match at Vicarage Road, this relationship has manifested itself in other ways as well.

The Supporters Club Talk-In with Dave Thompson at the end of last season was perhaps the fore-runner of similar events held by the Chairman and open to all season ticket holders this year, at which he explained his vision for the Club and answered some difficult questions at a time on anxiety and uncertainty.

We have also benefited from access to players for Talk-Ins and been able to acquire memorabilia that has then found its way into Supporters Club Members' hands via raffles and competitions. It was fitting therefore that during the year we awarded Dave Thompson Honorary Life Membership of the Supporters Club.

The Falcons are in a period of change. There will be plenty of new players on the pitch next season. They can be assured that they will continue to receive support from the Supporters Club, which despite a mixed-bag of a season is in a sound position to continue to provide services for Falcons supporters.

Membership

In 2008 / 2009 the Supporters Club attracted 207 people to become Supporters Club Members. This is a significant reduction on the previous season when there were 379 Members. There has been a corresponding reduction in Membership Income, from £2,885 last year to £1,512 this year.

This is disappointing, but we believe that it may reflect more on the fortunes of the Falcons this year than on the services provided by the Supporters Club.

Another significant factor in the reduced number of Members this year was the fact that the club generously sponsored the coach travel to Bristol and Saracens. The discount available on away travel trips by being a Member always attracts new Members, but this year the fact that our two most popular trips were those fully subsidized by the Club meant that we could not exploit the occasions to attract more Members as the trips were open to all, irrespective of whether they were Supporters Club Members or not.

To counter the risk that with the development of the web site people will access our services without actually joining the Supporters Club, we have developed a 'Members Only' area and we intend to develop this further so that being a Member brings access to services and benefits not available to web-site browsers.

We now have four Honorary Life Members: Rob Andrew, Dick Godfrey, Matt Burke, and Dave Thompson.

Away Travel

In 2008/ 2009 we have continued to fulfill our commitment to assisting Supporters Club Members to travel to away matches, ensuring in doing so that we provide a quality experience that is cost-effective.

The major losses that were sustained on away travel in the past – which reached a peak with the loss of over £3,000 sustained in 2006/07 - are no longer acceptable. We undertake competitive tendering for coaches on a match-by-match basis whilst still requiring coach companies to provide quality coaches and to allow the on-board consumption of alcohol. Whilst we will try every avenue possible to get people to away matches – including hiring smaller coaches – if a trip is not viable it does not take place.

We have also developed a wide-range of on-board fund-raising activities – raffles for signed shirts, quizzes and fancy-dress competitions – to raise funds to off-set travel costs whilst ensuring that travelers have a great time (irrespective of team performance).

The two most popular trips in 2008/09 did not actually cost the Supporters Club a penny.

The Chairman of the Falcons, Dave Thompson, generously agreed to sponsor the coach travel to the Friday night relegation decider at Bristol if the Supporters Club organized the travel. We were happy to do so and the trip proved very popular, buoyed by free drink and food from the Club and its sponsors, attracted a lot of media interest, saw the Bristol supporters voices drowned out by Falcons supporters, and stimulated possibly the best Falcons performance of the season.

The Chairman repeated his gesture for the European Challenge Cup Quarter Final match against Saracens. Although the result eluded the team, the trip was popular and enabled us to raise funds for the L'Aquila appeal as well as introduce plenty of people to the delights of away travel.

In 2008/09 we provided 19 coaches to take people to 11 matches. Of the 11 away trips operated, 6 made a surplus. There was only one fixture – to Gloucester mid-week – when we did not provide away travel. Income from Coach Fares and Fund-Raising Activities on coaches was £5,010.01. Expenditure totaled £5,137.

Overall, therefore, we made a loss of £126.99 on nineteen coaches, or £6.68 per coach - quite a contrast to the loss of £228.50 per coach being made two years ago.

Social Activities and Talk-Ins

The past season has seen a wide range of social activities for Supporters Club Members.

There were two Talk-Ins, at which Supporters were able to chat with firstly, Director of Rugby Steve bates, and then with defensive coaching guru Alan Tait.

For those unable to travel to Brive we had an evening watching the match on the Big Screen in the Hiding Place, whilst enjoying a pie and pea supper.

We held the annual Christmas Party in the West Stand, and two Pool Tournaments in the Hiding Place, all of which were a great success.

In a departure from tradition we decided to celebrate our cultural heritage with a Celebration of Northumbria. The evening involved very little rugby but combined food, music and a quiz about Northumbria, with the highlight being the entertainment provided by Radio 2 Folk Music Finalists 'Tyde', to provide a thoroughly enjoyable evening for all concerned.

As part of the Tom May testimonial year, the Supporters Club invited Tom along to an evening built around a quiz about his life and career. Tom brought along some friends, including Joe Shaw, Hall Charlton and James Grindal, as well as some personal memorabilia, and a great evening was had by everyone. The proceeds of the evening benefitted Tom's chosen charity.

There have been a lot of quizzes this year – on away trips and at social events – but the most competitive was probably that which took place when a team of Northern Hemisphere players took on a team of Southern Hemisphere players. After seventy questions, the laurels went south by one point, and the Victoria Bush Fire Appeal benefitted from the proceeds.

This summer sees the Lions tour to South Africa and the Supporters Club will be putting on a Lions Family Fun Day to mark the occasion. We are also planning a trip to Ireland.

Supporting Players

We have continued to show our support for players in a number of ways.

In 2008 / 2009 the Supporters Club continued to sponsor Rob Miller. Having sponsored Phil Dowson for a number of years, this year we decided to sponsor Coach Alan Tait. Alan participated in a Talk-In and Rob attended a number of social events, giving Supporters Club Members the opportunity to chat with him.

Sponsorship allowed us to hold a draw to select some Supporters Club Members to attend the Sponsors' Dinner and receive Alan Tait's framed shirt. This will be the first prize in our Summer Raffle, whilst match day tickets were made available as prizes in other raffles.

Although Living With The Lions withdrew their sponsorship of the awards, we have continued to award Player of the Month trophies. The winners are voted for by Supporters Club Members and receive their trophy from one of those who voted for them.

The winners in 2008/ 2009 were:

- September 2008 – Jonny Wilkinson
- October 2008 – Steve Jones
- November 2008 – Mark Sorenson
- December 2008 – Tom May
- January 2009 – Tom May
- February 2009 – Carl Hayman
- March 2009 – Tom May

We also presented a number of Annual Awards.

Almost inevitably, after an amazing testimonial season, Tom May was Player of the Season.

Rugby league convert Danny Williams was the Emerging Player for his try-scoring exploits during the season.

The Unsung Hero Award went to another Falcons player, Johnny Williams, for his ability to sell more raffle tickets single-handedly than the whole of the Committee combined!

A number of special presentations took place during the year.

Presentations were made to Mick Hogan and Richard Metcalf on their departure from the Falcons.

In a moving ceremony, Matt Burke was presented with a framed picture of the Tyne Bridges to mark his incredible contribution to the Falcons, together with a poem written by Supporters Club poet-in-residence, and our secretary, Margaret Smithurst.

Matt also received Honorary Life Membership of the Supporters Club, as did Club Chairman Dave Thompson, to mark his ten year association with the Falcons.

Communications

We have continued to improve our ability to communicate with Supporters Club Members about planned activities, whilst reducing the costs involved.

After some deliberation we commissioned a website designer to revamp our website again. Whilst there was a cost to doing this, the positive feedback received from Supporters Club Members suggests that it was money well spent. More importantly, the new website has facilities to allow people to join the Supporters Club on-line, and to access material not available to those who are not Supporters Club Members.

Next season we intend to develop the web-site to enable people to book travel to away matches on-line.

Combined with a growing use of email messages, we believe that we are now able to keep Supporters Club Members informed about Supporters Club activities in a much more efficient and cost-effective way than we could previously (whilst not forgetting the needs of those who do not have internet access).

We continue to contribute to match day programmes – this year has seen a number of guest contributors from amongst Supporters Club Members write pieces to give our regular contributor Perry Green a rest – and to produce the match day Flyer.

After the disappointment of last year, when we failed to produce a single issue of The Review, this year we have already produced two issues, with another planned before the year-end. Not only that but we have emailed them to Members and made them available to Members via the website, thus reducing postage costs. The new-look Review has attracted some positive feed-back and we know that the Review is particularly popular amongst younger Supporters Club Members and those who cannot get to Kingston Park as often as they would wish. We are committed to ensuring that it becomes a regular feature in the lives of Supporters Club Members.

Charity Activities

The latter part of the 2008/09 season saw the Supporters Club engage in a number of activities that will result in us being able to donate almost £2,500 to a number of good causes, thanks to the generosity of Supporters Club Members:

- Cash for Kids – the nominated beneficiary of the Tom May testimonial year – received £789.94 from the activities of a Tom May evening
- The victims of the Victoria Bush Fires will benefit from £285.70 raised as a result of the North vs South Quiz evening
- The L'Aquila Earthquake Appeal was initiated in response to the tragic events in the Italian city where many Falcons supporters had such a good time in December 2005. Our fund-raising activities have attracted media interest and we have worked closely with the members of Bath Rugby Supporters Club who have undertaken their own fund-raising activities. Already over £1,300 has been raised through bucket collections, a raffle and a quiz, with more to follow in the coming months.

Thanks

Throughout the past year I have received wonderful support as Chairman from all members of the Management Committee and thank each and every one of them for their enthusiasm and dedication.

On a personal note I also thank my wife and family for their understanding and support.

Martin F Peagam
Chairman