

PE1319/X

14 November 2011

Anne Peat
Clerk to the Public Petitions Committee
Public Petitions Clerks
Room T3.40
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Anne

**SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT CONSIDERATION OF PETITION PE1319
ON IMPROVING YOUTH FOOTBALL**

Please accept the following as the submission for Petition PE1319 on behalf of the Scottish Youth Football Association (SYFA).

Introduction

Firstly I would thank the Public Petitions Committee for allowing grassroots football to comment on the petition and give me the opportunity to introduce the Scottish Youth Football Association (SYFA).

SYFA currently consists of 7 regions, 47 leagues and 3148 member clubs covering age groups 6 to 21 years. Membership is off 2 classes namely full membership covering ages 12 to 21 and associate membership covering ages 6 to 11 however we are in the midst of an external self funded consultation to review membership amongst other structural considerations as measured against the 2006 Companies Act. During this season 105 member clubs have resigned due to a number of factors, mainly facilities and facility charges.

On the SYFA online registration system we have 33,819 players registered for full member clubs with a system for younger age groups being reviewed and self funded. This allows for easy tracking of player movements. Also during the season there have been 3454 player cancellations.

We also have 11361 volunteer positions registered on the same online system.

Evidence session 21 January 2011

I would comment on the session as follows:

Unfortunately on occasions young people have had some bad experiences with football that have endangered their further participation within both football and sadly other sporting activities. I as you would imagine for a person in my position love football and have experienced the positive power of football to affect participant's lives and as such their life styles. One example is CRBS checks on officials with previous history of criminal activity. To this end it is important that all involved ensure that young players are no longer treated or perceived as being treated as commodities when signing registration forms/contracts. I thank Tam Baillie for raising the debate around this key point.

I believe that there needs to be an explanatory leaflet coupled to an exit strategy for young elite players that is easy to understand and completely transparent. Said strategy then needs to be enforced and actively encouraged by SFA and their member clubs. This would ensure that players and parents know exactly what they are signing and its duration. No ambiguity or confusion needed. It is vitally important that any player or parent has been instructed that a registration/contract can be for 3 years at the behest of the club (SFA Registrations Procedures 2.5.1)

There is no opt out for players however clubs can release players throughout the season. This has been confirmed by the SFA Registrations Department.

Surely a player's training programme must be for an entire season and if you will indulge me "not just for Christmas". If players do not receive a complete years training as per the programme surely there is a clear breach of funding / grant conditions that results in young players being treated as "jerseyfillers".

The huge difficulty with open day trials for released players is that after being released a player is normally devastated, this affects his performance and as such some clubs no longer attend the trials.

The matter of compensation clouds the debate about freedom to move at the end of each season, should it read freedom to move when compensation is paid. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that when challenged legally clubs have shied away from contesting such issues in open court.

A simple question, if compensation payments are attributed to the training of young players, do volunteers acting at grassroots levels not carry out this same function?

It was also suggested that matches are played in a non-competitive spirit, I have never known a non-competitive football match at any level of the game. Another suggestion made was that players leaving elite programmes "do not have a future in the game". The ethos of the grassroots game is all about participation and fun where we try to accommodate all players.

SYFA Registration Procedures - Cancellation

In order to give a balanced view I will include the procedure for player release within SYFA grassroots football:

86. Both SFA Recreational Forms and Associate Player registration shall be binding on the player and the club until 30th June of the season for which the player is registered unless cancelled at an earlier date.

An Associate Player registration for Summer Football shall be binding on the player and the club until 30th November of the season for which the player is registered unless cancelled at an earlier date

99. A player may have his registration cancelled by submitting a letter requesting such cancellation to the secretary of the player's current club. If the club secretary agrees to cancel the player, the club secretary would go online and submit the cancellation request to SYFA. The SYFA decision will be emailed to the club secretary.

100. A Club desiring to have a player's registration cancelled, the club secretary must go online and submit the cancellation request to SYFA. The SYFA decision will be emailed to the club secretary.
103. When a player and a club for which he is registered are unable mutually to agree to the cancellation of his registration, the player may apply in writing to the National Secretary to have his registration cancelled. In such circumstances, the registration shall be cancelled when a period of 28 days has elapsed from the date such application was properly lodged and provided that the SYFA is satisfied that the player has met all his commitments to the club. If the SYFA are not satisfied they will carry out an investigation. The player will only be eligible to participate again in football after receiving written notification from the National Secretary.
- A player may only have his registration cancelled in such a manner, once per season.
104. The Executive Committee shall have the power to cancel registration of players in cases of clubs for which they are registered becoming defunct, debt suspended for a period of one month or where reasons satisfactory to the Executive Committee are adduced why the registration should be cancelled.

2 hours Curriculum Time for Physical Education

The figures for the implementation of the 2 hour target are well documented and are a poor reflection on Scottish Education Departments. I believe that quality PE ticks so many boxes that a possible outcome from this petition is the immediate enforcement of 2 hours and targets set to work towards the proposed 4 hour target. For Scotland it is imperative that we do not lose any further young people to inactivity and obesity.

Facilities

I think that facilities are currently the largest barrier to increasing participation and therefore failing to achieving Government Policy. We can create all the best coaches in the world but if they can not get facilities to actively coach tomorrows sporting stars we will never affect positive change. My grandson plays with a club in East Kilbride who have one third of a pitch for one hour per week. This one hour consists of set up and clearing the pitch leaving coaching time restricted to approximately 45 minutes.

Cost of synthetic pitches continues to be a major concern. I must confess that I do not understand the economics. A grass pitch can hold 2 events per week consisting of either matches or training sessions. Cost of pitch maintenance is high e.g. grass cutting, line marking, etc. A synthetic pitch can be used all day every day with much reduced maintenance costs plus players leave a much cleaner dressing room. My dilemma is why then does a synthetic pitch cost approx £120 per match and a grass pitch £30 per match.

I hope this written submission is of use to the Public Petitions Committee

Yours sincerely

David Little
For and on behalf of the Scottish Youth FA