

FAB Meeting

Tues 17th Dec, RTC

Tuesday, December 17 at Rangers Training Centre. In attendance Donald Gillies (RFC), Stuart Langan and Gary Ralston (Rangers FAB).

Please note, the meeting was held before the SWPL announced (Monday, 6 January) that agreement had been reached with the BBC to show women's matches on their BBC Scotland channel: [SWPL announces first ever broadcast matches on BBC Scotland | Scottish Women's Premier League](#)

GR: There have been several fixture clashes this season with the men's team that have been frustrating. What are the chances of more Friday night football moving forward?

DG: There's no question you'll see a lot more Friday Night Football in the SWPL in general next season. We hope, of course, to qualify for European football – particularly with the advent of the new Europa League – so, if that's the case, it's more likely to be in the second half of the campaign for Rangers because group stage European matches in the first half of the season will be played on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday for Champions League and Europa League. Teams who are not participating in Europe are most likely to be scheduled for the Friday night in the first instance. We moved our Sky Sports Cup quarter final with Motherwell in November to a Saturday night to avoid a clash with the men's team, who were playing St Johnstone on the Sunday. The atmosphere at K-Park in East Kilbride that night was brilliant. It's something we're keen to repeat.

SL: How possible is it to avoid fixture clashes with the men's team?

DG: We identify potential clashes as early as possible and are proactive with the Scottish Women's Premier League (SWPL) in terms of identifying alternative kick-off times, where possible. The game against Celtic at Broadwood in October was particularly challenging as it ended up falling on the same night the men played Lyon at Ibrox in the Europa League. I accept responsibility for that – I should have caught it before the game was made public by SWPL. It initially seemed logical to schedule that game midweek as both teams were involved in Champions League, but in reality those games need to be on weekends to give the best access options for supporters. I should have insisted it went ahead on the Sunday at noon or 3pm, but Sky were keen to broadcast and the decision was made around the date and kick-off before the men played Dynamo Kyiv in the Champions League qualifier. There are a lot of moving pieces in scheduling and by the time we knew we'd been drawn at home to Lyon that same night, Sky were reluctant to move the fixture and, clearly, the Old Firm match is valuable to them. UEFA also controls what can be broadcast on screen in the

stadium footprint, including Edmiston House, on European nights so fans at Ibrox couldn't watch our match on television before the Lyon game, unfortunately.

However, we do all we can – we managed to flip our fixture with Glasgow City earlier in the season so it could be played at Ibrox, for example. We're able to be a little bit more proactive with the SWPL and they've been a little bit better with us, acknowledging that supporters want to go to both men's and women's games, knowing also it will drive better their audience. Our game against Queen's Park on 12 January was due to be played at 4pm, when the men are kicking off against St Johnstone at Ibrox at 3pm. Queen's Park are not a professional side and couldn't initially change the kick off time until earlier in the day as they play at Stenhousemuir, who had other contractual obligations for Ochilview at that time. In the end, we got it changed. The match will be televised and kicks off at 12.30pm. Still tight for getting to Ibrox, I know, but it's an example of the challenges we face.

GR: Are BBC Alba on board for showing Friday night football – might there be a clash with the BBC Scotland channel, who show matches from the men's Championship? Surely, if Alba exists to promote the gaelic language, they should also be amenable to doing everything possible to promote the women's game?

DG: Yes, I get your point. In addition to showing games on Alba, the BBC also have their highlights show on BBC Scotland. Alba also promote the women's game with regular half-time features during their matchday coverage. That's an SWPL push but, in fairness, if Alba could do more, then I think they would be open to do more.

SL: But might there be pushback from other departments of the BBC, as it could affect their viewing figures for Championship matches?

DG: We don't know, but that shouldn't stop us trying – something like 13 of the 16 games we've played this season have been televised live and an important part of our discussion within Rangers is: 'What is our audience for the women's game, who are we trying to speak to?' We also have to consider RTV in the mix too and look at how we can show games on our own platform where appropriate. This would allow us to plug into the data we're capturing on our audience to grow the women's game still further among our own supporter base. Pleasingly, our average attendance continues to grow – we're already up on our numbers for last season.

SL: We're currently in discussion with the club on a review of MyGers. Is there more we could do to target rewards actually drive up match attendance – fewer points for buying a season ticket, for example, but points for actually attending the women's games?

DG: Theoretically, you could. Broadwood doesn't have the same scanning technology as Ibrox, but we've been using scanners and QR codes this season to provide us with data that allows us to take a more evidenced based approach. Who is coming to our games? What is their age? Their gender? Are they coming alone, or with family and friends? We have 1200 season ticket holders and we know around 350 of them regularly attend games. How do we incentivise those other 800 to come to more games by offering additional points for MyGers? I don't know at this stage. I think there needs to be a little bit more research and insight. It certainly is a discussion point.

GR: How would you assess our relationship with North Lanarkshire Council and Broadwood. Are we there for the long term?

DG: It's really good, actually – North Lanarkshire Council support us with requests and are creative themselves with how the stadium can operate better for supporters. There are challenges – getting off the roundabout and into the car park, for example. However, we have to look down the road and see what our stadium infrastructure could look like in future. Being a club in Glasgow, and having a home there is an important factor for the future. To not look at ways of creating a stadium in Glasgow that represents Rangers and its supporters would be very short sighted. However, I'm mindful of the sentiment here – people will rightly ask what it would cost, how can the club pay, even why should the club pay. I get that.

GR: So what is the solution for the ambition?

DG: Let me choose my words carefully. I stress this is only aspirational, but there would be ways of doing it with multi partnership groups, particularly the other women's teams in Glasgow, as well as the Scotland national team. It could be funded by four or five different organisations and clubs. Let me be frank, in my opinion, Hampden isn't working for the women's national team. It's too big for attendances of 8,000. But if you had a fit for purpose stadium specifically for women's football, with restaurants and other facilities, a grass playing surface and capacity of 8,000, then suddenly you're looking at stadia sell-outs and a better atmosphere and matchday experience. You could have that Friday Night Football and two games on a Sunday, one after the other. You'd have a fit for purpose stadium with two sets of home and away dressing rooms, on opposite sides of the pitch. Strategically, that needs to be part of the conversation. I believe it should be the next landmark moment for the women's game in Scotland. It would be fundamental for improving the product for the whole of the women's game in this country. As much as Broadwood is great, the matchday experience isn't where it needs to be. However, I don't necessarily think it's consistently brilliant anywhere, for any club. The majority of people who attend women's games do so because they've got a genuine interest in the women's game. It's nice. It's a good family day out. You can buy an affordable pie, there's better chat among fans from both teams, you can meet your friends and see top class female athletes and teams. It's not as tribal. But to grow the game, there needs to be more layers to this whole process.

Entertainment, fan engagement, a buzz that the players can feed off and in turn raise their own levels to match.

SL: But could you imagine the club came out and said they were committing X amount of millions to build a stadium, in partnership with others, for the women's team? There would be uproar. Fans would want that money spent on a striker for Philippe Clement!

DG: I get that. Look, I'm realistic. In terms of the venue I stress again that, ultimately, it's aspirational, but I don't think we'd be pushing for this in isolation. It's a role Rangers could play to help drive forward Scottish women's football as a whole.

GR: That sounds as if you see the future for Rangers as very much part of a Scottish set up, rather than pushing to be part of the WSL, for example?

DG: Our responsibility is to create the best platform for the Scottish players, and the Scottish women's game.

SL: Have you met with the new CEO, Patrick Stewart?

DG: Yes, I've spoken with him four or five times, once in person, and I'm now reporting directly into Patrick. There's no football management board for the women's game in the club and that needs to change. We need to work together to improve how to sell and activate the women's game commercially and financially, and also look at how we portray ourselves through the media. At the moment, I'm trying to connect them all. That will be my next objective. I'm working on a strategy that will, I hope, see the Rangers women's team thrive for many years to come – off the pitch as well as on it.