

A football regulator?

It is fashionable amongst the political parties and some football fans to demand a Statutory "independent" football regulator. Some fans support such a change as they are critical of some club owners or managements and think a Regulator might be able to sort things out for them .

I fear the prospect of an all wise Regulator who would just happen to bring about change in each club that fans would like is a good dream, but difficult for any appointed Regulator to achieve. A Regulator faces very difficult pressures when Team A claims rival Team B has broken rules and then Team B responds with a counter claim. The more rules there are, the more disputes. Where two or more teams are in dispute any verdict will upset a lot of fans.

Football is a popular sport. It is entertainment. It attracts a large number of rich individuals and some companies that like the game and want to spend their money on trying to build a winning team. Some do make more money out of it by succeeding in getting their team promoted and so generating more revenues. Some make money out of associated property development and retail opportunities using the club assets and brand. Many just spend their money on the costly hunt to transfer talent and then pay mega salaries to retain good people which can end in financial losses.

The FA is the regulator. They believe there needs to be rules over how much money a club can spend and borrow and rules over how clubs attract and retain talent. There obviously have to be game rules all accept, and rules over how you win or lose in league and cup competitions. It is difficult to see how an independent regulator could usefully change FA rules over most of these matters. The FA itself is discovering that its efforts to regulate club finances using penalties that include reducing a teams points in the league can upset fans and make rivalries more bitter. What is best settled on the pitch ends up being settled by lawyers.

If we do set up an independent Regulator under Statute law there will then be a wish to drag Ministers into decisions. When too many fans become critical of the Regulator the cry will go up for Ministerial interference or for some change of the law.

There is a good case for an element of fan ownership or for clubs to be established as trusts owned by fans. This would need to be arrived at with agreement or from buy out of the existing owners. All the time the football model is based on bidding ever higher sums for a small pool of well known players and managers clubs will turn instead to billionaires to help fund their expensive habits. Fans will not have sufficient collective money to pay the sky high prices of the famous. They then have to live with that relationship. The rich shareholder is well advised to keep on the right side of the fans. The fans offer the team support, pay high prices for tickets and buy the merchandise. I do not think politicians should tell football clubs and the FA how to finance themselves. There must be no

question of taxpayers bailing out clubs.