

As we draw to the close of my third season as Chairman of this great Club, there is much to reflect on and much for the Bluebirds to be proud of.

Once again, our players have put their heart and soul into their football throughout the season, in friendlies, League matches, in tournaments and in training. Bluebirds football means a great deal to the youth of our community, as we see by the reactions of our players as individuals and as teams, week-in, week-out, every time they score (or concede!) a goal.

We also, once a year, collectively see how much the Bluebirds mean to all of our players and to their families and supporters at our Presentation night, when we gather as a community to recognise the commitment of our players. Anyone can tell by the look on our players faces when they receive an award and hold it up high above their heads for photos that Bluebirds football means more than just turning up at training sessions during the week and matches at the weekend.

One thing I mentioned at our Presentation night and which I'll reiterate here is how great it is to see a growing interest in girls football within the Club. Jermaines U9 girls have had a fantastic season, with silverware, and Beths U12 girls have been training regularly and got stuck into a tournament towards the end of the season. Through the hard work and commitment of Jermaine and several of our other managers, we will also be providing football training for girls aged 5 to 11 in our community throughout the Summer as we are now an FA Wildcats Centre and training has already gotten off to a great start. I hope that we will continue to nurture and grow girls football within the Club in future years – who knows, maybe we'll even inspire a Lioness or two one day?

Our Tournament also surpassed our expectations this year. In spite of the efforts of rabbits and moles, a stuttering electrical supply, a struggling Pavilion plumbing system, a hot food offering where supply could hardly keep with demand and other curveballs, we provided great football for over 200 teams from across the region and raised money for two great charities – our local Air Ambulance and The Nasio trust, supported by Louise our Welfare Officer.

However, our Tournament also illustrated some of the challenges that our Club faces in future too. The first of these is ensuring that we get sufficient numbers of volunteers to help out with all aspects of running the Tournament in future years and indeed other Club events, rather than relying on our more experienced Committee members and long-time friends of the Club. Extra pairs of hands are needed. So in the new season, we will be more vocal in seeking support from a wider network of parents and supporters for the Tournament and for other events.

Secondly, our Tournament showed that leading and managing the different aspects of our biggest Club event fell to a small number of long-standing Committee Members. We need to change that and empower all members of our Committee to lead and

manage different elements of our Tournament and indeed any other 'corporate' event that we need to run to keep our Club vibrant and healthy.

Thirdly, we have the growing nemesis of our Club – the rabbits. And previously, and possibly in future too, the moles. We need to increase our engagement with the Parish Council to see what more can be done to control these pests and this may mean cash investment by the Club too to help bring the situation under control and to ensure that we can continue to utilise all of the pitches in the Recreation ground in Tournaments to come. We should not kid ourselves through - these pests are extremely hard to eradicate and it can be very costly to do so as nature always tries hard to find a way to persist. The fight will continue....

Fourthly, whilst the organisation of our Tournament is the envy of our region, there is always room to change and improve how we do things to move with the times. I had feedback from several parents about the Tournament app that Crowmarsh used this year which allowed parents, supporters and players alike to keep up to date with scores and other aspects of the event. It also helped their Club and their referees to organise and run the event and as such, it might be something we could consider too. But again, this comes down to someone with the right skills and who is willing to give up some of their time, to look into it for us – again, a matter of volunteering.

Another aspect of our Tournament that I've reflected on is our use of plastic. We went through hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of single-use plastic bottles, and polystyrene cups and trays on each day of the Tournament, the great majority of which were used for a matter of minutes before being binned. I'm also sure that very little of that waste will ever get recycled. Again, thinking about moving with the times, dare we go plastic free at our Tournament next year? It would be a bold statement to show our players that the Club cares not only about their football, but the world they are growing up in. If Glastonbury can do it for 200,000 people, surely we could do it for 2000?

I look forward to meeting these challenges with the Committee and our wider Bluebirds community, in the season to come.

Once again, I'd like to say a huge thank you to everyone who has supported the Club this year in their many and varied ways – from our sponsors, to the Parish Council, to our parents and supporters and to our players who have made us proud from day one of our season right until the end of our 2018/19 campaign. I would also like to reserve my biggest thanks for our managers, our assistant managers and the officers of the Club who have worked so hard this year, as they do in all years, to deliver great football to the youth of our community. You guys are absolute role models and I look forward to working with you again in the new season.

Mark Toal : Chairman of Cholsey Bluebirds Football Club : 2nd July 2019”