

Petition P-05-1027

Allow Welsh domestic football clubs to play friendlies and allow supporters to attend matches.

Discussions taking place on your working groups with clubs.

All clubs in Wales (until we enter Alert Level 4) are now allowed by the FAW to play friendlies within their own leagues and/or within their own County Borough. However, the Welsh Government Regulation of a maximum number of 30 participants in an outdoor event must be respected.

This 'Rule of 30' does not allow the full compliment of substitutes or coaching staff to participate in these games and the FAW entrusts the clubs and the match officials to ensure that it is complied with.

Currently 26,000 registered players are not playing football compared with the 2019/20 season as a direct consequence of COVID-19 and it is the FAW's view that the 'Rule of 30' is one of the influencing factors.

The FAW's National Leagues Board has set up a Working Group which meets on a weekly basis to discuss the societal and financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without supporters and/or significant financial assistance, it remains a possibility that Clubs within our National Leagues in Wales may not complete the season, which would lead to the demise of the hub of many communities throughout Wales.

The FAW strongly supports an increase in the number of people permitted in organised outdoor sport, but also recognizes the severity of the current Public Health situation. The FAW would encourage the Welsh Government to reconsider this Regulation within an Alert Level 2 situation, enabling 50 persons in organised activity, so there is a staggered approach through the four different Tiers.

The FAW communicates to over 800 clubs through circular emails to COVID-officers and through the [FAW COVID-19 webpage](#).

The possibilities of supporters to attend matches safely.

In our regular meetings with the Welsh Government, we have been appraised with the progress of the test events of 100 spectators and we had been in discussions to deliver one of the test events of 500 spectators at a Cymru Premier League match. We have been informed that these test events are now on hold until February and the FAW has submitted an application to be considered for the delivery of test events in February at Cymru Premier League matches.

We note that prior to the Firebreak; bingo halls were permitted to open with 100 customers in an indoor environment, yet the messaging from Welsh Government is that the spread of the virus is significantly greater indoors, than outdoors. We have stadia in the Cymru Premier League like Jenner Park in Barry, with over 2,500 outdoor empty seats, yet 100 people are sat in the adjacent indoor clubhouse watching the match on television. We have worked with our clubs on designing safe capacities for spectators to attend their venues, based on an introductory figure of 15%, leading up to a maximum of 30%, subject to the success at the lower level. We work closely with the Sports Ground Safety Association to ensure the required safety at all of all Cymru Premier League grounds and believe that the principles outlined in the 'Planning for Social Distancing at Sports Grounds' (SG02) document

are also evident in the FAW's 'Return to Spectating Protocols'. We have partnered with the UK's leading ticket agent to produce a digital ticket, which can only be accessed on the matchday following completion of a COVID-19 self-assessment questionnaire and everybody entering the ground will be temperature tested upon arrival. The digital ticket also acts as the Track and Trace mechanism and can identify if the ticket holder is inside the ground or has been inside the ground at all during the match.

We have safely delivered the principle of Red & Amber zones at all CPL matches since September 12th and our organisation has been commended by senior Welsh politicians who've attended CPL games.

We would like Welsh Government to continue with its pilot project of 500 spectators using the FAW and the JD Cymru Premier, as trusted partners to deliver this safely.

Naturally, we would like to see spectators returning to all football matches in Wales but understand that this principle must be conducted in a controlled environment. We therefore fully accept that it will be very difficult and impractical to implement paperless tickets, good signage, controlled access and egress and effective sanitisation points in ground which are not enclosed.

Ongoing financial viability of leagues and clubs.

We have recently announced a partnership programme with the National Lottery worth £750,000 at Tiers 1 & 2 of the domestic game in Wales. However, this still does not fill the void that has been lost by these clubs due to the non-return of spectators.

As confirmed in their annual audited accounts at the last Financial Year End the Cymru Premier League clubs (Tier 1) alone will have lost over £300,000 revenue from the loss of paying customers and an additional commercial income at CPL ground of £745,305. The current financial situation of CPL Member Clubs is therefore perilous due to the impact of Covid-19.

The Tier 2 Leagues (Cymru North & South) have not yet started their 2020/21 season but they have recently been awarded Elite status to commence in January. As there are far fewer professional players plying their trade in the second tier, matchday income is an extremely important revenue stream for these clubs. One typical example of matchday revenue from last season states receipts of £880 which replicated for a whole season by the 32 Member Clubs would denote a loss of income of over £450,000.

Failing to start/complete the playing seasons in the Cymru South/North could also see a further potential loss of £65,000 as League commercial partnerships and contracts would have been breached.

The Tier 3 FAW Affiliated Leagues are impacted on a smaller scale than the Tier 2 clubs but failing to start/complete the playing season in the newly named Ardal Leagues could also see a potential loss of £23,000 due to unfulfilled commercial contracts.

Our clubs are at the heart of their respective communities and an impact study of Bala Town (attached) gives us all an insight into the importance and relevance of our domestic clubs.

Although we take great pride in the development, growth and positive community impact of our domestic leagues, the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how reliant our respective leagues are on matchday income. We are working with clubs to ensure more viable and streamlined budgets for the coming seasons, but there's no escaping from the fact that our domestic game is currently in a financially perilous position due to the pandemic.