

Panel Night a roaring success

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The consistent thread that linked Gannon's contributions was his determination to develop young players, to see them improve year on year and to have a team that played proper football. The question bubbling around the Motherwell rumour mill - about his long term commitment to the club appeared towards the end of the evening.

He answered by pointing out that he had been asked to go to Brighton in March but that he had turned the move down citing loyalty and commitment to Stockport who were in a perilous position. Having reached safety he was rewarded with redundancy. So he has no illusions about the way people can be treated in the football industry.

He was surprised and disappointed to hear of the question and let it be known that he doesn't have an agent, that his practice was not to 'showboat' and self-promote and that he might be in a position to face a new challenge some time in the future. He believes that Motherwell has a great potential to grow and he sees that as a collective process with him preaching gospel of good football. There was no definitive statement about his contract.

The evening started with the Dallas affair and our man made his surprise at the lack of a reporting structure very clear. His only aim was the wish to help create the best environment to ensure fairness for players. Chris McCart felt that there had been a widening of the gap between players and officials since his playing days, Mark Hateley felt the standard was higher in Europe and that there should be more dialogue post-match. Craig Brown said that there used to be a better reporting system but that the present SPL routine was flawed.

A discussion about the quality of Scottish players was illuminated by contributions from Hateley and McCart. They stressed the individualised nature of much of the work on the continent and made several unflattering comparisons to the work ethic of home grown players. Asked about choosing to field young players ahead of more experienced ones Gannon was quick to reply "younger players are better". He judges players of the training field and has to test them for real to inform his decision making for the January window.

Gannon was asked about his impressions of Scottish football and the answer was that he is pleasantly surprised. The games are played in the right spirit though most teams have similar systems. He is disappointed in the media treatment of the game. Negative views are pushed forward, journalists often adapt quotes to the story they want to write and there was more interest in his private life than he welcomed. On the other hand he is delighted that he can bring through young Scottish talent that may have an influence in the national team in years to come. He related the development of a couple of Welsh youngsters who he nurtured at Stockport and now have national recognition.

Brown was impressed that in his few sights of Motherwell this season he can see clearly the influence of training routines being transferred to the real game. Motherwell were "vibrant" and a credit to the manager. Hateley refereed to his son, Tom, and underlined how important it is to a young player's career that they get 100 or so games in first team football by age 20 or 21. As a result he's delighted that Motherwell are giving young players an opportunity - much better than reserve football south of the border. McCart admitted that Paul Slane might be better staying at Motherwell thereby gaining first team experience rather than tasting the better facilities at Celtic (though he didn't deny that Slane might be on his wish list for Parkhead!).

Most of the panel were keen on some variety of summer football though Gannon was ambivalent. He noted that the pitches in the SPL are in excellent condition (you should have seen ours last season…) but he felt strongly that development football (U19s) should be played in the summer.

TV evidence was next on the agenda. Everyone felt that it should be introduced. Gannon suggested that the only technological advance in football had been the digital watch!

A question about the physical development of players drew some interesting thoughts from our man. He made it clear

that a couple of our boys needed to fill out but that had to be done correctly and that our athletic coach would take care of the matter. He noted the broadening of Reynolds as an example. He reminded the audience of his belief that games are often lost following fouls and pointed out that we were top of the fair play league (as he had been with Dundalk and Stockport). "I want thinking players" who learn to control themselves and have good technique.

Craig Brown pointed out that the biggest cheer at a match is for a goal. The next biggest is for a good hard tackle. Half a dozen passes are met with silence. Therein lies the problem.

As the evening drew to a close towards 10pm, Gannon discussed his notion of 'succession planning'. We know that players will move on, in fact "we know which players are likely to go and we think we know when. So we plan to fill the positions. We can let them go, at a fair price to the club, but we have someone to step in".

He assured fans that he'll be speaking to the press after matches but he felt that the official site should be the preferred place for fans to hear his post-match thoughts.

Trust chairman Joe Smith offered a vote of thanks to the guests and presented them with a small gift. He was delighted at the attendance on what was a cold, snowy December night and thanked all who had signed up for the Trust on the night.