

## Programme Notes v Forest Green Rovers

Good afternoon and welcome to this afternoons match against Forest Green Rovers and a special welcome to those making the long trip from Gloucestershire.

The subject of our notes this week is the debate that has arisen around cup replays and the status of the FA Cup in general.

Within recent weeks we have had top premiership managers in Pep Guardiola and Jürgen Klopp calling for an end to cup replays whilst many clubs also field weakened teams in the FA Cup in order to prioritise the league. Even the manager of Oxford Utd, Karl Robinson, who currently sit just below the play offs in league 1, has called for the replays to be scrapped despite earning a home replay against Newcastle Utd which will be a big financial windfall for the club and a match their fans will relish. He cites the “ridiculous” number of games his players have to play as the reason.

So why have our domestic cup competitions been devalued so much over recent seasons despite many still claiming that the FA Cup is the greatest cup competition in the world? It is certainly the oldest but that doesn't make it the best and over the year it has definitely lost it's magic compared to the days when it was the highlight of the football calendar every season and something that everyone religiously watched at home with their friends and family. As usual you have to follow the money to understand why attitudes towards the cups have changed.

The money clubs currently receive for being in the Premiership are just staggering. Every club gets an equal share payment of £79m and then on top of that there are reward and TV payments which vary on success and are worth about £68m to the top clubs and £14 to the bottom club. The difference in payment for each place teams finish is approx £2m and so the incentive to finish as high as possible is very lucrative.

This contrasts hugely with the Championship where each team receives approx £6.5m in total for basic rewards fees and solidarity payments and then these fall even more sharply for league 1 £1.4m and league 2 £1.0 m. The financial rewards to get promotion to the Premiership are therefore massive

and even from League 1 to the Championship they are significant. It then follows that retaining premiership status and championship status is vital for those clubs involved in relegation battles hence the priority given to league fixtures.

For the top premiership clubs the rewards get even bigger if they qualify for the Champions League with £14.5m guaranteed for those getting to the group stages with a further £2.7m per win and then on top of that there are the gate receipts and matchday commercial income. For the winners the competition is worth at least £70m and so you can see why finishing in the top 4 in the premier league becomes absolute top priority.

The prize fund for the FA cup pales into insignificance:

3 <sup>rd</sup> round winners	£135k
4 <sup>th</sup> round winners	£180k
5 <sup>th</sup> round winners	£360k
QF winners	£720k
SF winners	£1.8m (losers £900k)
Final winners	£3.6m (losers £1.8m)

So, in total the winners will receive around £6.8m plus any TV and commercial revenue.

Although not so attractive if you are trying to get into the champion league or trying to achieve or maintain premiership status these are big sums of money to league 1 and league 2 clubs and can make a huge difference to their sustainability and short term success. In recent times we have had the likes of Lincoln and Newport benefiting greatly from cup competitions and now we have Shrewsbury Town earning a replay at Anfield which, despite Klopp saying he is fielding his U23 team and won't even be there himself, will still be a magnificent occasion for the players and fans alike and to deprive them of that memory would be a travesty. The history of the FA cup is littered with memorable matches of replays involving lower league clubs against premiership teams and it is what makes the FA cup such a great competition. It provides a lifeline for all the lower league and non-league clubs that do well and it is really important in our view that the FA do not give in to the demands of the premiership clubs to eliminate replays.

The answer is not easy, ideally the distribution of the money sculling around in the game would be more evenly distributed but realistically that is unlikely. At the moment the winners of the FA cup get a place in the following seasons Europa League and if that was to be upgraded to a Champions league spot it would provide a huge incentive for the premiership teams to take the competition more seriously, but again it is difficult to see UEFA agreeing to that. Whatever happens the EFL, FA and Premier League need to become much more aligned on the importance of the pyramid system and the vital part the lower league clubs play in the overall popularity and success of football in this country.

Enjoy the match. As always, your support can make a huge difference.

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