

CHAIRMAN'S SPEECH – JOHN NEWSHAM

First of all I would like to put on record our thanks to John Rutherford who has chaired the Association for the past two years. I would also like to ask Sharon, who has stood in as Chair since John stood down, to continue to Chair the rest of this meeting.

The Association was formed back in 1992 and was the brain child of Mike Holford, then the Safety Officer of Nottingham Forest.

The Association principles were based on:

Improving Safety at Football Grounds - by enhancing the role of safety management and the Safety Officer within the Football Industry.

The Association intended to achieve this by promulgating best Safety Management practices, enhancing the role of Stewards and continually developing the expertise of the Safety Officer.

Let's just look at these objectives and **reflect on just what progress has been made:**

With regards to **improving safety at football grounds** "yes" we can all sit here today and agree that standards of safety have significantly improved. **Safety, however, is not a one off concept and** all of us that are Safety Officers or Stadium Safety Managers have to continue to work and to develop ways of maintaining and improving on a safe environment for the industry.

We can never say that we have achieved **the Association principles**. Once that happens we become complacent **and we all know that is the main enemy of safety**.

Enhancing the role of the Stewards:

"Yes", again we can all agree that the development of the Stewards' training **programmes** over the years, notwithstanding the new "On the Ball Training Pack" that has just been introduced, has enhanced the role of the Stewards and again continual development is what is still required. **The training programmes are however just tools and it requires the knowledge, skills and competencies of our members to use these tools to best advantage and why our Association must continue to play a major part in the future of stewarding in the UK and overseas.**

Developing the expertise of the Safety Officer:

"Yes", with the introduction of the FSOA's six day "Event and Match Day Safety Management Course" which was introduced back in 2002 and now "NVQ Level 4 Spectator Safety Management" courses and others available. That "yes" the qualifications for Safety Officers have been and are still available to **help develop the professional knowledge our members require** but the **real** expertise comes from actually doing the job - from understanding the principles and the concept of safety, from continually developing relationships with others, from continually developing our own knowledge but most of all having the determination to succeed.

"We can reflect on the many achievements that the Association has had" "but" have we enhanced the role of the Association?

The answer to me is "no" we have not.

There are two concepts for us to look at I think:

- 1) The financial status of the Association
- 2) The Institute status going forward

- a) The financial status is one that concerns me the most. We have struggled constantly to provide a service to our members and without financial support for the future I don't see a future **for the Association**. It is therefore my intention to focus on improving the financial aspects of the Association through lobbying the Football Authorities to provide that support. Over the years the football authorities keep saying that safety at football grounds is their priority. When you consider that it is our members who are at the forefront of managing safety at every football ground it is a sad indictment on the football industry that we get no support whatsoever from any of the football authorities. **However, on Friday 18th March we met with the authorities to discuss the issue of funding the Association. I am pleased to say that we have had some success. The Premier League has agreed to support the Association with a donation of £15,000.00. At the moment we believe that this is a one off payment and not an annual donation. However, we will continue to lobby all the authorities to assist us with further funding for the future of the Association.**
- b) With regard to enhancing the **Institute status**, I was scheduled to do a presentation today on where we were on that and to see where you our members wanted to go with it. However, at the meeting with the authorities last week the Institute status was discussed. It was decided that it would be better for the Association if we were to put this on hold for a further period of time, to give us time to work on building further relationships with the associations that govern us. We have got to focus on Association business and to get things right in our own Association before we jump into bed with others. I am not saying that we are not going to move forward with the Institute in the future. That is something we still need to consider. The professional status of the Safety Officer and the Institute status are still high on our agenda. But in my opinion the profile of the Association and its financial status are the priorities.

Moving Forward

If we are to move forward as an Association there are going to be many more changes required and many more challenges ahead.

"One of my more recent challenges was to seek out a Patron for the Association". My suggestion was that of Gordon Taylor. It was, therefore, agreed by the NEC that I approach Gordon to see if he would accept the role of "Patron" of the Association.

I met with Gordon a few weeks ago at his Offices of the PFA in Manchester. I spent some time with him discussing the role of the Safety Officers, how the Association was formed and the principles behind it.

I also discussed the Association's role alongside the F.A., the Football League, the Premier League and the FLA – notwithstanding the Certifying Authorities we have to deal with and what we were trying to achieve.

I have to say that in my initial discussions with Gordon, he did not know about the FSOA or what we the Association stood for.

Now that tells me just how far we have come when an iconic figure like Gordon Taylor who has been in football all his life and worked for the PFA since 1980 thought that we were something to do with the stewards football tournament.

"The one that takes place every year"

"The one that asked the PFA for a trophy".

What an absolute disgrace that this Association was formed back in 1992 was not known at that level.

I have to say I was slightly embarrassed to the say the least.

However

Head held high, determined as ever to succeed I continued our discussion and at the end of it Gordon Taylor agreed to become the Association's Patron.

This man is an icon in football. He speaks eloquently on the subject and has the respect of everyone in the game.

If we are to move forward we need people of his stature on our side to speak for the Association and to help raise its profile.

I am pleased to have Gordon on board and I welcome him to the Association on your behalf.

I would like to finish by saying that I thank you for giving me this chance to Chair the Association **and to pledge my total commitment to doing all I can to continue the development of the Association and in particular the service and quality of that service that we owe to our members. However, I cannot do it all on my own and why as an Association we will need to work together to achieve my vision for the future. With the financial support of the football authorities and the support of the membership there is still much that we can achieve together in maintaining our leadership in safety at our football grounds, whatever the League. We have come a long way since 1992, but the journey is far from over and in my personal case it is just beginning if we are to raise the profile of the Association to sit alongside the football governing bodies not underneath them.**

Thank you