

HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

Wednesday 23 April 2008

Session 3

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HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

11th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP)

DEPUTY CONVENER

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab)

*Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)

*Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP)

*Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP)

*Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

*Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Joe FitzPatrick (Dundee West) (SNP)

Jamie McGrigor (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab)

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Craig Brewster (Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club)

Shona Robison (Minister for Public Health)

Fiona Tyrrell (Scottish Government Primary and Community Care Directorate)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Tracey White

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Douglas Thornton

ASSISTANT CLERK

David Slater

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Health and Sport Committee

Wednesday 23 April 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:01*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christine Grahame): Welcome to the 11th meeting in 2008 of the Health and Sport Committee. I remind everyone to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off. We have received no apologies, but I understand that Ross Finnie was not very well yesterday so it may be that he is still unwell today. We will see.

In item 1 on our agenda, committee members are invited to consider whether they wish to take item 5 in private. Item 5 is consideration of a draft response to the Scottish Government's consultation on delivering a lasting legacy from the 2014 Commonwealth games. It is our normal practice to consider draft responses in private. Does the committee wish to take item 5 in private?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Subordinate Legislation

Mental Health (Cross-border Visits) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 (Draft)

10:02

The Convener: Item 2 is subordinate legislation. I welcome to the meeting Shona Robison, the Minister for Public Health, who will give evidence on the draft Mental Health (Cross-border Visits) (Scotland) Regulations 2008. She is accompanied by David Smith, who is from the solicitors health and community care division of the Scottish Government, and by Fiona Tyrrell, who is the branch head of the mental health division. Welcome to you all. I invite the minister to make some introductory remarks before taking members' questions.

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): Thank you, convener. The purpose of the regulations is to make provision in connection with escorted mental health patients who visit Scotland while on short-term leave of absence under the law of England, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Isle of Man or any of the Channel Islands.

The regulations put beyond doubt the powers of escorts authorised under the laws of those other territories to convey such patients while in Scotland and provide for escorts to have the power to restrain and retake such patients in the event of their absconding or attempting to abscond while in Scotland.

The regulations are being made for two reasons. First, the Scottish Government doubts whether current statutory provision gives escorts sufficient powers to convey patients from other territories who are on leave of absence in Scotland or to retake such patients should they abscond while they are in Scotland. Secondly, the Ministry of Justice in England has raised concerns about a perceived lack of such powers in relation to patients detained in England and Wales who are granted leave of absence and for whom a visit to Scotland, under escort, is considered appropriate. In effect, that meant that the Ministry of Justice would not authorise any short-term visits to Scotland by restricted patients from England and Wales.

The United Kingdom territories each agreed to make arrangements in their respective legislative provisions to ensure that it is possible to authorise short-term cross-border visits by mental health patients through the use of powers for escorted suspension of detention or leave of absence.

The regulations will allow patients who are subject to mental health measures in the territories I mentioned to be granted short-term escorted

leave of absence for the purpose of, for example, visiting a sick relative or attending a funeral in Scotland, before returning to their "home territory".

Reciprocal provision for cross-border visits by patients from Scotland to England and Wales has already been made via amendments to the Mental Health Act 1983.

I am happy to take questions from the committee.

The Convener: Thank you. You have dealt with my question on reciprocal arrangements, so I invite questions from the committee.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con): My questions have also been answered.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): How many cases have there been during the past few years? Did any give rise to difficulty? Does the European Union have a similar arrangement?

Shona Robison: There are two live cases. The outcome of the motion on the regulations is pertinent in that regard. I ask Fiona Tyrrell to answer the second question.

Fiona Tyrrell (Scottish Government Primary and Community Care Directorate): We have had no experience of a patient wanting a transfer for a short-term visit to Europe. We have procedures for formal transfer to hospital on a permanent basis, but not for short-term visits.

Shona Robison: The regulations do not apply in that situation. In such exceptional circumstances, I assume that discussions would have to take place with the appropriate officials in the jurisdiction in question, but that has not arisen to date. If it did, arrangements would be made between the appropriate departments.

The Convener: You said that there are two live cases. Do you mean that two people have come up to Scotland from England for personal or family reasons? Richard Simpson also asked how often there has been difficulty.

Shona Robison: At the moment, the Ministry of Justice will not approve such short-term visits. Two live cases have been brought by people who want to come to Scotland on a short-term visit but cannot, because the Ministry for Justice will not give approval. The regulations are pertinent to those cases, and I hope that they will resolve them.

The Convener: Do such cases arise regularly?

Shona Robison: A very small number of cases is involved.

The Convener: Single figures?

Shona Robison: Yes.

Fiona Tyrrell: One or two a year.

The Convener: That is fine. That is the information that we were looking for.

As there are no further questions, I bring the evidence-taking session to a close. We now move to the debate on the instrument. Does any member wish to debate the instrument?

Members: No.

Motion moved,

That the Health and Sport Committee recommends that the draft Mental Health (Cross-border Visits) (Scotland) Regulations 2008 be approved.—[*Shona Robison.*]

Motion agreed to.

The Convener: I thank the minister for her attendance. It was pretty painless for us all.

Pathways into Sport Inquiry

10:08

The Convener: We will now continue our evidence taking in the first phase of our pathways into sport inquiry, during which we are taking evidence from successful sportspeople. I am pleased to welcome Craig Brewster to the meeting. I saw you parking your car this morning, Mr Brewster, as I walked through the park, but I did not know who you were.

As members will be aware, Craig Brewster is a professional footballer and manager. He is the current player-manager of Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club. Members will find a short biography in paper HS/S3/08/11/3.

I invite you to make some opening remarks, Mr Brewster.

Craig Brewster (Inverness Caledonian Thistle Football Club): I will give a short insight into my career to date.

Logically, I will start with my childhood. I was fortunate to be born into a supportive family that encouraged me to participate in sport from an early age. The importance of that healthy start cannot be overstated. My family provided a solid base and continued support throughout my career.

From an early age, football played a major part in my life. The local park became my second home, whether as part of a group of children or alone—me, my football and my imagination. As the committee will appreciate, I was an extremely active child.

On entering Muirhead primary school—a primary school just outside Dundee with no dedicated physical education teachers—I continued to be absorbed by football. That continued informally, with children providing the rules and regulations, and it changed only on the appointment of a new headmaster, David Fimister. Subsequently, at the age of nine, pupils of both sexes were introduced to a more formal sport structure, which was still enjoyable. A football team was formed, but not for competitive purposes.

At seven years of age, I was spotted playing in the local park and invited for a trial with McAlpine Thistle boys club. There, I remained part of the local boys club network until the age of 17.

At 10 years of age, I was spotted playing for McAlpine Thistle by Dundee United football club, which gave me the opportunity to train one night per week. That progressed to twice weekly, and I signed for the club on schoolboy forms on my 13th birthday. In addition, at that stage, I began to

become interested in golf—albeit that it was always my second sport—and have remained so until the present, joining Downfield golf club at the age of 12.

In first and second year at Newtyle secondary school, which was about 10 miles outside Dundee, we were encouraged to participate in all forms of sport, including rugby, hockey, badminton and cross-country running, but not particularly football, which was provided elsewhere. I went to Harris academy for third, fourth and fifth year and continued to be provided with a broad sporting curriculum. Most of the time was devoted to football through the boys club, Dundee United and the school team.

At 17, I signed semi-professional forms with Dundee United, training three nights per week and playing for the reserves while working locally. That led to my first disappointment: being released and reinstated to the amateur ranks with Dundee Stobswell.

A month before my 19th birthday, I joined Forfar Athletic FC on semi-professional forms. I spent six years there before moving to Raith Rovers FC. I remained part time for 18 months out of my two-year stay with the Kirkcaldy club before rejoining Dundee United at the age of 26.

After a three-year spell with my home-town team, a chance conversation with a football agent gave me the opportunity to join Ionikos FC, an Athens-based club. It proved to be a significant point in my career, as the opportunity to encounter a different cultural approach to life and sport was to have major consequences.

I returned to Scotland with Hibernian FC at almost 35 years old for one year. I subsequently joined Dunfermline FC, where I started to progress my coaching certificates and future plans. In November 2004—earlier than I anticipated and at a higher level than I expected—I joined Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC as a player-manager. The transition from playing to management began smoothly despite the challenges that we faced. ICT had to play its home matches in Aberdeen, but secured its top-flight status; I continued to progress my coaching badges and reduce my playing role.

A successful start to my second season at ICT working with a tight unit of committed professionals and support staff did not go unnoticed and, in January 2006, I rejoined Dundee United for the third time—this time as manager. The 10 months in which I remained in charge proved the biggest challenge of my career to date. A brief but highly enjoyable playing spell at Aberdeen ended when the opportunity to return to Inverness arose. I remain there to complete the task that I started back in November 2004.

The Convener: Thank you very much.

Right, colleagues: questions. Rhoda Grant is quick today, as is Helen Eadie.

Rhoda Grant (Highlands and Islands) (Lab): I was promised. I was nice to the convener earlier, so I have been told that I can get as many supplementary questions as I like.

I welcome Craig Brewster to the committee. I am glad to see him, as he is part of my local football team—I live in Inverness, as does Mary Scanlon, so we are probably a bit biased.

10:15

The Convener: Heaven forfend.

Rhoda Grant: Craig Brewster has worked abroad. Was the focus on sport there different from that in Scotland? We are keen to expand involvement in sport, especially among groups of people who do not have a supportive family such as you had. I am interested in whether other countries treat sport differently and encourage their youngsters differently.

Craig Brewster: I went to Athens in 1996 and it was certainly different. I thoroughly enjoyed my time there. The kids there experience a different culture. The climate is really warm for most of the year, which has a big impact on sport. I played for a small club—it was not a big club with fantastic facilities—but we made the most of what we had. In its structure, the club was keen to encourage as many youngsters as possible to become involved in football.

I was 29 when I went to Athens. In the latter stages, I started to focus on my plans and examined what was of benefit. People there look after themselves better than we do. I return to the culture: we play sport as kids but, after a certain age, it is all about nightlife and so on. People in Greece do not go for the drinking culture that we have a problem with; they are very much into athletics. I was greatly impressed with how they look after themselves, which is why they have done well. Greece has won the European football championship for the first time and the Olympics have been held there. The facilities that are in place in Athens and throughout Greece are a major benefit.

Rhoda Grant: How does Greece encourage young people into sport? Is the fact that everyone participates just part of the culture?

Craig Brewster: It always starts with parents. If kids have parents who show an interest in what they are about and encourage them to do what they enjoy, that can go a long way towards benefiting them in the future.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): Rhoda Grant has stolen my thunder, because I was going

to ask what she asked, so I have had to rethink my question quickly. You have travelled through different clubs, including Dunfermline Athletic—I am the member for Dunfermline East—and Raith Rovers, which is in the patch of my Westminster colleague, Gordon Brown.

The Convener: I feel that we are going to have a roll call of clubs. I declare that I know nothing about football, so Craig Brewster is safe in my hands.

Helen Eadie: I am in the convener's camp, because I, too, know nothing about football. The best match that I have attended was Real Madrid v Eintracht—

Craig Brewster: That was a few years ago.

Helen Eadie: That is right.

The Convener: That did not take place in your constituency—come on. I ask for a question.

Helen Eadie: In the course of your travels, did any unique set of circumstances or individuals make an impact on your career development that it would be worth highlighting? Other sportspeople have usually told us that one or two individuals have stood by them. Has anyone made a remarkable difference to your career?

Craig Brewster: When I look back—whether at being in lessons at school or playing football—I can see that if I respected the teacher, I always gave my best. I have played under many managers whom I respected. People will say, “He’s not trying.” That is not the case, but when a player respects someone, that has a two-way effect and the player gives that little extra. That affects not just the field of play but every part of the set-up, and it can go a long way. I did not particularly like many classes at school, but if the teacher was good I certainly tried my best.

Helen Eadie: That is really helpful, and it chimes with my experience. Do any of the clubs in which you have participated have a good and different way of encouraging young people?

Craig Brewster: When I came back from Greece, I went to Hibernian, which was a fantastic, well-run club. All clubs in the SPL have a structure to adhere to. Things are easier for the bigger clubs, especially those in the bigger cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh. We have a problem in Inverness because, under the structure that we have to adhere to, kids of 10 or 11 have to travel all the way down to Kilmarnock. That is not great, but it is part and parcel of being a club in the SPL. It goes back to the point about respect and having role models to look up to.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): Given that we are all declaring our interests in different clubs, I should say that I have three in my

constituency: East Stirlingshire, Stenhousemuir and Falkirk. Unfortunately, two are in the same league, which always make it difficult as I have to split my loyalties. Each has a different structure to work with young football talent and engage with the community. Falkirk and Stenhousemuir in particular have an extensive network in the community. In light of your international and domestic experience, do you think that Scotland is getting it right in the way that clubs are engaging with communities and schools to get kids to participate in football? Are we getting the structure right to ensure that we identify young football talent?

Craig Brewster: All the clubs are trying hard to bring as many youngsters as possible into the game. Obviously, they do not do that for nothing—fees are involved. Not all families can afford to send their kids to the coaching schools. Sometimes, it is down to the kids; they might go for an hour once or twice a week, but that is all they do until the following week. We need them to do more. When kids come home from school it is easy for them to sit and play on their PlayStation—and of course they have their homework to do. Some kids are not participating enough.

As a football manager, I want loads of kids to practise football every day so that, eventually, we will have a lot of players to pick from, but that is not happening at the moment. I am a great believer in giving kids loads of opportunities in every sport going—not just football. Football clubs are trying hard to get players in, but once they go home there is not enough repeated exercise and play.

Michael Matheson: I am conscious that there is a commercial aspect to some of the programmes that clubs run. From what I have seen, many of the programmes are run at a reasonable cost. Could the governing bodies, such as the Scottish Football Association, do more, such as have community coaches working in schools?

Craig Brewster: The SFA is doing a grand job. It has umpteen community programmes. It is definitely trying. It is down to parents to try to encourage their kids to take up football, golf, tennis and all other sports. We need to encourage more sport in general. It is sometimes difficult to do that, given our climate. The facilities in certain areas are not the best.

Perhaps it goes back to what is happening in schools. Perhaps we need to have more kids participating in sport day to day in school. *[Interruption.]*

The Convener: Something electronic is interfering with the sound. If anyone has a device switched on, could they please switch it off?

Michael Matheson: Does sport lack the priority or recognition that it needs in our education

system? The big focus here is on academic work and getting people through their exams, but in countries such as Australia and France, sport plays a much bigger part in the education system. Could we help to change the culture and involve more young people in sport by giving sport more prominence in our education system?

Craig Brewster: We have to. Sometimes, over the winter, our climate is not conducive to playing outdoors, but schools can definitely increase the number of hours that kids participate in sport. I think that kids get a maximum of an hour and a half or two hours a week at school, but they should be running about for an hour a day.

Ian McKee (Lothians) (SNP): Can I ask two questions, convener?

The Convener: Yes—I am in a generous mood.

Ian McKee: Thank you.

I want to be a little more specific about the pathways into football for youngsters. What effect does the presence of the old firm in Scotland have? Having two clubs that are fairly consistently successful or on the verge of success at European level is a good advertisement for the game in Scotland, but I have heard it said—I do not know whether it is true—that they Hoover up many promising youngsters and then have to discard some, and that some of those youngsters lose their appetite for football and do not go on to other clubs. Will you comment on that?

Craig Brewster: Because Celtic and Rangers are the biggest clubs in Scotland, they have the pick of any player in the country—if Inverness Caledonian Thistle has a really promising player, Rangers or Celtic can come and take them at any time, although they have to pay a small fee. We have to sell our club to those players by saying that they are at home and close to their parents. If they go to the old firm and do not make it, some kids feel that that is the end of the world, but it is not.

We have all had setbacks in our careers and lives, whatever we do. It is about trying to turn a negative into a positive and showing people that you have talent. Football is a strange game at times—it is all about opinions, and my opinion is completely different from somebody else's. We have to tell young players that it does not matter if they are unsuccessful and that they should keep their head down and try to prove us right.

Ian McKee: I totally agree, but I am asking how often that attitude is successful. Are we losing young players from the game because they are hoovered up by the old firm clubs and then discarded? Are a significant number lost to football altogether, or do such people end up playing for other clubs if they have any talent?

Craig Brewster: You will find that more kids are getting opportunities to play first-team football for certain clubs. If they do well, bigger clubs come in for them. That is how it works and that will never stop.

Ian McKee: I accept that, but I am thinking about youngsters who are on the threshold of a career, before they have played for a first team anywhere. Is it usual for juniors with Celtic or Rangers who are discarded to go on to other clubs, or do a substantial proportion not stay on in football?

Craig Brewster: Usually, the players filter down to other clubs. Some get so sickened that they give up the game, but nine times out of 10 they filter down to other clubs.

10:30

Ian McKee: Would you like to comment on the influence of what seems to have been quite a large number of foreign players in the league in recent years? Is their involvement good, because it exposes young Scots players to people who have been trained in different environments, or does buying in players from other countries prevent Scottish talent from succeeding?

Craig Brewster: For a while, Dundee United, for instance, had a policy of going big time on bringing over foreign players from Scandinavia and South America. However, when less money was available in football, clubs—apart from Celtic and Rangers—had to consider bringing through their own players. That is where we are today. Some clubs have one or two foreigners—I have a Romanian, a Canadian and a young boy from Finland who has been in Scotland for a few years. Celtic and Rangers have more choice.

It would be great if all Scottish clubs had Scottish players and if all English clubs had English players, but the system does not work like that. If Celtic and Rangers want to compete at the highest level in Europe, they must attract the best players.

Ian McKee: I accept that, but you are saying that the comparative shortage of money in the Scottish game is encouraging clubs to take on home-grown talent rather than import talent.

Craig Brewster: Definitely. That is why our national team is improving. In the past three or four years, Scottish youngsters have suddenly had a chance, which has given them confidence. They have made the step up to the international team and we are all benefiting from that.

Ian McKee: So the best way to encourage youngsters into Scottish football teams is to keep Scottish football short of money.

The Convener: I will ask about talent scouts. When my sons were young, I remember seeing talent scouts watching wee boys of seven or eight playing matches. Do you share my concern that that can sometimes take the fun out of the game for youngsters? We are concerned not just about those who have talent and your having a larger pool of talent, but about encouraging children to continue to play in adolescence and, when they are men, to play in Sunday afternoon games competitively, but with enjoyment, although they do not have a career in football. Will you comment on that? Talent scouts may distort the situation when children are young. You were spotted when you were very young.

Craig Brewster: Clubs try to get in as early as possible. If a boy has talent, finding him early saves the club forking out money when he is 16, 17 or 18, because the club has that talent under its wing.

It has been well noted that kids should not be allowed to participate in club football until they reach a certain age, but the bigger clubs steal them a year before then. Whatever age a child is—they might be just out of nappies and kicking a ball—if they have talent at all, a club will take them in.

To be attached to a professional club at seven, eight or nine years old is not of great benefit. Kids of that age have to love and enjoy playing football. Once they are 12, 13 or 14, they can start to think about being involved in club football. The important point is that the kids love to play football.

The Convener: That is interesting.

Mary Scanlon: I suppose that I should declare that I was at Saturday's game with Craig Brewster's mother and that I had a free ticket from her—thank you.

The Convener: Information is emerging because of Craig Brewster's presence.

Mary Scanlon: We must declare interests.

In giving evidence to us, Rhona Martin and Liz McColgan said that fewer young people were competing in their sports now than when they started. Does that also apply to football?

Craig Brewster: I do not imagine that it applies to proper training sessions or club-organised coaching schools, but there is a severe lack of kids playing football in local parks after school, because most of them want to go home and play their computer games. That is what is missing.

Mary Scanlon: So the formal structure of junior clubs is as healthy as ever, but there is no voluntary playing like there used to be. Is that right?

Craig Brewster: There is not enough from the kids themselves; they are not practising after school for an hour a week, say. Perhaps it is parents' job to encourage them to be more active.

Mary Scanlon: Could the Government, local councils and schools do more—and should they do more—to get people to participate in sport, even if they might not become competitive football players? Liz McColgan said that we should focus on fitness from five years old. You mentioned other sports besides football. Do we need to give people tasters of all sports and focus more on fitness?

Craig Brewster: I would certainly like there to be more physical education at school. Being involved in sport is also good for discipline. Whatever sport somebody plays, if they are in a team game they must adhere to rules. It is good for kids' future to be disciplined in relation to certain aspects of sport. I come up against players who have not been disciplined well as kids, and I can find myself trying to help them off the park as well as on it.

Mary Scanlon: The point is that many sports get a lot of intervention and money from Government. I confess that I am not knowledgeable about football, but I understand that it pretty much stands alone and does not get lots of money. We have seen the problems with Gretna FC; nobody jumped in to bail it out. Should the Government be more involved and put more money into football, whether into parks, open pitches or other facilities?

Craig Brewster: The Government has to provide more sports facilities. We have a fantastic indoor Highland football academy in Dingwall, which is 12 miles north of Inverness, the Highland capital. That is great for Dingwall people, but we need an indoor facility like that in Inverness as well. If we have the right facilities, perhaps we will get the kids involved more.

It is so important for kids to do more sport at school. In private schools, kids are really encouraged to participate, or it is compulsory, whereas in local schools it is not like that.

Mary Scanlon: Rhona Martin and Liz McColgan also mentioned a shortage of coaches. I do not know whether there is too much bureaucracy or people do not want to volunteer their time. Could that shortage be limiting participation in football?

Craig Brewster: I was at a seminar on Sunday at which the SFA stated that the best coaches should train the kids, but a lot of the players who are coming to the end of their careers want to be first-team managers. Perhaps we need to devote more time to encouraging the kids.

Mary Scanlon: Is it difficult for new coaches to get into the sport?

Craig Brewster: People now have to get badges to become proper coaches. The football clubs want the best coaches to train our kids. When kids respect the coaches, they will give that extra bit.

Mary Scanlon: You mentioned our drinking culture. Given that you are the oldest player in the SPL, do you have any advice for us about what the Health and Sport Committee should do to address the drinking culture in Scotland?

Craig Brewster: I tell my players, especially the younger kids, that they can go out and enjoy themselves, but they are professional footballers and they must remember to act like it, whether they are at the club or away from it. Sometimes, kids forget that—full-time senior professional players also forget it. I harp on about them conducting themselves in the correct manner.

The Convener: Let us move on.

Dr Simpson: You have made some good points about the number of hours involved. I was educated in the private sector, and I did eight hours of physical exercise a week. People who were in a team had another period playing their team sport at the weekend. The approach in that sector was totally different. I note that the Scottish Consumer Council says that parents want their children to have about five hours of exercise a week.

I wish to develop the theme of coaching. You said that, as they come to the end of their playing career, players begin to consider coaching. Is there a structure for that? Was it suggested to you, "Craig, you should think about coaching," and were you told how to approach it? That would not necessarily have ended up with you becoming manager of Inverness Caledonian Thistle, but it might have been suggested that you could coach a junior team or whatever. In other words, is there a career progression, and are people counselled throughout their career?

Craig Brewster: It is down to the individual. During my Dunfermline days, I seriously started to consider coaching. I completed my youth licence, which is for coaching young people between the ages of 12 and 18. Then I got the basic licence from UEFA—the Union of European Football Associations—for adults. I did not know exactly what I was going to do when the time came to finish playing, but I wanted to go down the line of coaching. I got a phone call asking whether I would be interested in the Caley Thistle job, and that was it. Somebody saw something in me and thought that I might be able to do a good job. That is how it worked. Coaching is critical, especially for players of a younger age. On Sunday, the SFA emphasised the importance of getting good coaches for kids.

Dr Simpson: We fund people specifically to become youth coaches. They might never aspire to your level, but they might want to stay involved in the game, perhaps having played at a junior level, for instance. Should we encourage them? Should we fund them? Did you have to pay for everything yourself?

Craig Brewster: Players and others have to pay.

Dr Simpson: They have to pay?

Craig Brewster: Yes.

Dr Simpson: So coaching is not funded.

I wish to expand on the point about the school-club connection, which seems to be important. Does Inverness Caledonian Thistle have connections with schools, or do you just have your own junior playing group? Do you have links with the local schools at all?

Craig Brewster: That is a good point. Once kids have signed forms with Caley Thistle, Celtic, Rangers or whoever, they are not allowed to play for their school teams. That is absolutely criminal. I loved playing for my school team. Playing for Dundee select was an honour. Kids are missing out if they cannot play for their schools.

Dr Simpson: That is interesting and helpful.

10:45

Rhoda Grant: I want to follow up Ian McKee's questions about career progression. I guess that smaller teams tend to feed players into bigger teams, and Celtic or Rangers can easily take a player away from a smaller team. That seems to happen throughout the leagues. A friend who is involved with Brora Rangers Football Club told me that many Caley Thistle players started their careers with Brora Rangers. As a result, teams do not really move within the leagues, because players who reach a certain stage are taken away by a better team in a higher league. Players who are looking for career progression move on. Smaller clubs feed into more elite sport. Is that how it should be? What is your take on that, given that you and Caley Thistle have broken the mould, in that not just individual players but the team has progressed?

Craig Brewster: What you are describing happens in every walk of life. When someone sees ability in a person, they encourage them to move elsewhere. We will never stop that. We have all been in that position—we leave school and do something and then we want to better ourselves. People who have talent move on. The good thing in football is that if a kid progresses the club is rewarded for the coaching that they gave them over the years. That is the only way in which clubs can be helped.

Rhoda Grant: Despite that, Inverness Caley Thistle managed to progress through the leagues to the SPL. Was that to do with the geographical area that the club covers? You talked about persuading young players to stay close to home. If players move on they must leave home and go elsewhere. Did that enable the team to keep its talent longer?

Craig Brewster: Over the years following amalgamation, Caley Thistle developed through the leagues quickly. That had a lot to do with the club itself and the board of directors. The club was stable, it did not throw money about willy-nilly and it brought in good managers. There was a good structure and a group of players were worked with and kept on—they did not just stay one year and then move on. There was stability in the team and the boardroom. Caley Thistle will never do what Gretna did, because it has a strong foundation that has been built on slowly over the years.

I had the same experience in Greece. We were a small club but we did well because of the structure. The club did not sell five players and bring in 10; there was a solid foundation throughout. That is how you succeed. Nowadays, it can be difficult, because the media put pressure on clubs to do this, that and the next thing. It is about focusing on the right direction.

Ian McKee: The convener asked an interesting question about the age at which young people become involved with football clubs. As I understand it, you said that it is not in the interests of very young children—seven and eight-year-olds—to be tied up in the football set-up when they should be enjoying the sport and developing interests with their friends. However, you also said that it is in clubs' interests to get at players as young as possible, because there is a financial and professional advantage in having links as early as possible. Do we need to firm up the regulatory environment, through the SFA or perhaps even Government, to prevent clubs from fighting over talented seven or eight-year-olds?

Craig Brewster: The criteria mean that we have to have an under-10 or under-11 team to compete as an SPL club—you have to take on kids. It does not matter whether they are seven or eight, if they are good enough to play for the club, we take them on, which is great. Once we get together a group of young kids, the problem is that, because of where we are geographically, we have to drive them four hours down to Kilmarnock, for example, and four hours all the way back, just so they can play for an hour and a half. That is not the best situation for any kid. We have to adhere to the criteria, but that is not player development; it is a box-ticking exercise.

Ian McKee: One of the committee's functions is to come up with recommendations and advice. I do not want to put words in your mouth, but it

sounds as if you are saying that that rule should be changed. Surely making youngsters of seven and eight travel long distances for a short game alters the whole pattern of their childhood and their relationship with their friends.

Craig Brewster: We all talk about football development for kids, but having to travel those long distances is not development.

The Convener: You said that it is part of the criteria that you cannot play in the SPL if you do not have teams of under—what age was it?

Craig Brewster: Under-10s and under-11s.

The Convener: When did that become part of the criteria? Where is it embedded?

Craig Brewster: It is an SPL criterion.

The Convener: When did it become one?

Craig Brewster: I am not sure.

The Convener: We will pursue that and find out where it is embedded in, for example, the SPL constitution.

Michael Matheson: Is it in the power of SPL member clubs to alter any of the criteria, if they want to do so?

Craig Brewster: Yes.

The Convener: We will follow through on that.

We understand the commercial nature of professional teams and the pressures on them, including the money that is to be made. In taking on seven and eight-year-olds, those pressures might distort things. There are also ordinary school kids out there who enjoy football. I was in Selkirk—I think it was on Monday, but the week flies so quickly—and saw boys and girls playing football in an event that the Bank of Scotland, the local authority, the SFA and the Government set up, following on from the midnight football league. Andy Driver of Hearts was there as the glamour figure—he will not forgive me for calling him that. The event seemed very successful in building interest among parents and kids. Do you know about those events?

Craig Brewster: I do not know about that one.

The Convener: I may follow through on it, and see if anyone else at Caley Thistle knows about it.

I understand that the Scottish Institute of Sport is getting rid of a programme for promising young football players on the basis that the clubs fulfil the role. You have told us about that, albeit that the clubs take in only kids of a certain age. Are you aware of the situation? If so, what are your comments?

Craig Brewster: That is a difficult one. The institute tried to put together a group of 10 or 12 players, I think, of a certain age as a group of so-called elite players. The clubs were a bit wary of

sending their kids who were picked to join the group, on the basis that someone else might steal them. The programme did not go too well.

The Convener: Football politics.

Craig Brewster: Yes.

Michael Matheson: I return to the issue of facilities. In my constituency, the council went into partnership with Stenhousemuir Football Club and laid an all-weather surface pitch that can be used seven days a week and until about 10 o'clock at night by the team and community groups. The all-weather surface has proved to be a success.

I was interested to read that Hamilton Accies, in securing promotion to the SPL, will get rid of an all-weather surface that, like Stenhousemuir's, is used by community groups. Can we do more at a national level to encourage local authorities to work with junior clubs or those in the lower leagues to lay all-weather surfaces and develop programmes to allow the community to use those facilities, which would benefit the club and the local community? Would that help to support player development?

Craig Brewster: You have just summed it up. We can never have enough of those plastic pitches. When clubs have them, they are used nearly seven days a week. The one at Dundee United is used all the time. Junior teams sometimes use it mid-week—one team has one half of the pitch and another junior team has the other half. It is not ideal, is it? We can never have enough good facilities. It all comes down to cost at the end of the day.

The Convener: That is important. Penicuik's junior team uses half a pitch. It cannot afford to pay for a pitch and a referee for games.

You have raised one issue in particular that the committee may want to follow up. We agree with the concerns about the SFA's rules. You have highlighted how competitive your profession is in business terms—it is even worse than ours, which is saying something. Thank you for your interesting evidence.

Craig Brewster: It was a pleasure. Thank you.

The Convener: I would like to deal briefly with a procedural matter. I remind members that under rule 12.4.3 of standing orders, witnesses may seek payment of expenses associated with giving evidence. Are members content for approval of any such requests for expenses in respect of the inquiry to be delegated to me? It is common practice and avoids the full committee having to take those decisions.

Members indicated agreement.

10:57

Meeting continued in private until 11:29.

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