



Bucks Free Press gets fans' vote

THE Bucks Free Press newspapers are a lifeline for Wycombe Wanderers' fans despite new media's march into sport, says club director Alan Parry.

The Sky TV commentator was speaking at a fans' forum on Football and the Media at Adams Park on Thursday and said the relationship between the club and the Bucks Free Press group - which has not always been cordial - needs to be improved from the club's point of view.

The rise of the internet as a source of information for supporters was also examined as an issue many fans were concerned about.

About 25 fans attended the forum which saw TV presenter Jim Rosenthal, who lives in Cookham Dean, on the panel as well as Bucks Free Press Group editor Steve Cohen. The forum was chaired by Wanderers supporters' club vice-chairman Andy Worboys.

Alan Parry said: "The Bucks Free Press is our lifeline. It's the major source of news for fans who want to know about what's going on at the football club.

"Journalistically, I will always protect the right of a local newspaper to pursue the club for news and information that is essential for fans."

He added it would be 'terrible' if the relationship between the BFP and the club was to deteriorate.

He said: "I don't miss a line of the BFP and I think it's pretty fair.

"The paper has a duty to report as they see fit and shouldn't be penalised by the club for just doing its job. I think it's a very old

It's official – the BFP is the major source for Wanderers news. Nasser Hashmi reports.

fashioned attitude and we should be more progressive."

Supporters also spoke of their reliance on the BFP as their primary source for team news, interviews and match reports.

Colin Strange said: "We learn more from the paper than from the TV or any other media. We get our news about the club from the BFP and I think it's very important to fans and the community that the relationship between the club and paper is smooth."

Another supporter Ian Blackledge said: "The paper benefits the supporters and I think the BFP are right in not giving up in trying to get news and information for us."

The forum also covered many other issues about the modern game with TV rights and pay-per-view being high on the agenda.

Jim Rosenthal, who currently works for OnDigital and ITV, said: "When OnDigital started they only had 70,000 subscribers but when they bought the rights to Champions League football they shot up to 750,000. Football sells digital television – it's as simple as that.

"But there is a danger with this. Football can be watched virtually every day of the week and this will increase next season with more games transmitted live. If you churn out a product all the



Alan Parry

time there is a danger it can become overkill.

"Pay-per-view is also turning people off. Why should people pay twice to see a big game or event. They're paying a subscription already and then they're asked to fork out another tenner. I'm not sure it's going to work."

Rosenthal, who began his journalistic career on a local paper in Oxford, also talked about ITV's plans for Match of the Day which was lost by the BBC in a dramatic TV rights deal earlier this year.

"Sky TV has set the standard in televised football but ITV are going to make Match of the Day look sharp next year. They're also looking at scheduling it at either 7pm or 10pm on a Saturday and a programme on Sunday."

Fans were also concerned about being overcharged at grounds and felt that gate prices should be frozen or brought down because of the bonanza of TV money for clubs.

Joe Stevens said: "We're just getting screwed all the time. Gate prices have rocketed up and there's been nothing done about it. It's just getting out of proportion. There's so much TV money around but clubs are still going under and it's just all being put into players' wages."

Other issues like the possible scrapping of the transfer system, England's current footballing plight and refereeing decisions were also examined.

Parry also mentioned Wycombe's location and how other media organisations failed to cover the club's matches.

He said: "It sometimes feels as though we're living in the Bermuda Triangle here. We are just out of the London TV stations' reach, the London Evening Standard is out of our area and it's the same with the radio stations. We seem to be stuck in the middle because of the geography of the area."

Cable company NTL's internet rights to cover Wycombe were also a matter of concern to many fans but BFP editor Steve Cohen felt that differing forms of media could co-exist and still provide a good service for fans.

He said: "I'm a fan of the internet and regularly go online to get the report of the game. But the next morning I get the newspaper to get a different view of the game. Many young people have grown up with the internet and it may be difficult to shift their allegiances but our job is to provide information for our supporters. I hope we're compelling enough that fans want to read us. The internet and newspapers can both provide an important service."