

## Up front



with  
**Bruce  
Holloway**

## The Fallon factor

I'm amazed at my own hypocrisy sometimes.

Had Shane Rufer taken over from Mike Petersen and – not once, but twice in succession – had his team snatch defeat from the jaws of victory through inept defending, then for a third time conceded a critical goal in the final minute, no doubt I'd be railing against his appointment from this very page.

I have no doubt I would be mercilessly savaging Rufer for his lack of organisation, absence of tactical nous, and limited coaching ability. Make no error, I'd be sermonising on how "this wouldn't have happened" had they signed an experienced coach like, say, Kevin Fallon.

And had Shane, upon appointment, taken the Kingz to the point where only the alphabetical rule had saved them from being dead motherless last in the table, as was the case earlier this month, I would have concluded that, well, what else can expect when you ain't got a proper coach?

So there you go. How two-faced of me to see the Kingz down with the dead men - yet to win under Fallon as I write – and for me to sit here feeling more confident than any time in the past three years that the Kingz might finally be starting to get a few basics right on the playing side of things.

For me there was a sense of relief in hearing Fallon named as coach. I must acknowledge that is the complete opposite of some of my closest soccer colleagues, who have criticised the appointment, but I saw him as the best choice.

At least you know what you are getting with Big Kev. After two years of trying to fathom the thinking behind the Rufer brothers' weird revolving-door selection policies and madcap signings, only to have them replaced by another mystery coach in Mike Petersen -- whose major contribution to club life was to sign a bunch of dodgy Aussie-Greek imports and prescribe early morning beach swims, life under Fallon should be more straightforward, if more rigorous.

History shows that with Fallon you get organisation, structure, and an underlying ethos of hard graft, sprinkled with tactical astuteness and the odd success.

You also get a fair bit of turbulence. Fallon can be abrasive, moody. He has a reputation for throwing cups as much as winning them. Almost as famous as his successes with the All Whites, Gisborne City and Nelson have been his dust-ups at Central United and Hamilton AFC.

In this respect it's just as comforting to know what we won't be getting with Fallon. You won't find him opting for Petersen-style two-man defences against the league leaders. And you won't see him playing Batram Suri at right back or indulging in other Rufer-esque brainstorming (though there was a worry over his publicly floated ideas for using newly-signed dinosaur John Markovski as a defender). And, as one Waikato Kingz fan put it, you certainly won't find Fallon signing namby-pamby Australian girls.

To be fair, Homer Simpson could have improved upon Petersen's inept few weeks

in charge. But what joy it has been to be able to listen to a Kingz coach on television and radio without having to cringe.

The Rufers may have hearts of gold, but they made dire front men. They are poor communicators, with little to communicate. I didn't find Petersen much better. By contrast Fallon knows what he is talking about. He is eloquent, authoritative, and has an engaging, if acerbic, sense of humour.

It didn't take him long to sort out a lot of the nonsense the Kingz have been renowned for. No accident that in his first week in charge Wynton Rufer resigned from the board. I imagine having a contracted player sitting on the board in judgement, would be untenable for any serious coach, muddying the chain of command as it does.

And it was no surprise to see him sort out the Wynton Rufer playing situation quickly as well. This, remember, was a player who would flit off to Europe for Fifa players' committee meetings while his team was struggling. Fallon made the call early that he wanted players with passion, giving no less than 100 per cent.

But best of all with Fallon's appointment, for the first time the Kingz have a coach who has his finger on the pulse on what is going on in the rest of New Zealand soccer -- which is vital for a club supposedly perched at the top of our domestic pyramid.

At Labour weekend Fallon was casting his eye over the teams at the Napier Youth Championships. At the time he spoke of the frustration of the Kingz being a good idea "done all wrong", and poorly served by coaching eccentricity.

This was about three weeks before he landed the Kingz job, and at a time when he was being linked with Waitakere. (Fallon said he was embarrassed by this because it had put Ron Armstrong in a queer position, and he never had any interest in the position once NZ Soccer made it clear they wouldn't allow his idea for a feeder system from Mt Albert Grammar to Waitakere to the Kingz.)

I was struck by Fallon's general mood of conviviality. Paid by his school principal to watch the tournament, Big Kev was like the cat that got the cream. He'd spend the days offering sage advice on the sidelines and the evenings parked up in Rosie O'Grady's Celtic Inn, holding court in the presence of fellow coaches such as Keith Pritchett, Brian Turner, Paul Nixon and a host of acolytes, at peace with the world and full of lilting humour.

Somehow it didn't seem right. To me Fallon has always been at his best as a tortured soul. Blunt, brooding, darkly pensive, black-humoured. That's more the archetype we know and love.

So in some ways it was perversely reassuring to see him up to his armpits in crises a fortnight into life at Ericsson as Kingz gaffer, as his defenders lost the plot for the second successive week. Speaking to Shane Rufer by mobile at Ericsson with a face you could crack a brick on, gesticulating wildly, eyes like dark pools... Yes, that's more like our Fallon. Welcome home, Kevin.

\*\*\*\*\*

For a glimpse of Fallon's own coaching philosophies it's timely to look back at some of his early programme columns:

*"In my experience, many coaches are just not coaching," he wrote in a typical soul-baring effort after joining Hamilton AFC as player-coach in 1978. "For let's face it, it is*

*easier to train players than be ruthlessly critical and demand performance from them... All coaches should ask themselves: 'have I got a message to convey, and is this message being carried out?' If not, we are deluding ourselves into thinking we are coaching. We are not, we are only figureheads.*" Good stuff. Ominously, barely four months after penning this, Fallon suffered the ignominy of effectively being sacked by his own players. They didn't care for his message at all.

Here is another excerpt from Fallon – from a piece titled Motivation – written in 1980 when he was with Gisborne City:

*"Superficial motivation lies with the player, deeper motivation comes from the coaching staff. When the top Dutch coach Rinus Michels was asked why his team did not have a psychologist he remarked 'I am the best psychologist for my team'. That little remark says it all for me.*

*"A football coach can employ many different methods to get inside the heads of his team. No-one knows my team better than me. I sweat with them, share their triumphs and their disappointments. I know when I knock them down and when I build them up...*

*"On a team level I look for the dominant trait in the team to develop. If the dominating factor is aggression and the coach wishes to stress it, I feel he must also be aggressive. It is no use wanting aggression then not putting up with the odd rough tackle in training. It is no use wanting aggression if the coach is not aggressive himself...*

*"Motivation is complex, but unless you can find it in your players, yourself and your team, you will not be able to ride the breakers when things start falling apart at the seams. Without it you will be an ordinary player, and I an ordinary coach."*

\*\*\*\*\*

Speaking of programme contributions, what a pleasure it was to pick up *The Royal Review* (Kingz programme) of November 30 (v Spirit) and find a column from the coach. Yes, at last, a coach with something to say!

This is the first time in three years (and four coaches if you count both Rufers) we've had a gaffer who has had a message for the fans. Good stuff.

In it Fallon recounted his personal nightmare with his first-up loss to Melbourne Knights. There was such an ominous tone to his message, parts of it are worth repeating here.

*"The least we should have returned home with was a point. It was not to be. Unfortunately I have seen the team display similar suicidal tendencies late in the game this season (shades of Marconi). In fact, since the inception of the Kingz these last*



"Crisis? What crisis?"

*minute defensive botch ups have been a regular occurrence. If we are to progress and grow, there has to be a better tactical and psychological approach by the playing staff.*

*Personally I would rather have moderate trainers and good match day performances than vice-versa – the Kingz staff need to toughen up mentally. We have to learn how to hang on and raise our expectations otherwise we will always be last-minute losers. I expected to win and so should the team. If they cannot – then long term we have to find players who can.”*

Go to it Kev. You're the coach.

\*\*\*\*\*

Incidentally, this is probably a good place to express overall disappointment with *The Royal Review* this season. It is by far the flimsiest effort of any NSL club, but at \$3, one of the dearest. It's been down-sized to 16 pages, counting the cover and the back, and it has a very high ratio of ads to copy. The Supporters Club page has been dropped this season, though Fallon's column at least compensates for the absence of any other comment or think-piece.

I know editor Jeremy Ruane is frustrated by the constraints he works under, but the bottom line is *The Royal Review* is poor value for money in spite of its full-colour layout, and the editorial grunt given to it by Fallon.

Sorry Jerry, but if it gets any worse, we might have to look at giving away a few thousand "Unoffical Kingz" programmes just to inject a bit of life into the culture of home games.

\*\*\*\*\*

How will Mike Petersen be remembered in Kingz folklore?

Who knows. What I do know is he did us all a favour by resigning, because the board weren't up to sacking him, despite him being clearly out of his depth.

His signings, on average, were no better than what you'd find around our own national league. Worse, he seemed to bring a culture of disorganisation with him. When Perth scored their first goal in that 7-2 horror at Albany, Sean Douglas went down like he had been shot by a sniper from the stands. (I half expected their psycho security guards to sound an alert). It was obvious to all that he would be for for five weeks, not five minutes.

And yet there was no move to even warm up the subs on the bench. Someone did saunter around to have a look at Roly, and rub his leg eventually. But it was something like six minutes later that they decided a sub would be necessary.

It then became apparent Hiroshi Miyazawa (and isn't he slow?) did not have a shirt on under his tracksuit. Somebody had to scoot around to the dressing shed, on the far side from the bench, and fetch it.

There was a sense of justice when at a further injury break, Kingz were down to 10 men when Perth scored. Again, nobody was given the alert to warm up, though Wynton Rufer had bizarrely been doing his private shuttles behind the northern goal, independent of anything happening on the pitch.

I've never seen Petersen in action as a coach. But this lack of initiative from the bench was enough to tell me here was a man who did not know how to operate.

Having let so many of last season's players go, and the embarrassment of the exits

of Con Boutsianis and Val Kalageracos, and the fact he was relying on two old men in Wynton and John Markovski to lead the line, the squad had never been in worse shape.

Fallon immediately bemoaned the shocking state of things. "There's an imbalance," he said after the Spirit game. "We've got plenty of central midfield players -- I don't know who signed this squad -- but there's no defenders... I've been working on somebody's masterpiece and the pieces don't fit."

In this respect Fallon was out seemingly of step with his board – which includes Sky TV soccer ignorami Paul Smart, John Fellet, former All Black coach John Hart (who, my spies tell me, was the prime instigator for signing Petersen), and our less-than-loved NZ Soccer chairman Kevin Stratful – who, the record shows, still think Petersen was the man for the job.

Petersen's resignation was accepted with "extreme reluctance", remember. "The board was totally and utterly supportive of him and we wanted him to continue," Chris Turner said at the time. "We felt and we still feel, that he is the man for the job."

So, there you have it. Turner and the board thought Petersen was just the goods. But Fallon thought he'd inherited a crock of shit. They can't both be right.

I'd say there is seriously suspect soccer judgement, not to say a shortage of soccer knowledge, on the Kingz board.

The other thing about Petersen and the board is the question of Con Boutsianis.

Does anyone else find it hypocritical that the Kingz should be seeking a breach of contract ruling against Boutsis at a time when they have failed to hold their coach to his – despite believing he is the best man for the job and apparently leavign them awfully in the lurch by leaving?

\*\*\*\*\*

# Wynton Rufer. should have retired last year. Not because his legs were gone – and they were – but simply because he was having such trouble fitting soccer into his too-busy schedule. A man with his own manager and own secretary, running courses all over the show and with commitments everywhere, simply didn't have time to do routine things like, er, training.

It's tempting to say it's sad such a great career has ended in such messy fashion. But looking back, much of Rufer's career in New Zealand has been just as messy, from unavailability and retirement from the All Whites to his sudden re-availability, from his appointment as coach of the U17s to his abdication there, and from his appointment as Kingz coach to a tacit understanding that, er his brother Shane was really the coach.

I loved the red herring thrown in that he had a verbal agreement with Mike Petersen that he only had to attend three team sessions. It displayed a stunning naivete of the objective situation the Kingz were in, battling away at the foot of the table, with no money to bring in new talent, and an aging injured player telling a new coach brought in specifically to tidy the mess up he had his own training agenda.

All the same, we will miss Rufer. There was a time when he was the best, and this is the end of an era. We've lost our last remaining top-level playing link with the class of 82.

Hopefully he will become an ambassador for soccer in much the same way Sir Richard Hadlee did for cricket. Just don't make him convener of selectors. Anyway,

more on Rufer next issue.

\*\*\*\*\*

There is an old Chinese proverb: "A man with one watch always knows the time. A man with two watches is never quite sure".

It's a bit the same for the Kingz with home grounds. They've got two, having fueled uncertainty by opting to play two matches at Albany this summer.

The Ericsson v Albany debate just won't go away as long as the Kingz, er, play the field. Long-time readers will know I'm no fan of North Harbour Stadium (see issues 20-48). But there is one area where it has the edge over Ericsson: locating it.

Ericsson is almost impossible to find for an out-of-towner. It is not signposted from any motorway or indeed any link roads for those approaching from the south. It's frontage on O'Rorke Rd, where most of its vehicular traffic enters from, must have the most obscure facade of any park in the southern hemisphere., tucked away behind panel beater shops and steel merchants.

One of the biggest problem at Albany – if you ignore for a moment the psychos who work there – is the lack of cover in the covered stand.

It didn't bother my Bloc 5 brethren, who seem to enjoy getting wet, but I'd be mighty pissed off if I'd paid for covered seating in the stand at North Harbour, only to get rain in my face all night.

Another perverse thing about North Harbour Stadium, I noticed after the second half upstairs in the main lounge. You can purchase a premium beer like Stella Artois (if you're rich enough), but the wines they offer are exclusively crap brands (Timara and Jacob's Creek). Then again, you can buy a three course meal, but not a Moro bar (not enough mark up on them, I'm told).

At Ericsson it's strictly Lion Red (\$4.50 a plastic cup) downstairs, which is as bad as anything you'll get charged in Wellington. But at least there is a wide array of consumables on hand (*but no sauce!* – *Proof Reading Editor.*)

The other great thing about Ericsson is the announcer. How delightful it was to hear the Kingz team introduced before the Newcastle match with the homespun nicknames like "Riki Bonecarver van Steeden" and Chris You're-Going-Home-in-a-Jackson-A mbulance Jackson". Brilliant. Makes up for the naff Phil Collins and Dire Straits music we have to endure on the terraces.

\*\*\*\*\*

How disappointing that Sky are 80 per cent owners of the Kingz but it's still such a haphazard business getting highlights of other NSL matches.

Too often we only ever see the Kingz in isolation, and not in context of what other clubs have been doing in any particular week. However Soccer Central does give us hope, with the odd clip from other matches.

This programme has a promising format, with pundits offering comment and analysis and the laddish excesses of House of Football toned down. Hopefully they will build from here and pursue soccer issues wiioth journalistic fervour. Having said that I must confess I wouldn't mind seeing the odd infusion of the preposterous Miles Davis, who is great in small doses.

On the subject of television, how disappointing there was no coverage of the

Australia-Uruguay World Cup playoff matches.

Sure, no New Zealand team was involved, but these were arguably the most important matches for the future of us here in Oceania for four years. That night we watched West Ham v Fulham instead.

It's de rigeur to jeer the Aussies and say "good job" but I really felt for them. We've been over this ground before, but they had the toughest route to the World Cup finals. How many of the European qualifiers could have beaten two-times World Cup winners Uruguay in a home and away series?

Australia is requesting FIFA a direct entry to the winner of the Oceania Qualifying for the 2006 World Cup, and it looks more likely following the Fifa decision to scrap automatic entry for the Cup holder.

For all that, Aussie soccer boss Ian Knop is way off beam in arguing that Australia deserved better because it won 7 out of 8 games it had to play, while Uruguay played 20 matches and won only 8. You can't honestly compare playing Cook Islands with the world's toughest qualifying competition in South America. One group is too easy, the other too tough.

In looking for an solution next time around, diehard Aussie fan Mark Bowman has come up with a good idea.

He suggests Oceania's direct entry slot (if it eventuates) be used as a carrot to woo a few other countries, like Japan, Korea and a few of the east Asian lesser lights down to us. The USA was even mooted, but they have it too sweet at the moment, but some of those Asian countries have little to lose, part of a 35+ confederation that has little in common except most of its members are Muslim.

Here's what Bowman says:

*"I would like to see a 16+ Oceania - four initial groups of four with seeding. eg Australia might play East Timor, Fiji, Tonga home and away or over 1 week. For this you could use your local lads. Then the winners of each of the four groups play home and away, over 2 -3 batches. This might be eg Oz, NZ, Korea, Japan - the winner over a round robin, qualifies. This would mean six games and with planning could easily involve the overseas players... In summary it is more realistic and politically savvy to get a slot and have others join us, rather than try to join another group, or knock back a direct path."*

Meanwhile it hasn't been all bad for Australia. More than three million people watched the November 20 game at Melbourne, a record number for a soccer match in Australia, while papers published "introductions to soccer" for the country's less informed fans.

\*\*\*\*\*

I was taken by a piece in Ralph Sheppard's Holker St Newsletter (Barrow FC, dummy) which regurgitated a piece from the Non-League Paper asking the question: if big clubs have to reveal their balance sheets in public, why can't outfits further down the food chain be a bit more open with their finances?

The article acknowledged the reality that, however much punters like to deny it, we all like to know how much a player is worth when he is sold.

Wrote journalist Marc Webber: *"Nowhere is that more apparent than in the semi-*

*professional and amateur game. Not a week goes by without one club being threatened with administration or clubs planning multi-million pound re-developments, or a player being sold on for a tidy sum to a League side.*

*"We love to know about these things because, unfortunately, they are sometimes more important and much more entertaining than the action on the pitch. But, it's very difficult to satisfy our hunger for such information when the clubs have no incentive or interest in telling the cash-paying fans how good or bad the situation is. It's a very secretive world, the world of non-League soccer.*

*"Only certain privileged people in top positions at clubs, leagues and councils get to see the numbers that matter. The rest of us have to try and prise such information out of those in the know, using whatever means we can.*

*"This is no way to treat the hard-working fans, who actively contribute to the funds of the clubs they love, and are often the ones who are hurt the most when the team they have passionately supported for all their lives suddenly goes down the Swanny with no warning at all.*

*"Oh, how different it is from the real world of business. Big companies, including some of our biggest football teams, have to declare in public what they earn, what they spend, their profits and their losses. If they don't, their shares are suspended and they lose a vital source of revenue generation..."*

Webber went on to argue that clubs that are in financial trouble tend to reach out to the community for support at the last minute, when, if they had allowed fans, local authorities and other members of the public to see their books beforehand, some eagle-eyed person may have spotted that they were heading into financial oblivion before them.

Perhaps it is drawing a long bow to compare those sentiments with the game here in New Zealand, but it struck a chord with me in light of the Kingz belated month-at-a-time signing of Campbell Banks (about six months after most New Zealand soccer fans had suggested it – but then the previous Kingz coaches never used to watch much New Zealand soccer, did they?).

Having lost more players than anyone to the Kingz, Central United had Banks well secured under contract.

Bearing in mind how we hear from professional clubs all the time how this player has signed for \$4 million, that player for \$2 million etc when transfers to professional clubs have been sealed, I didn't think it was unreasonable to ask the Central United webmaster if they would be revealing terms of the Banks transfer.

The reply was no. Seems the figure was so meagre, publicising it might only piss off loyal Central club members and probably embarrass the Kingz into the bargain, (considering the money wasted on their duffers signed from Australia, compared to how little they could shell out for a potential Kiwi match winner.) A lose-lose situation.

But as one Sitter! reader close to the Kingz action said: "Put it this way, I would not want to be seen in a second-hand car bought at the same cost."

Central are one of our better-run clubs, and they were astute enough to insist on a percentage of any future transfer deal concerning Banks. The question from the terrace is: should this information be fair game for fans? I'd like to hear other people's opinions.

**– Bruce Holloway**



# Fallon quotes

## From Fallon:

*"I've seen plenty of people in that sea over the years, but none of them have ever played for Manchester United."* -- **Fallon on Kingz beach training under Mike Petersen.**

*I've felt like Shane's [Rufer] felt this week - he got knocked down but I've had a bone thrown from the table and I'm going to run with it."* -- **Fallon on winning the coaching post ahead of Shane Rufer.**

*When I get my head up I'm going to phone Ken and all his staff - I want them fully involved. This country is too small for bickering but still big enough to be good."* -- **Fallon promises better relationships between the Kingz and the All Whites with player availability.**

*"I'll do what I can with what I've got. It's not exactly the shape I want or the type of players I want . . . yet. But we'll make a good fist of it."* -- **Fallon on his first team selection, away to Melbourne Knights.**

*"I want players who want to talk about football all night long and who will run all day long to get points."* -- **Fallon replies to a question on what fans can expect from his Kingz.**

*"I don't want to get involved but he's a big boy now and has got to make his own mind up. I'm just here to coach football and get the club back to winning ways."* -- **Fallon unfazed on whether Rufer stays or goes, Nov 14.**

*"I've got to get on with the present and the present at the moment is Campbell banks. I've got to help him get better. That's what's dominating my thoughts... not whether Wynton Rufer decides to have a run on his 39<sup>th</sup> birthday."* -- **Fallon in advance of Rufer's retirement. (Dominion).**

## Others on Fallon

*"Not everybody agrees with Kevin's philosophies on the game, but I have worked with him on a number of occasions and always found him to be very good."* -- **Federation Six director of coaching Fred Simpson.**

*"Kevin is the best coach in the country."* -- **Kingz chief executive Chris Turner has us**

wondering why he hadn't appointed Fallon earlier.

*"If you want a team that is well organised and well disciplined, he is your man. The problem in our day was we were mainly playing for enjoyment. Kevin is technically very good, but he needs to be operating at a high level. He is ideally suited to a professional set-up. He doesn't take any prisoners, and rules with an iron fist, but he'll do a good job. He'll be like John Mitchell is in rugby."* -- **John McDermid, one of about seven senior Hamilton AFC players who mutinied against him in 1978.**

*"He is one of just 40 Fifa coaching instructors in the world. He didn't get the job for his looks or his manners. He is the consummate coach, and will give an opportunity to young players nobody else seems to want to take a punt on."*

-- **Former Fifa referee John Cameron.**

*"Some coaches can't even see when they have a problem, and some see it but aren't strong enough to do anything about it. Kevin can see what's going on and actually has the balls to do something about it. If there's a weakness somewhere, he'll spot it -- he's been in the game a long time. It may not be what the players want but he will do something about it."* -- **Former All White skipper and NZ Soccer board member Steve Sumner (Nelson Mail).**

## End of the Lines?

Aaran Lines had a brief but unsuccessful trial with Dunfermline – via Waitakere City. The Scottish website reports went like this...

Week 1: Said manager Jimmy Calderwood: *"He's done well since he came. We'll make a decision on him within the next week or so."*

Week 2: This on the website:

*Jimmy Calderwood has dropped his interest in signing New Zealand international midfielder Aaron Lines after a week-long trial.*

*Lines was involved in Dunfermline Under-21s' 3-2 league defeat to Motherwell at East End Park, but was singularly anonymous on a night when he had to impress his prospective employers. The pace of the game seemed too much for him and he was often bypassed in his midfield patrol.*

*That below-par performance cost him his chance of a prolonged career in the SPL while Calderwood now has to pursue alternative targets for the second time this week.*

Last we heard, Lines was back in Germany.

Former soccer express editor Terry Hobin has won the contract to manage the northern league next season. Others bidding for the job were incumbent Noel Robinson and Tony Pill (Tauranga ref & City-Utd matchday co-ordinator).