

***The following is a potted chronology of events, largely surrounding political issues in Force Three (and other federations), over the past few months. Bruce Holloway presents a personal case study into soccer administration in...***

# Federation-watch

**October 23:** I attend a Waikato Junior Soccer Association meeting entitled "The Direction Forward". The meeting has been called for junior delegates to discuss the future administration of junior soccer in the Waikato, in light of the Force Three federation coming under pressure from New Zealand Soccer to wind up operations of such junior associations. I am there because I serve on the Waikato secondary schools committee.

WJSA president Peter Williamson chairs the meeting, saying it is a chance for the federation to explain to an open forum how new structures might work in Waikato soccer. The meeting comes just weeks after an interview panel of Tony Marks ((Force three president), Graeme Fleming (Hamilton City Council), and Matthew Cooper (Sport Waikato) have appointed lecturer Patsi Davies, lawyer Craig Purcell, Wel Networks boss Ken Gibb and accountant John Gray to the board.

Force Three chairman Dave Parry begins by comparing old Waikato and Bay of Plenty Association structures to new federation structures, on a whiteboard.

In effect he presents the old associa-

tions as a series of round objects with no links, calling them "islands". He then presents a federation structure (puts them in square boxes this time so we know they're well different) which shows a series of women's, youth, referees committees to the side, clubs at the bottom, all joined to the Force Three board at the top. It's bollocks, and his audience quickly recognises it as such.

"We know the WJSA works," complains one delegate. "But we don't know how you work when we look at your organisational chart. There are still 14 different islands. There is still no link."

One speaker challenges Parry to justify his desire to shut down the WJSA. "Why would you want to try and fix just about the only thing in Waikato soccer that isn't broken?" he asks.

Adds another: "Don't change for the sake of change. Change to make things more effective, and be prepared to show that they will be." Most succinctly of all: "Please tell me the advantage of this structure."

Parry does not appear to have a very well planned presentation, and this irks chairman Williamson. "For a long time we have put our requirements to your board

for a takeover of our operations. We work under a constitution and must run an AGM and set fees. We cannot work in two camps. We have asked you to bring a presentation to this meeting. At the moment you are taking a silk purse and making a pig's ear out of it. Show us the business processes and the flow diagrams and we may be able to disappear. Three years down the track and you still don't have them."

In reply Parry employs the old Kevin Stratful analogy: of young players getting on a train at a railway station, then deciding at which stop they want to get off as they move through the system. The federation, he says, provides a holistic system for developing players from junior to senior in the region. "We are all at the station. We can either get on the train, or get left behind."

Brian Lloyd, a junior coach of over 20 years, helpfully adds to the analogy: "You don't get on a train which has no tracks at the end of it". Lloyd tells Parry the federation's lines of communication are exceptionally poor, and this has created many of the current problems. "When ideas are ignored you don't offer any more. People have stopped offering to the federation."

Another speaker says, in the circumstances, thanks very much, but he would prefer to wait for the next train. He points out we have always had pathways of varying degrees of success, noting that the former ones produced Waikato products such as Jonathan Perry and Che Bunce.

I make my contribution to the discussion, noting the presence of Force

Three board member Chris Jessop, who was for many years the WJSA president - takes notes during the meeting. She says she is compiling a list of issues to take back to the board. Through the chair, I ask Chris if she thinks the Force Three board is ready to take over WJSA operations. She hesitates, then says "no" -- at about the same time that Parry says "yes".

"Your board is split," I tell Parry. "Why don't you go away, sort out your problems, then come back when you are united."

The meeting drifts into other concerns. Brian Webb asks where on earth the Force Three blue and white colours have come from. "When we see red, yellow and black colours in the street we know immediately where people are from," he said. "But if I see blue and white, I wouldn't have a clue."

Parry says these colours are "an interim arrangement" and not necessarily permanent colours. This brings huge uproar, given the tens of thousands of dollars that the federation had spent on blue and white gear. Williamson closes the meeting by announcing it will be business as usual for the WJSA. "We were given an undertaking a structure would be presented tonight, it would be ratified and delivered. We have had no other communications." He apologises to delegates for convening them to hear such a shoddy Force Three effort.

**November 20:** I attend the WJSA AGM where junior administrators are livid to hear Force Three plan to impose new levies which will take the cost of

registering a school team from \$285 to \$474 a year.

Waikato Junior Soccer Association delegates unsurprisingly reject this increase of almost 75 per cent.

The levies, designed to cover existing debt and annual federation operational costs, have been set at \$5 (plus GST) a head for 8-year-olds and under, \$12 (plus GST) for all other junior players and \$20 (plus GST) for seniors. Similar federation plans for a mid-season \$7-a-head levy in May were canned after an outcry from clubs and schools.

New Force Three board member Craig Purcell explains the levy is essential for retiring debt and paying for operating costs over the next year, after a massive budget blowout in 2001.

But the meeting rejects the charges, at least until Force Three presents a full budget

and an action plan for the next 12 months. WJSA chairman Peter Williamson notes the proposed levies will take \$171,000 out of juniors, but only \$40,000 from senior soccer players -- who are about to be hit with a \$25 a player rise.

He questions the value of structural upheaval since the federation was imposed upon Waikato soccer.

Waikato secondary school spokesmen announce they are examining disaffiliating from the federation and running their own competitions in 2003. But that will only mean the remaining

junior and senior teams being clobbered with even more savage rises if the federation continues with its philosophy.

Gary Steele (Hillcrest High) says the new charges will be the final straw for Waikato secondary school teams. They already pay an average of over 10 times more than their Auckland counterparts, who prefer to affiliate to the national body through the New Zealand Secondary Schools Football Association rather than their federation. As a result, secondary school teams in Auckland pay \$35 for a first XI and \$10 for all subsequent teams

in boys' competition and \$20 for girls' teams.

"I can think of no Waikato secondary school that will agree to pay a further \$13.50 a head for no extra service when we are already paying too much," Steele says. "We are quite capable of running our

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own competitions using our own facilities. In all likelihood we will do so for a fraction of the price." Waikato has 120 secondary school soccer teams who pay about \$30,000 in annual fees. Competitions are administered by a committee of volunteers.

Neil Evans (Melville) warns administrators will walk away from the game. Steele (Hillcrest High) says there is little coming out of Force three in terms of performance measures or financial accountability.

"There has got to be a point where you

don't come back for more money."

Peter Docherty (Western United) asks if the people who have squandered funds are still there. "If so, we want to see restraints put on them." Board members will not name those responsible, saying it serves no purpose.

I challenge the federation representatives, in the circumstances, to cut their cloth to meet the financial constraints. Purcell admits the federation does not, as yet, have an action plan for next year. Nor does it have contingency plans to deal with such rejection.

Others complain that clubs such as Cambridge have huge junior numbers who are not affiliated to the WJSA, and therefore not the federation. The irony is noted, with Cambridge chairman Peter Martens being a Force Three boardmember.

Says WJSA chairman Peter Williamson:

"I am not opposed to change, but the benefit of change must not be overshadowed by the cost of change. It has become too easy to tap up juniors for everything."

**November 21:** I am invited to a meeting in Taupo at the weekend of administrators from all over the country concerned at developments, or lack of them, within the federation structure.

On hearing of this meeting, I initially wonder to myself why these people aren't instead making submissions to Chris Ineson's review of the federation struc-

ture. So I ring Ineson to ask him the following questions: how do people go about making a submission? What are his terms of reference? He refuses to answer. I now have a better idea of why people are going to the Taupo meeting.

**November 22:** I offer to publicise the Taupo meeting, to encourage a broader spectrum of participants. Organisers say they would prefer not to. I flag my reservations about such a meeting being too secretive, when the ferment and synthesis of ideas from a greater cross-

section of viewpoints might offer greater long-term value. Organisers, who do not want to be named, explain that they are happy for that in future, but their immediate concern at this stage is to establish common ground with like-minded people.

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***-- WJSA chairman Peter Williamson***

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**November 23:** I attend about three hours of what is a two-day workshop in Taupo, attended by disaffected elements from Hamilton, Tauranga, Gisborne, Taranaki, Manawatu, Napier, Wanganui, Auckland, and Christchurch. There are apologies from people in Hutt Valley and Dunedin.

The meeting considers an action plan for re-democratising soccer in the wake of unhappy federation experiences. The main thrust of discussions is "evolution rather than revolution" and examining how the worst aspects of federations can

be modified to make them less in conflict with operations and grass roots level. It is slightly out of keeping with my personal views that any examination should start from more basic questions such as: why have we got federations at all, and would we really be any worse off if we didn't have them?

Still, you can't let personal views get in the way of a group dynamic. After I leave, the meeting is steered around to the action plan, particularly the formation of a national ginger group, "Soccer Reform", to combat the worst excesses of the federation system. It's more a support network rather than a political movement, but organisers ask me not to publicise matters until they are ready. I tell them I can wait a week.

**November 24:** As a follow-up to Taupo, a posting on the Goalnet (internet) soccer mailing list from Capital Soccer administrator Steve Stevens gives an even more worrying spin on events. He says he has "no time for the moans and groans that keep surfacing" over soccer structures and rules. He agrees that some constitutional clauses (particularly the one that says federations are not allowed to amend their rules) are indeed diabolical but then excuses them by saying: "however if one looks deeper one will find more just as bad, but all were plain to see by anyone who had the time to read them before voting".

Translation: "federation rules are a shocker, but because they pulled a swifty a couple of years ago you've got no comeback".

It strikes me that this point of view from

someone working in the game is perhaps an even bigger problem than the lack of democracy itself. By this reasoning, anything you can get away with is basically fair game. Welcome to the wild west.

**December 4:** Haven't heard anything more about Soccer Reform, so in the interests of promoting discussion, make a rather long posting on the Goalnet inviting feedback either on the list or confidentially.

This appears to cause disquiet on both sides of the divide. I field emails and phone calls challenging me to name names and strategies on one hand, and communications appealing to me not to say anything more on the other, with some of the people at the meeting feeling quite tender about things.

The following is a precis of my goalnet posting, summarising the early part of the Taupo meeting, which largely dwelt on the state of the federations, and before they got into action plans for the future).

*Because a lot of the stuff is of an anecdotal nature, and lacking empirical support data, I thought it would be useful to air this summary here. It will give a useful insight into the Taupo gathering for those who weren't there, and secondly, allow others to challenge what they see as being factually incorrect.*

*Some people at the meeting were uneasy about having their identity revealed -- they wanted it to be an "issue" rather than a personality thing. Speakers opened by noting NZS promises associations would remain in the mix,*

and that was not honoured. Rules were changed and never ratified.

Comment: "NZS has perpetrated the biggest crime in New Zealand sport." The speaker's view was the game cannot survive unless the grass roots have a say.

A Taranaki junior administrator lamented the game had become a dictatorship. A fed 4 person, also a union official incidentally, had "never seen a meeting more manipulated" than the one in Taupo in 1999 which led to federations. A Gisborne rep noted there was nine hours travel in their federation. A Wanganui rep said people who paid fees and collected revenue must be entitled to a say in how the game is administered.

Manawatu junior rep: "NZS have a great tactic where they tell us 'it's only your federation that is the problem, everyone else is working superbly... you've got to sort yourself out...' It's bully boy tactics and i'm tired of it."

Auckland rep: "Federations are not necessarily a bad thing, but poorly thought out and badly implemented". He argued the ballot box was still the best way of finding people at governance level.

He noted how Soccer 2 wrote a new set of rules, but NZS refused to accept them as rules. He criticised the lack of criteria in appointed board positions in federation, noting how in all other appointments you measure personnel against job requirements. The fees have gone up considerably, and the costs are tremendous. Another speaker noted there was a major problem in that the NZS board would only listen, or deal with federations. For instance, they have

refused to receive a 17-page submission from the re-established women's committee on the state of the game.

The meeting was told a number of NZS rules had been filed inappropriately. Further, no federation rules have been endorsed by clubs or associations in their area, which is a breach of the Incorporated Societies Act.

**At this point there was a quick collective summary of the state of the federations. Here's a summary.**

**Fed 1:** Considered a dictatorship, with chairman Kevin Simms quaintly described as being a clone of Kevin Stratful, (which struck me as pretty cruel). Though some clubs stood them up on levies -- leading to the unprecedented suspension of some junior teams -- most clubs were acquiescent. Northland however have basically given up and are doing their own thing.

**Fed 2:** It's first board was ineffective and after an uprising from clubs and special general meeting was called -- and only two of the previous board returned. Currently operating with two appointed members and three elected, a major breach of the rules. Still considered an ineffectual board. Is expected to post an even bigger loss than last year. Auckland and Counties associations have gone into recess, but have never been wound up.

**Fed 3:** Considered a total basket case. Doesn't operate as a federation in many respects and is perceived to have a struggling CEO and a coaching director who has alienated many potential allies. Financially is slowly recovering from \$105,000 deficit, but has imposed whopping hikes in fees.

**Fed 4:** Has achieved nothing apart from trying to achieve compliance and a bit of showcasing. The standard of soccer in the region has dropped dramatically. Its administration is tendered out (though the lowest tenderer, Wanganui, was overlooked because it was not considered to have the experience. [My note: Central CEO Peter Andersson had his employment terminated on December 9.]

The over-riding view was under the federation they had changed something that worked well to something that didn't work at all. Attendees ruefully recalled guarantees by Bob Patterson that under federations "costs won't go up, it will not cost you any more". There were huge demands, not just monetary, but physical as well, in trying to make sense of a geographic nightmare.

Gisborne people said their province had become even more isolated under the federation regime. Manawatu and Taranaki were reported as being fractured into men's women's and junior camps. Because most of those present were Fed 4 people it was revealing to hear them concur that one of their biggest setbacks under the federation regime was they no longer got the opportunity to meet, and had lost the benefit of talking and learning from each other. Hawkes Bay made a \$16,000 profit for the season.

**Fed 5:** Had worked relatively well. "Perhaps a model federation," suggested one speaker, though others were more

sceptical. Juniors had been left to "do their own thing in Hutt and Mana" (not sure it that was a good thing or a bad thing), where some elements are scathing of the board. Others said that Fed 5 was not as functional as people believed, with CEO Graeme Sole effectively the tail that wags the dog. Comment: "Sole is capital Soccer". Dysfunctional without him.

**Fed 6:** largely based on old Canterbury Soccer, with the West Coast left to do its own thing, and Nelson and Marlborough also out on a limb. At their AGM a levy was struck (seniors \$10 and juniors \$5) to pay for the Canterbury United team. (Personally I thought this was a worthy initiative, though others disagreed, mostly attacking the

concept from the view that once again juniors were being asked to pay for everything, and secondly, that there was not enough accountability attached to the plan.)

There was a perceived lack of unity between Christchurch and Nelson because of the distance. These regions both used to historically field teams at most premier age group tournaments. Now they have one between them. Contributors wondered whether Nelson was withering as a result. [Nelson subscribers may wish to forward their views on this -- Ed].

Speakers also questioned the ethics of "The Mattison Loop", a reference to NZS South Island board member Nigel

**Attendees ruefully recalled guarantees by Bob Patterson that under federations "costs won't go up, it will not cost you any more..."**

*Mattison, who sits on selection panel for appointed federation members, who then have the voting power to elect him to the NZS board*

***Fed 7:** They've never really accepted the federation thing completely. There has been major resistance to de-registering associations, mainly because it has worked so well in Southland, where they draw big money from their licensing trust. Maverick personalities also make life interesting.*

***A look at things nationwide:** Attendees recalled the Wellington presentation at which the fed concept was sold, particularly the words of facilitator Di Gilbertson... "Soccer owns soccer"... "Soccer is a sports democracy"... "a board serving the game rather than dominating the game..."*

*And the words of Kevin Stratful that "the sponsorship is in the briefcase".*

*These days Fed budgets are submitted to and approved by New Zealand Soccer, not the people who pay the money. The board and NZS decide, nobody else.*

*Speaker: The July 2000 changes to the NZS constitution were illegal. He particularly referred to "branch structure" clauses, where processes they went through to strike the rules were substandard.*

*"In essence, the rules were never properly approved. Indeed, no federation rules have ever been endorsed by clubs or associations in their area, which in itself breaches the Incorporated Societies Act."*

*It was recalled how in September 2000, the rules under which NZS operated their first congress, weren't even filed until two days after the meeting.*

*This was the meeting where Bruce White was famously declared "unelected" as a board member, despite him being the only nomination for a vacancy.*

*This may indeed, be interpreted as electoral fraud.*

*One speaker believed this contravened not only the Incorporated Societies Act, but also the Oaths and Deeds act.*

*Case law since 1998 suggests the federation set up, under which each fed has the same set of rules, where NZS run everything with a heavy control structure, won't stand up to scrutiny. Comment: "Rules are rules -- until challenged."*

*The tenor of the meeting was that it was absolutely essential for soccer to rebuild itself, with people having the power to do what is best for their area. But taking a full legal case against NZ Soccer might cost up to \$20,000 and take 18 months.*

*Speakers noted at NZS board level how appointed members were selected for their expertise. Yet when it came to getting a chairman, they needed to get co-opted member John Morris to fill the vacancy.*

*They also noted the demise of the women's committee and youth committee. Speakers who inquired of NZ Soccer about terms of reference of the Chris Ineson inquiry were appalled to be told it was none of their business.*

**December 11:** Concern is mounting in Waikato soccer circles at the prolonged absence of Force Three director of coaching Mark Youngjohns.

Youngjohns, has been off work on special leave for a month. Force Three chief executive Tony Pill won't say when he is expected back at work. Nor will he



give a reason for Youngjohns' absence since November 11.

Force Three deputy chairman Peter Martens says he had no idea why Youngjohns is on special leave.

Youngjohns does not return my phone call. But sources say he is on stress-related leave and may not be back until February. Youngjohns' absence is causing rumblings of discontent.

With Force Three planning to introduce new levies next season which will significantly increase the cost of running teams, Waikato's grass roots elements are becoming far more demanding in getting their money's worth.

**December 16:** Force Three CEO Tony Pill joins Youngjohns on special leave. It's contagious. One wag describes Force three as being like the Marie Celeste. Sources suggest it is stress-related, though Force Three won't confirm this.

**December 21:** Force Three announces the resignation of CEO Tony Pill, less than a year after taking on the job. His predecessor, Mike Thompson, also lasted less than 18 months.

In a prepared statement Force Three chairman Dave Parry says it has been "a demanding year" for Pill, who worked "many additional hours above what is generally acknowledged as a strenuous time commitment for CEOs".

"After a much needed holiday over the Christmas-New Year period Tony intends to focus on a role in marketing and sales, utilising the experience he has gained from 15 years of self-employment in this area."

Pill, who was initially employed as Force Three's operations manager, presided over the inevitable flak from a record \$100,000 loss in 2001.

Parry will not divulge the CEO's salary, but annual accounts suggest it is about \$60,000.

Asked if the loss of two CEO's in two years indicates the job is too big, Parry says: "we are looking at a dividing line. There may be some truth in that, but there is an awful lot more to setting up an organisation from scratch than maintaining an existing operation."

Meanwhile Force Three director of coaching Mark Youngjohns is no longer on special leave. He is now on annual leave.

**January 22:** The Force Three CEO application pack directs hopefuls to "write two short stories you have been involved with in the past three years as part of the process".

"The stories need to be at least 150 words long and provide detail about who was involved and what your thoughts and feelings were at the time, according to application instructions.

"It is helpful sometimes to write it in chronological order so that it starts with the first thing then moves onto the next, then the next, until you reach the final point. There is no right or wrong way of completing this, but it is important that it is done in your own words."

"It helps us understand how they think," explains appointed Force Three board member Ken Gibb. Applicants are also invited to attach a CV "if you have one" but this is "optional".

*Should I submit this "story", perhaps, I wonder?*