

HAMPSTEAD & WESTMINSTER HOCKEY CLUB

A WATER-BASED PITCH AT PADDINGTON

LETTER TO THE CLUB FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE

BACKGROUND

At the AGM in May the President of the Club, Peter Boizot, wished it to be known by the whole of the Club what the story was behind the redevelopment of Paddington Recreation Ground. In particular he was anxious that the Club be made aware precisely how much had been expended in renovating the ground on which the Club plays, and how we would be able to play, in future years, on a new water-based pitch at Paddington Recreation Ground.

There is no doubt that the future of hockey is on water-based pitches. Anybody who has had the pleasure will tell you so. In fact there are very few pitches in this country, the latest one having been laid, this year, at Southgate. The E.H.A will rule that all Premier League matches will have to be played on water-based pitches - probably by the year 2000. All top matches world-wide are played on such surfaces.

You only have to play on the surface to realise why.

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL

The Committee was aware that Westminster were intending to do something with Paddington Recreation Ground but we were never consulted about the proposed redevelopment. A chance meeting in the New Year to discuss charges revealed that there were major plans afoot for the ground. We asked to be consulted and a meeting was held at the end of February. It became apparent that Westminster were going to spend in the order of £1.2m on Paddington recreation Ground and of that c.£475,000 would be spent on the renovation of the hockey pitches. The plan was to resurface both pitches with an updated version of the running-track pitch (i.e. a Balsam sand-filled pitch) and the development was to start in the middle of April.

We were almost too late.

THE INTERVENTION OF THE CLUB

There was a series of meetings at which it became apparent that (i) the contract was out to tender and (ii) that Westminster were adamant that they would not lay anything other than sand-filled pitches. Eventually the President persuaded Westminster that they could accept a private donation in order to lay a water-based pitch (one of their objections was based on a mistaken belief that they were unable to accept such donations) and the matter was agreed between the President and Westminster. *It was decided that he would make up the difference in cost between a sand-filled pitch and a water-based pitch. The figure which that sum represents is in excess of £100,000.* The new pitch, it was decided, would be inside the running track. There will be, if the project completes, 4 water guns in the four corners of the pitch and the whole pitch will be fenced in with high fencing behind the goals.

I have all specifications for the new development, if anyone is interested.

THE TERMS

Writing, as I now do, at the beginning of July 1998, a number of matters have to be explained.

1. The Council's contract for the renovation of the pitches has now been awarded to Balsam (UK) Limited. We had no say in that award. Balsam are responsible for providing the pitches on which the Sydney Olympics will be played, a polypropylene water-based pitch which is the latest model and exceeds F.I.H requirements on ball speed and ball rebound . (It is to be noted that the F.I.H will soon be tightening their regulations but the Paddington pitch will be the first to comply with the requirements).

The pitch is what is called a “ “

2. The President and your committee members who have been concerned in the negotiations of the terms of this arrangement have secured a number a matters which are to the benefit of the Club as a whole; notably, among other things, security of tenure during the lifetime of the pitch (at least 10 years), the proper regulation of charges, which are to kept to a reasonable level, and a number of other beneficial matters .

3. However, the cost of hire of the water-based pitch is bound to increase our own running costs because there is an additional cost attached to watering it. The best advice we have from the contractors is that it costs circa £8-£10 to water the pitch. The number of waterings depends upon the climatic conditions but should not, with

ordinary usage, exceed £2,500 p.a. We have arranged a proper system of monitoring our use.

4. **Match Fees**: as you will know, if you attended the AGM, the Committee is resolved to raise match fees but the meeting was made aware of concerns that any increases should not be excessive.

Having analysed the whole picture, including our overall use of the pitches and our likely use of the new pitches we have decided to increase match fees to £ per person per match.

There will, of course, be the usual reductions for students and unemployed persons.

This new match fee will apply whether you play on the new pitch or not. The reasons for this are that it would be administratively impossible to charge differential rates and, over the season your use will average out.

THE CLUB'S OVERALL POSITION VIS A VIS THE INTERVENTION OF THE PRESIDENT

Without doubt this astonishing development in the history of the Hockey Club could not have taken place without the magnificent generosity of the President to whom everyone owes an enormous debt of gratitude. The Club itself did not raise any money for this purpose and the President himself has entered into the agreement with Westminster, in effect as a donor on behalf of the Club. Yet the Club will, I am sure, wish to feel that it can help to repay some, if not all, of the money given by the President. Whilst there is no legal obligation to do so without the agreement of the

membership, I hope you will agree that it would be only right and proper to acknowledge our thanks to the President and his extraordinary generosity.

THE FUTURE

We have not, as yet, planned any major events but any timetable should be built around the fact that the new sand based pitch will soon be available and the water-based pitch will be ready in early November (we hope). Plainly a major opening should be held, as early as possible, and, we would also suggest, a fund-raising dinner in the early part of next year in honour of the person who has made this development possible, your President, Peter Boizot.

THE CHAIRMAN

Finally, on a personal note, I shall ask to be relieved of my duties at the next AGM.

I have been Chairman of the Committee for several years and I believe it is time to stand aside. The Club, as a result of the efforts of your committee and the President, to whom I am very grateful for all their help, is, I believe, in very good health and will, I am sure, be able to withstand the challenges of the future, particular with the new ground at Paddington.

Good luck with the new season! I hope to see you at the start. Please tell me if you have any thoughts on the new development.

Nick Coleman

Chairman

July 1998