

LATEST NEWS

Top brass meet over deal on football's future

BY STEWART FISHER

REPRESENTATIVES of the SFA, SPL and SFL are to meet at Hampden this Wednesday to thrash out the terms of reference for George Peat's so-called "coalition committee" into the future of Scottish football.

The date has been in the diary for weeks but has gained currency following the long-awaited ruling by the arbitration panel led by Lord Hope Brodie on Thursday that the formation of an SPL2 would not constitute a breach of the deal set up between the two leagues back in 1998.

League restructuring is just one strand of the Peat committee's planned remit, but the timing of the talks could hardly be better considering the SPL will call an extraordinary general meeting in mid-March in an attempt at moving forward the original plan – which envisaged 10 others joining the existing 12, with stadium criteria for this second tier set at 3000 seats.

Considering the time, expense and hassle it has taken to get this far, it might have been expected that things would now be straightforward, but the Sunday Herald can reveal a number

of sticking points which could yet derail the plan:

- It remains unclear whether the SPL's member clubs are still in favour of it. With an 11-1 majority required to move the plan forward, teams near the bottom of the SPL must weigh up the hope of a softer landing in the event of relegation, against the as yet unstated suspicion that the restructuring might also be used to get rid of the dreaded SPL split, in favour of a return to a 10-team top flight. In which case two of the SPL's basement clubs could be voting themselves out of an SPL1 place.
- It remains unclear whether

the First Division clubs are in favour of it. With it hard to imagine any of the existing SPL clubs surrendering any of their current revenue to fund SPL2, funding for the league would come from the £1.8m that the SPL currently pay to the SFL – at least a third of which the SPL would be looking to reclaim. First Division clubs, already guaranteed that sum from changes to the SFL, may need convincing there is enough revenue in it to be worthwhile.

- What about relegation/promotion? The current agreement between the SFL and SPL insists that the winners of the SFL (First Division) are

promoted to the SPL, and the team which is relegated from the SPL receives a six-figure parachute payment. Thus, the SPL could be left with the a situation where the winners of the SFL jump into SPL1, or else must continue paying top dollar to the team which drops out the bottom of SPL2.

"We are meeting [on Wednesday] in the hope that we can set out the parameters of what we will be doing," Peat told the Sunday Herald. "The tribunal has made their decision that the SPL haven't breached the settlement, but there are lots of things which are still to be ironed out."

'Sheridan ban could backfire on Celtic'

BY STEWART FISHER

MOTHERWELL manager Mark McGhee has warned Celtic that their decision to prevent the on-loan Cillian Sheridan from playing against his parent club this afternoon could backfire on them.

The Republic of Ireland Under-21 international is prevented from playing due to a commonplace clause in his loan deal with Celtic, but McGhee said it could mean that Motherwell employ more cautious tactics than normal.

"It's a shame he won't be able to play," McGhee said. "However, there's a danger for Celtic that, because he's not going to play, it will be a stuffer game than it would be if he was," the Motherwell boss added. "Because he's not

going to play, we will probably go with just David Clarkson up front, get behind the ball and make it as difficult as we can for Celtic... But we're not going to start bleating about it. We'll beat them without him."

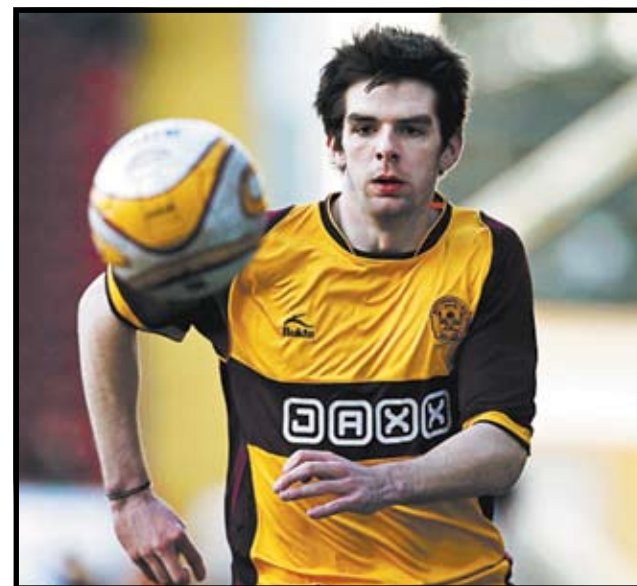
The match will be played on a rutted Fir Park pitch but, however much both teams will be reduced to "common-sense football", Willo Flood has no desire to follow the model of his countrymen in the Eircom League, who moved to a summer season.

The SFA are currently investigating whether changing to a March to September season is viable, but Flood wants things left the way they are. "We played at Fir Park in the second game of the season or something like that and it was supposed to be good then, so I can just imagine what it

must be like," said the Irishman. "But I think if both teams want to get it down and play they can get it down and play no matter what pitch they are playing on."

"If you are asking me personally I wouldn't want a summer league and I am sure a lot of the other lads wouldn't want a summer league. A lot of the boys want to spend some times with their families."

Flood also insisted that his former Dundee United boss Craig Levein will follow him to the Old Firm. "What Gordon Strachan and Craig Levein have in common is they are winners," he added. "The gaffer here has a lot more experience, but Craig will get that. I think one day he will be at one of the Old Firm teams and I think he will be a top, top manager."



Cillian Sheridan is unable to play today

Stanford auditors linked to Fifa financial scandal

EXCLUSIVE BY ANDREW JENNINGS

THE mysterious company that audited the bank run by alleged fraudster and cricket promoter "Sir" Allen Stanford was intimately linked to a Fifa scandal in 2003, also in the Caribbean island of Antigua.

The tiny CAS Hewlett firm of St John's, Antigua, and two rooms in north London, has received massive global publicity for its involvement with Stanford, accused of a multi-billion dollar scam.

The Stanford crisis is not the first time Hewlett may have been conned by sports racketeers. In 2003 they were caught up in a Fifa swindle when a \$1 million grant to the Antigua FA disappeared.

When the grant was paid Chet Greene, the tuggish general-secretary of the association, assured Fifa that Hewlett would be the independent auditor, to ensure the money was not embezzled.

Greene, a close associate of Fifa vice-president

Jack Warner, claimed that a Mr Raymond Doorgen, a "partner" in Hewletts would control the account. He did, diverting the money into his and Greene's personal accounts, bundles of untraceable cash and, sometimes, to the travel company owned by Jack Warner, deputy chair of Fifa's finance committee.

When football collapsed in Antigua, Hewlett said it was news to them that they were Greene's auditors. Doorgen turned out to be a mere clerk and was fired. When I went to Greene's office in Antigua in autumn 2003 to ask what happened to the \$1m he told me, "If you don't leave I'll throw you down those stairs."

Stanford was given his absurd knighthood by the Antigua Labour Party that held power for 50 years until being kicked out in 2004 following a stream of corruption charges – including allegations of bribes from Stanford. Elections are due soon – and Chet Greene is a candidate for the ALP.

More on this Fifa scandal at www.transparencyinsport.org

CULT HERO #7: DUNCAN FERGUSON

THE scorer of more goals than any other Scot in the English Premiership, Duncan Ferguson had a total £18.75m spent on him in transfer fees, captained Everton and was feted for his early feats there. Yet for all the lofty regard for him at Goodison – adulation owing as much to his being undeniably well hard as to his contributions in front of goal – he was also the most frustrating of talents, a taciturn underachiever who often seemed to take more interest in pigeon-fancying than football.

Jim McLean's comments to the effect that Ferguson hadn't the hunger to fulfil his potential were prescient. The Dundee United manager sold his sinewy young striker to Rangers in 1993 for £4m, but he would make very little impact at Ibrox besides headbutting John McStay

of Raith Rovers during a league game in 1994, a misdeed for which he served 44 days in Barlinnie. The SFA's imposition of a 12-game ban on top of the jail sentence rankled and Ferguson responded by making himself unavailable for selection for Scotland after 1997.

His first season at Everton was a success: he scored eight goals in 23 games, helping them to stave off the threat of relegation and win the FA Cup in 1995. And despite his over-familiarity with the treatment table, his goals proved indispensable to the club's Premiership survival right up until he was shipped by Newcastle in 1998. He played just 30 games there and was back at Goodison in 2000, from which point onwards he seemed to alternate between being injured – his problems stemming largely from sciatica – and producing short-lived spells of spectacular form, usually punctuated by sendings-off, in one instance for attempting to strangle Leicester's Steffen Freund.

Besides his four assault convictions, Big Dunc was so hard he once confronted two men who were burgling his house, one of whom then spent three days in hospital. He retired in 2006 and lives in Majorca.

Kenny Hodgart

MENDES STRUCK BY CAP POSER

PEDRO MENDES, Rangers' Portuguese midfielder player, should perhaps apply for a place on Countdown if he succeeds in solving the conundrum that is his international career.

Mendes, who cost £3 million when he was signed from Tottenham last August, is keen to find the answer to his more modest \$64,000 question – he confesses to not knowing whether he is coming or going after being recalled by Portugal coach Carlos Queiroz.

Prior to Queiroz issuing a call to arms last August, Mendes had all but given up hope of adding to the two caps he won against Scotland and Italy in season 2002-03.

Having been a member of Porto's Champions League-winning side under Jose Mourinho, in 2004, Mendes might reasonably have expected to feature for his country.

But that has not been the case, albeit he received an invitation out of the blue from Queiroz requesting his services for the World Cup qualifying ties against Malta and Denmark.

Mendes said: "It was good to be involved again and meet old pals after being out the picture for more than five years."

"It seemed I had been forgotten about so it felt weird that never having received a call during the main part of my career, no sooner had I joined Rangers than it came."

"Unfortunately, I had a hamstring injury and didn't train the first week in Malta and although I was fit the following week, I did not get the chance to play against Denmark."

"Portugal have a match against Sweden next month, but I am not getting my hopes up."

Meanwhile, Rangers manager Walter Smith believes the prospect of a European Super-League has receded further following the growth of the Champions League.

Smith sees very little prospect of Rangers and Celtic competing against the cream of Europe on a weekly basis and he pointed out: "The Champions League is now such a big tournament that they would be loath to disrupt it."

"The same applies to the domestic competitions in the likes of England, Germany and Spain because of the television money accrued from these countries."

Jim Black