

## **KEEPING FAITH WITH RISK MANAGEMENT...Everyone does it every day!!!**

In a previous article I tried to argue for the opportunity to be developed which will allow fans back into stadiums and for this to be seen as something football could lead the way in. It's something I still feel really passionately about but am now increasingly concerned may not happen.

The recent upsurge in COVID diagnosis is of course a worry and something that I do not undermine in any way. We are in the midst of an unknown, and an unknown that is taking a terrible toll on life across the globe, but what I do question is that we remain in such a retreat from its dangers. I neither think its good for our future as a society nor is it good for the infrastructure of sport to come out of this in a healthy way.

There seems to be a total reluctance to see what we can do rather than what we can't achieve, and people need to start to realise that just retreating is not inevitable. We don't have to accept defeat and we can learn from the examples of other areas of sport and from other countries approach to the management of sport.

In Germany there is also a growing number of people testing positive for COVID, and in France as well. The decisions we are having to take are the same as theirs and we should try and understand better why they take a positive attitude to the risk whilst we seem to be opting to take draconian measures with little evidence that it will make any huge increase to infection numbers.

In Germany they are now allowing stadiums at top levels to accept 20% of capacity. They don't seem to be worried by it and there doesn't seem to be a link to increasing infections. They are clear though that they won't ignore the facts and that if there is an increase of infections regionally that can be related to the staging of football matches then the team involved may well have to accept an increase in restrictions including returning to playing behind closed doors or a further reduction in admissions to the stadium.

This really amounts to simple risk management, or positive risk taking and speaking as someone who works in the NHS I can assure you that it something that occurs on a daily basis in all areas of work. We don't operate or treat when there are alternatives, we don't use the mental health act and detain people when we can use other methods to treat. We don't rule out using the higher level of intervention but we risk assess that it may not be the required immediate intervention.

The same process occurs in practically every area of industry and through assessment of the environment and risks we decide what can and can't happen. Thirty years ago people wandered on and off building sites without adequate protective equipment. Now they are aren't allowed to do that but we haven't stopped construction so why are we stopping football?

I personally thought the opening league game at Cheshunt, against East Thurrock United, was handled really well in terms of crowd safety. People were allowed in, there were notices everywhere and regular announcements were made to enforce

that we expected people to observe distancing and all that's necessary to create as safe as an environment as possible. We even opened two areas to buy refreshments, we reorganised how toilet facilities worked and we had stewards and a committee member walking around the ground to remind people to distance. We may look at increasing measures but we must measure the response to the behaviour we want to manage.

In my opinion it worked because our supporters were able to appreciate that to do something they love doing they need to be respectful of safety. If we can get people to view the importance of safety in the way they view construction site safety then we really will go a long way to ensuring our stadiums are safe and secure now and for a long time to come.

I continue however to have a fear that we will not take the brave steps needed and that we will retreat into an attitude of if we shut everything then everything will be alright. It won't be. We will lose clubs at our level if we bring back ground closure and even if there is a financial package it might not be enough after the damage already created in the March lockdown.

Is this a blind faith?

I honestly don't believe so. I believe it is faith based in proper risk management and proper risk assessment. If our area of Cheshunt was in huge trouble with a massive infection rate we might then have to look at escalating the actions of how we manage staging a game at Theobalds Lane. It may well be that we have to play a number of games with a drastically reduced crowd or even no supporters but is there really a need to respond with this unimaginative blanket ban?

For now we seem to be able to move forwards with a number of fans in the stadium but that isn't the same for Premiership or EFL clubs, and that's a decision that must be reviewed sooner rather than later.

We are all enjoying some level of access to the society that was closed for months. We are capable of respecting rules in the majority but unfortunately we are focused on the minority who haven't, but if give it in to that minority we miss the point that we can control environments and where better than sports stadiums?

I'm looking forwards to today's game and for many more of them in the future and I ask only that as fans we show how well we can change our traditional behaviour to ensure we have one of our favourite pastimes.

**Written by Tony Madden**