



## **Kerala Blasters FC Fan Advisory Board**

First Meeting Minutes

Date: 22/03/2025 | Time: 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

Venue: Crowne Plaza, Kochi

### **Attendees:**

Club Representatives

- Abhik Chatterjee – CEO
- Sushen Vashisht – COO
- Karolis Skinkys – Sporting Director (Online)
- Aranyak Nanda – Club Presenter, Moderator

### **Fan Advisory Board Attendees**

Offline:

- Muhammad Jabir TA
- Somu P Joseph
- Sourab M Kalliyann
- Anandkumar Subramony
- Rejin T Jays
- Cerin Pathrose
- Sajith As

Online:

- Ajay Haridas
- Pranav B Pillai
- Gokul Gopalakrishnan
- Rahul Satish
- Abijith PA
- Mathew George
- Rakesh RS

## **Minutes of Meeting**

### *Opening Remarks*

- Moderator Aranyak Nanda set the tone by emphasizing on a culture of open discussion, urging attendees to challenge ideas, not individuals, to maintain professionalism and to carry out constructive debates.
- Introduction of all participants, acknowledging both physical and virtual attendees followed.
- Aranyak introduced Ajay Haridas as the Chair of FAB members, who was internally appointed by the FAB members themselves.
- Abhik Chatterjee (CEO) welcomed the members and outlined the club's vision for the Fan Advisory Board (FAB), emphasizing that:

FAB is all about creating a two-way transparent zone of communication where the fan's voices will be heard and the FAB will accurately relay back the club's sentiments on certain matters.

- FAB is not about power or control; it is a democratic platform for meaningful fan engagement.

- It serves to eliminate misinformation and bridge communication gaps between the club and supporters.

## **Agenda Items**

### **1. Vision & Strategic Goals of KBFC**

-CEO presented the Key Focus Areas for KBFC for the Upcoming Season:

#### **1.1 Squad Competency & Strengthening**

- Ensuring the best possible team setup and challenging for honors across all levels of Indian football

#### **1.2 Infrastructure Development**

- Creating training facilities, stadium experience, and operational efficiency.

#### **1.3 Community Outreach**

- Strengthening the connection between KBFC and Kerala's social issues/ culture and participating in causes that are important to the people of the state.

#### **1.4 Introduction of Project KBFC Star**

- A club-wide goal to add a star to KBFC's crest, representing its first major trophy and excellence in all domains.
- Extending the 'Star Mentality' beyond the pitch to all departments within the club.
- Expansion of KBFC's Presence:
- CEO committed that the club's major objective is to be competitive in every Indian top level football tournament and start win silverware.

- Long-term ambition to expand into the Asian football landscape by qualifying for AFC Competitions.

## **2. Season Review & Challenges**

Concerns on Fan Engagement & Stadium Attendance

### **- Gokul Gopalakrishnan raised concerns regarding:**

- Declining stadium attendance and lack of engagement.
- Negative sentiment on social media, which impacted fan perception.
- Due to the above observations, “Win-Back” was chosen as the motto of the FAB for the 2025/26 tenure, aiming to reconnect proud, loyal supporters with the club by addressing fan voices and strengthening transparent communication.

### **Abhik’s Response:**

- Performance is the key driver for fan engagement, success on the pitch will naturally bring the fans back. The club acknowledged that performances this season were below par and certain areas and departments would undergo complete overhauls in the upcoming months to ensure that this season’s mistakes are not repeated. He also stressed on reforming the club’s communication strategy with feedback from FAB members.
- Reaching the playoffs should be the minimum expectation for a club of KBFC’s stature and the Club should be challenging for each and every tournament that it participates in. Naturally, recruitment and staffing will be areas that will be assessed and will undergo key changes in the immediate term.

*Club Decision-Making & Media Handling*

**- Abijith PA criticized:**

- The impact of Coach Vukomanovic's sacking, which caused uncertainty among fans.
- Delays in the Noah signing announcement and poor preseason prep, late incoming of certain key players and lack of training facilities led to team training outside Kerala, causing a negative impact on fans.
- The lack of efficiency in communication and outreach, which led to negativity building up in the fanbase.
- Why no AFC accreditation?

**- Abhik's Response:**

- The club's identity is bigger than any individual and no individual can ever be bigger than the club, the decision-making must be process-driven rather than personality-driven.
- Abhik clarified some past inefficiencies were before his tenure, and a structured approach will ensure smoother communication in the future.

**Addressing Misinformation, Karolis Skinkys clarified:**

- Fans gave precedence to online comments over the club's official statement, leading to misunderstandings.
- Urged fans to trust official club communications over speculative reports. FAB can play a vital role in fact-checking.
- Rejected the notion of poor preparation last season. Stressed that the team started training in Thailand one month before the Durand Cup. He also mentioned the team stayed behind in Kolkata to play more friendly games. He

acknowledged that sometimes key signings are delayed due to market negotiations as certain cases (Jesus Jimenez) take time before picking India as their next project.

**- Sushen Vashisht (COO) added:**

- The decision to train outside Kerala before the ISL season was based on weather conditions and ensuring optimal player preparation including availability of competitive practice games which was available in Thailand and then Kolkata for the previous season.
- Miscommunication led to unwarranted criticism, reinforcing the need for better information dissemination.

**3. Role of FAB & Fan Expectations**

*What does the Club expect from FAB?*

**- Ajay Haridas asked:**

- What role does FAB play in the next 12 months?
- Can FAB be a platform to express fan sentiment directly to management?

**- Abhik's Response:**

- FAB's purpose is to improve and install transparent and factual communication between the club and the wider fanbase.
- Relaying sentiments of the fans to the club and vice-versa along with community engagement and outreach will be FAB's primary role. FAB can also challenge and criticize club decisions and provide their feedback which will lead to greater accountability. They will also be armed with information to dispel myths that circulate on a daily basis.

- FAB should also give inputs on stadium experience, ticketing, fan engagement, PR and other areas where the club can improve.
- There are no restrictions basis topics that the FAB can bring up and each and every topic can be directly related to the management.
- Fans should rely on official club statements rather than online speculations.

#### **4. Team Preparations & Transfers**

##### *Squad Readiness & Preseason Planning*

##### **- Jabir asked:**

- Fans have noticed a lack of preparation ahead of tournaments like the Durand Cup.
- Will the new coach get adequate time to adapt and gel with the squad?
- Can the club ensure key signings are done earlier?

##### **- Karolis Skinkys' Response:**

- Repeated and rejected the notion of poor preparation last season. Stressed that the team started training in Thailand one month before the Durand Cup. He also mentioned the team stayed behind in Kolkata to play more friendly games. He acknowledged that sometimes key signings are delayed due to market negotiations as certain cases (Jesus Jimenez) take time before picking India as their next project.
- Affirmed that the club will follow best practices to provide the Head Coach with sufficient time to assess and train his squad.

- Affirmed that the club's endeavor will be to complete signings before pre-season except in the case of exceptional circumstances.
- Mentioned that transfers are dictated by market dynamics. Sometimes waiting for the right player is better than rushing into signings.
- Cited Lagator and Bikash's January signing as a strategic move of committing to good players as soon as possible.
- Confirmed multiple signings are completed and will be announced.
- Confirmed that the medical side will be thoroughly and critically assessed and refreshed.

**- Abhik added:**

- He debunked false online claims suggesting an "astronomical compensation" was paid to Coach Mikael Stahre, labelling such rumors as clickbait-driven engagement tactics.
- Emphasized that the salary data available on online sources is inaccurate and does not reflect actual club dealings.
- Unlike other teams that used the Durand Cup for preseason, KBFC opted for a structured Thailand preseason, ensuring better training conditions for players.
- Jiménez's signing was a strategic decision, and his performances have vindicated the club's patient approach in the transfer market.
- Confirmed that a new Head Coach appointment will take place in the upcoming days before the Super Cup campaign that the full-strength first-team squad will compete for.



## *Player Retention & Maintaining Core of the Squad*

### **- Pranav asked:**

- What is the club's strategy for player retention and squad composition for the upcoming season, will the core of the team be maintained into the next season? What are the objectives for the next meeting?

### **- Karolis Skinkys responded:**

- The club's primary focus is on securing the best players and ensuring they deliver top performances. He added that players leaving or staying is not always the club's decision, the player's motivation and personal goals also play a big part in the players continuing with the club.
- The Indian squad next season will see a few new additions, while a few foreign signings will also be made to strengthen key areas.
- The team needs more leadership and passion, and the club is actively working towards building this.
- With the new coach coming in, the focus is on striking the right balance, there will be some changes but not a complete overhaul.
- Pointed out that the club did reinvest transfer funds in Lagator and Bikash, moving them into the squad in January so that they had time to bed in and prepare for the new season.

### **Abhik responded regarding the next meet objectives:**

- Abhik encouraged FAB members to divide functionality related jobs within themselves, have fan interactions and create a social media presence for the same to build a rapport with the general fanbase before the next FAB meet.

## **5. Women's Team & Social Initiatives**

### *Women's Team Future*

#### **- Ajay asked:**

- What is the timeline for KBFC's women's team's reintroduction?
- Was there any information on a new training venue for the team?

#### **- Abhik's Response:**

- Post the inception of the women's team, the club financially couldn't sustain the team within the circumstances present at that period for a sustained period.
- Accepted that the manner in which things were executed, was painful for the fans and was something the club has taken cognizance of and learnt from.
- There is an intent to find answers for financial solutions specifically for a women's team for a sustained period and it is something that is being studied execution-wise in a serious manner. Once complete financial independence can be guaranteed, the club will not waste time to take the step in this direction. Admitted that it is a work in progress, hence cannot over-commit at a stage where information is sensitive.
- Confirmed that the club has secured space on a 10-year long-term lease and is building its first state-of-the-art training pitch. This will be under KBFC's exclusive remit and is expected to be finished before the upcoming pre-season. This is a significant step and investment by the club in the infrastructure category.

### *Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (PWD) Fans*

**- Anand suggested:**

- The club should initiate exclusive programs for PWD fans.

**- Abhik confirmed:**

- PWD-friendly initiatives will be launched to improve matchday accessibility. Also added that the club would take steps to showcase the existing facilities via social media so that there is more awareness regarding the same.

## **6. Diversity & Inclusion in FAB**

### **Rakesh's concerns**

- About the lack of female representation in the FAB board.
- Inclusion senior citizens and LGBTQ community in our FAB panel.

### **Abhik responded:**

- The number of female applicants was very low, and most were underage, making selection difficult. As per merit, our neutral selection panel didn't find suitable candidates for the same.
- Age or sexual orientation wasn't a hurdle to join FAB, Abhik underlined the club would welcome senior citizens or LGBTQ community candidates into the FAB as per merit.
- However, he encouraged Ajay (FAB Chair) to propose a suitable female candidate, assuring that the club would consider the recommendation on priority.

## **7. Club Finances & Sustainability**

### *Revenue Generation & Financial Challenges*

#### **- Rejin questioned:**

- Why did the club continue promoting sponsors like Kravin' during a difficult phase last season?

#### **- Abhik's Response:**

- The issue is not sponsorships but perception; the club relies on revenue streams for sustainability.
- Kravin, part of the House of KBFC, is an innovative project that has been unfairly criticized. Any revenue from it is reinvested back into the club.
- Every football club in India operates at a loss, and KBFC is no different.
- Several large Kerala-based conglomerates expressed interest in taking over the club but reconsidered after realizing the massive operational costs involved.
- Even with a full stadium, the match-day revenue does not cover stadium operation costs due to various expenses paid to multiple service providers for smooth functioning of the event and exceptionally high rents that KBFC has to pay, with no support from central bodies. Hence, even a sold-out house is operated on high losses at the Kaloor stadium.
- The current KBFC ownership has invested close to ₹380 crores since their takeover and has not shied back from supporting the passion that the people of the state have for KBFC. Their takeover was at a time, where the ownership of the club was in flux and nobody stepped forward to take over.

- The CEO clarified that the money spent or the losses of the club cannot justify poor performances as there are valid question marks on how the money was invested into the squad. Acknowledged that there was a definite need to improve on this front drastically.
- Stated that this financial information is available publicly on the MCA portals for general consumption and that that these audited statements are there for all fans to consume.
- The club is actively exploring alternative locations within Kerala that may offer better options to bring KBFC closer to the fans.
- Unlike some other clubs backed by state governments and with financial support through various dispensations, KBFC's owners have kept the club afloat entirely through their own financial commitment.

## **8. Fan Communication & Engagement**

- *Clarification on Fan Group Communication*

### **- Rejin further asked:**

- What is the club's stance on direct communication with fan groups?

### **- Abhik assured:**

- Fan groups will continue to have their place and be engaged with.
- FAB is not a replacement for fan groups, but rather a structured advisory body to enhance communication and transparency.

### *Challenges Faced by Fans attending Away Games*

### **Somu's concerns and suggestions:**

- Raised concerns about poor away match experiences for KBFC fans, particularly:
- The Bengaluru FC (BFC) away match last season, where ticket prices were revised and inflated.
- He requested ISL to play a role in regulating away ticket pricing, ensuring fairness for traveling fans.
- Away fan seating arrangements were also pointed to as being subpar, often placed behind the goalkeeper, leading to a poor match-day experience.
- Added that the club should take on community-based initiatives in the vertical of the fight against drug abuse.

**COO Sushen Vashisht responded:**

- Away match seating is entirely at the discretion of the host club.
- However, KBFC is willing to coordinate with host clubs in advance to ensure better arrangements for traveling fans. KBFC will raise differential pricing issues and attempt to provide possible solutions.
- Fans attending away matches should communicate their concerns to the club in advance, enabling KBFC to liaise with host clubs and local authorities for better fan experiences.
- Acknowledged the community-based ideas and ensured action in these areas.

**Sajith enquired regarding:**

- Fan registration, and the perks/exclusive benefits for season ticket holders!

**Somu suggested campaigns & initiatives:**

- Conducting social media influencers meeting to get the support from them.
- Mentioned ensuring availability of Ramps during ticket promotions.

- Campaign against drug abuse which is the greatest threat to Kerala at present.

## **9. Match-day Experience & PR Issues**

- *Improving Match-day Atmosphere*

### **- Mathew enquired:**

- Whether club has financial viability for Improving match day experiences after receiving feedbacks from Fans and FAB?

### **-Sushen's response**

- Accepted suggestions, ensuring openness to ideas.

### *Handling Negative PR & Misinformation*

### **-Cerin criticized:**

- The club's weak PR strategy, suggesting a fact-checking section for fans.
- Stated that the club had a genuine PR problem.
- Stated that the club needed to do more to ensure families had a better viewing experience during games.

### **- Abhik's response**

- Acknowledged that the club had a PR issue.
- Asked for feedback and inputs in terms of improvement. Stated that ideas will be welcomed in this regard.
- Committed to improving experience for families by segregating specific areas in the stadium.

## **10. Closing Remarks**

### **- Gokul Gopalakrishnan inquired:**

- Fan protests & banner regulations, why were they restricted this season, even though the club approved / welcomed “peaceful” protests?

### **- Abhik explained:**

- Any protests/banners inside the stadium must be pre-approved with the timeframe of at least 3 days before the game, as unapproved demonstrations can result in ISL-imposed fines for the club along with disruption of such unauthorized protest on part of the authorities.
- Added that for certain demonstrations, no prior approval was sought from the club and items were concealed and brought into the stadium. On frisking and during security checks, certain elements created disruption.
- The CEO also provided proof to the FAB in this regard.
- Pre-approved protest in the last game of the season was permitted when proper procedures were followed.
- The FAB asked whether the Club intends to officially complaining continuous mistakes from referees. [Question was left unanswered due to time limits]

*Aranyak concluded the meeting by distributing FAB membership cards to the Advisory Board members, which grant free access to all KBFC home and away matches for the upcoming season.*

**Meeting concluded at 6:00 PM.**