

I very much hope that this finds you, your friends and loved ones well as we all continue to navigate our way through this ongoing, national crisis.

At the time of writing, with the tragic fatality statistics, and the human loss behind these numbers, finally beginning to recede, there is real hope that the worst is behind us.

The tragic loss of life hit close to home recently as we learned that one of our committee members lost his mother-in-law to Covid-19, after spending what must have been 7 very long weeks in hospital. My commiserations go out to him, and his partner, and of course to everybody else who has suffered loss due to this pandemic. I feel it is very timely to emphasise the need to follow the Government's guidance on social distancing.

The lockdown guidelines are slowly being relaxed and we must all play our part in getting past this pandemic and continue to follow advice. Please ignore what some others are doing and hopefully, recent events around the country, and the world, won't result in a second peak in the coming weeks and we can get back to doing the things that we love, sooner rather than later.

There have also been a couple of other losses recently, not related to the pandemic, and I hope you will join me in taking a few moments to remember all those we have lost, including Kent Youth League founder and Kent County FA President Colin Boswell, and long-time VCD Athletic stalwart Martin Ford.

As yet, we still have no idea when the new season might start but we are gearing up to kick off the new season in August. That target date seems very unlikely of course, especially as I hear that the National League is working towards a September start for the 2020/21 season. This all depends on when the Government will allow football matches to take place and I know that our League is looking at contingency plans that include start dates into the New Year!

These could include the postponement of the League Cup, possibly no County Cups, and maybe even just a 19 match season! There are a lot of ifs and buts at the moment and the Leagues around the country will have a lot to do to try and please its clubs.

Normally, a lot of us would be jetting off around the world on our holidays by now and perhaps the "staycation" is something we may have to get used to?

This is also the time of year when we look forward to the release of the early round draws of the FA Cup and while we await confirmation of when the season might start, we do know that this date could well have an effect on those Preliminary, and possibly Qualifying Rounds.

Depending on when we can get going, some of the early rounds could be bypassed with the result that a lot of clubs will not be given the opportunity to participate in this season's competition. And with the FA charged with recouping £300 million of lost revenue, prize money has already been reduced by 50% from last season.

That is vital revenue that clubs at the Steps 6, 5 and 4 could all do with, especially with the losses that clubs have suffered over recent months.

The FA Trophy, which starts a little later into the season, may not be quite so dramatically affected but my hunch is that prize money could also be reduced in this competition.

Of course this is all hypothetical at the moment, but it will be a significant blow to a lot of clubs if it happens.

As a club, we don't budget for Cup prize money when we prepare for the season, but as you can imagine, a good Cup run is welcomed for the financial benefits it brings. We have applied for grants that may be available, to help us through this difficult time but we can safely say that, at this time, we have the capability to see the club through to the new season.

Our manager is talking daily to players, old and new, as he looks to prepare for another assault on the Isthmian League. It looked likely that we would have at least made the play-offs, in what was an exciting first season at Step 4, and hopefully, we will be in a strong position to challenge for honours next time.

The next Government advice for our National Game is due to be announced at the beginning of July when we should be that much closer to knowing when we can get football back out on to the pitch.

There will still be a need for a pre-season. The players will have trained hard during the break but they will need matches to properly prepare for the season ahead. So maybe 3 or 4 weeks after being given the go ahead, we should be able to get out and watch the beautiful game.

What we can say for certain, is that when football does return to Badgers, it won't be behind closed doors. The Premier League and Championship may feel comfortable playing in front of empty terraces, but at our level, it just wouldn't work. (Stand by for the jokes!) Supporters are the lifeblood of the grassroots game and when we do return, we hope that you will return to support us once again.

There is still plenty to do at Badgers to ensure the safety of supporters, committees, players, match officials and staff and we are committed to carrying out those works. We have already been given some instructions on what we have to achieve as we prepare for your return.

It will be difficult, and probably significantly different from when you last visited, but we have to prepare for a new normal.

In all areas of our lives.

We have already made some significant improvements to the playing surface and changing facilities during this extended break, while the clubhouse is also being treated to some TLC. I hope you will notice the difference when you next come and visit us. Don't get frustrated by the wait. Use this time to grow and we will all be better prepared when the door finally opens.

I am immensely proud of the team behind the team who have pulled together these past few months and I know that when this nightmare ends, as it surely must, we will emerge stronger as a club and be ready to play our part in the community.

Our committee haven't met as often as we would have liked, telephone conference calls are not ideal, but we are all committed to bringing us all together as soon as possible.

We are hopeful that the main hall will be reopening some point in July, with all social distancing guidelines in place, and it will be a nice feeling to get back into the clubhouse and enjoy a cold one with friends.

Finally for now, please continue to follow the social distancing guidelines, for everyone's sake, and with one final push, we should get there!

Best regards to you all, stay safe, and see you all soon.

Frank May
Chairman
Cray Valley PM Football Club