

## **Who Knows our Bluenoses? – A Focus on Supporters.**

Recently, there has been much accusation that Birmingham City supporters are suffering from increased apathy – I myself have been guilty of using that word to describe the support at times.

With the continuing ambiguity regarding the ownership and sale of the club, our depressing home record and the humiliation of last Saturday, it could be argued that it would be hard not to become apathetic. However, if the last few days have proved anything to me, it's that this isn't the case at all.

So what has happened in the last few days that has caused the apathy to subside? Obviously the news that Gary Rowett is back at Birmingham, having taken up the management position, has greatly increased the optimism. I for one am delighted. He was a favourite player of mine back in the 1998/99 season. His interview on Tuesday night was impressive.

The Open Meeting facilitated by Blues Trust on Tuesday night was also encouraging. There was a real sense that those supporters that attended had had enough of the apathy too. They want a change for the better, and want to do something that will act as a catalyst for that change.

In this turbulent and challenging time that us Blue noses find ourselves in, there has been a call for unity. With this in mind, I want to find out more about the varied and numerous supporter groups that we have in order that we may find out more about them, and indeed unite. We may be in different parts of the country, or indeed the globe. We may belong to one group or several. The groups may be run in different ways. However, we have all got one common interest – and that is our beloved club. By finding out more about these other groups we may be inspired to work together and quash the apathy that we are sometimes guilty of fostering ourselves.

This week I have been communicating with the Birmingham City Norwegian Supporter's Club, which was founded by Martin Kolsrud back in 1981 when he was fifteen years of age.

Here are some questions that I posed to Martin, along with his replies.

### **Supporter Group in the Spotlight – Birmingham City Norwegian Supporter's Club.**

**E.H:** Why did you establish the Birmingham City Norwegian Supporter's Club?

**M.K:** *It was founded to create a fellowship for Norwegian Blues supporters. Norway is a wide long country from South to North and most members are the only Bluenose in town. Originally it was*

*also set up to gather information about Blues for the fans. Before the days of internet the information that was passed on through our Magazine Blues Info was vital.*

**E.H:** How many members are in the group?

**M.K:** *.56 is the official number, but over the years I think I must have come across something like 300 Norwegian Bluenoses.*

**E.H** How is the group structured?

**M.K** *It's set up democratically with an annual meeting where a vote is held to elect people for the board. Originally, the annual meeting voted for our Player of the Year, that is now through internet.*

Martin shared a list of Winners of their Player of The Year. Our new manager received this accolade for 1998/99.

**E.H:** What has been the membership trend? For example has membership numbers ever increased or decreased?

**M.K:** *We were on a peak in the late 80 early 90s, when Blues didn't do well at all. A member said, "I think we are a bunch of adversity followers!"*

**E.H:** Do you attend matches regularly?

**M.K:** *I have travelled regularly since my first visit back in Easter 1982 when Blues lost to Everton and Leeds*

**E.H:** Are any of your members Season Ticket holders?

**M.K:** *Yes. 3 of us are*

**E.H:** What would you say has been the best or most memorable Birmingham City moment for your group?

**M.K** *Must be when we took more than 20 fans over to Wembley for the League Cup*

**E.H:** And, dare I ask, what would you say has been the worst?

**M.K** *I'd say the guys who went last Saturday and had to witness the Bournemouth horror show. (Member) Knut Roger Hansen, said he liked Wembley better!*

**E.H:** Do you think Supporters should be involved more at a club level?

**M.K:** *No, I don't think we in Norway are close enough to the club to be, but the local supporter's club should be given the opportunity to give a customer's prospective. That is important to any business.*

**E.H:** How do you think supporters can engage with the club?

**M.K:** *We need gatherings with people that is running the club, to get mutual feedback and brainstorming together.*

**E.H:** Finally but most importantly, It is a difficult time for Birmingham City at present. What would you like to say to your supporter members, and all supporters of Birmingham City?

**M.K:** *Remember we are Blues. This is the third time in my time, we have been close to oblivion, we will fight back, we always do. I said to one of the travellers for the Bournemouth match, "In 10 years time you will smile when you tell others you were at St. Andrews for the worst match in the history of the club, imagine that is only ten years ago, and now we play in Europe."*

I am inspired by Martin's words and I hope that other Bluenoses are too. We are a proud and resilient supporter base – we have one common love and interest and that is our club. Let's stick two fingers up to apathy, focus on the things that we have in common and unite in our passion for the team, the club and the game.

My sincerest thanks to Martin for the opportunity to pose these questions, and for his time and effort. Also thanks to Trond Fuhre for his assistance.

For further information please visit [www.bskn.info](http://www.bskn.info) They can also be found on Facebook.

### **Birmingham City Norwegian Supporter's Club Player of the Year Winners.**

84/85 David Geddis	94/95 Ian Bennett	04/05 Emile Heskey
85/86 Des Bremner	95/96 Johnatan Hunt	05/06 Damien Johnson
86/87 Steve Whitton	96/97 Paul Tait	06/07 Gary McSheffrey
87/88 Vince Overson	97/98 Jon McCarthy	07/08 Sebastian Larsson
88/89 Martin Thomas	98/99 Gary Rowett	08/09 Lee Carsley
89/90 Robert Hopkins	99/00 Martin Grainger	09/10 Roger Johnson
90/91 Simon Sturridge	00/01 Martin O`Connor	10/11 Ben Foster
91/92 Nigel Gleghorn	01/02 Darren Purse	11/12 Chris Bruke
92/93 John Frain	02/03 Robbie Savage	12/13 Curtis Davies
93/94 Scott Hiley	03/04 Kenny Cunningham	13/14 Darren Randolph



Picture courtesy of Martin Kolsrud from The Annual Supporter`s cup, held in Oslo. Since it was set up in 1991, 59 Norwegian supporter`s Clubs have participated. Blues are currently 14<sup>th</sup> on the "all time table" (1991-2014) Having played 72 games, won 32, drawn 14 and lost 26, goal difference is 121-117 and they have 110 points

The Picture shows back from left to right: John Sterri, Torger Engeland, Martin Kolsrud, Roar Kopperud, Eirik Haglund, Roger Mikkeltorg. Front: Trevor Hansen, (named after Trevor Francis), Brian Hansen, Knut Roger Hansen, and Trond Fuhre.



Picture Courtesy of Martin Kolsrud - From Norwegian TV back in 2002/03 when Birmingham City beat Liverpool. Martin Kolsrud on the right and former Sheff Utd player Mike Speight in the middle