

Grand Match Report

This report outlines the process and issues relating to the decision not to go ahead with the Grand Match at the Lake of Menteith earlier this month.

The Lake of Menteith was removed from the list of potential venues back in 2000/2001 for a number of reasons including issues with car parking. On Monday 4th January it became known that the local landowners were willing for their car parking to be used again, representatives of the Grand Match Committee met on the Tuesday and agreed that it was worth investigating the possibility of using the Lake again.

Representatives of the GMC met with various local interested parties and the police on the Wednesday and although some concerns were raised it was believed that these could be dealt with. The main areas appeared to be issues with access to car parking and the logistics of getting buses in and out of the site. Work continued to try and resolve these issues and continue the planning over the next day or so until another meeting was arranged at the Lake of Menteith on Friday 8th.

At this meeting not only were there representatives of the GMC, the hotel, the local landowners and the police but also the ambulance and fire services, the national parks authority and Stirling Council, including the Lord Provost.

The meeting began with the Police outlining their concerns about the lack of a formal plan for the Grand Match being held at the Lake. In particular they had major concerns for public safety linked to the access to and from the site for both players and spectators and were concerned that without the correct plans the road infrastructure would not cope and we could find ourselves gridlocked. This led to additional concerns re provision of access for the emergency services. Additionally they felt that there should be clear contingency plans for the site and crowd management plans. They also expressed concerns re the condition of the car parks and that although cars could get in they would not get out.

The police and other blue light services did make comment about what proof was there that the ice was safe and noted that without the right kind of proof they would not go on the ice but this was not the main that was they did not feel they could get people in and out of the site safely.

The police and other blue light services then gave a clear and unambiguous recommendation not to proceed and made it clear if we did go ahead it was without their support. At this point we made contact with our insurers who confirmed that the insurance was not available if we went ahead without the support of the emergency services.

The police and other services were questioned if plans could be put in place to deal with their concerns but they were clear that they did not think it would be possible to do so in the timescale but that they were happy to work with us to develop robust plans for the future.

Those members of the GMC present felt that there was no option but to follow the recommendation of the police. A joint statement was then agreed between the GMC, Police and National Parks Authority.

It is important to be clear that plans are in place for both Loch Leven and Piper Dam which have previously been discussed with the local police. The GMC are now revisiting these plans to ensure the local police remain committed to supporting them.

One of the suggestions raised was that all the players could sign a disclaimer thus allowing the match to go ahead without insurance. There are differing opinions on this but it would seem that a player signing a disclaimer would not prevent their family from suing the organisers of the match if they felt they were liable for the injury or death of the participant. It would also not be possible to have every spectator sign a disclaimer and as organisers the Royal Club could potentially be liable for any loss which could be proved to be due to the hosting of the Grand Match.

There has been a large amount of correspondence since the announcement of the decision not to go ahead with the Match. The majority of it has expressed disappointment but understanding, a small portion have been angry with the anger directed at the Royal Club for not ignoring the Police advice and one or two have been anonymous and abusive. We are working through all the emails from members and will respond to them all in due course.

In terms of whether the level of optimism for the Grand Match could have been better controlled it is difficult to see how once the story had been run on BBC on the 4th / 5th January that anything could be done to dampen expectations. On the 5th the Royal Club issued an update to say attempts were being made to with local partners to make it happen early the following week. The meeting on January the 6th did nothing to change that expectation so the procedures were posted as a news item and we continued to take names for the reserve list. It is difficult to see what kind of statement could have been made before the 8th based on what was known at the time which would have done anything but increase the optimism.

It should be noted that on the Saturday following the decision not to go ahead there were conversations with the First Minister's office to see if there was anything he could do to help.

In hindsight the easiest thing to have done was when the Lake was again proposed as a venue it could have been rejected outright immediately, however although that may have been the easiest decision it would not have been the right one. The correct decision was taken ie. to see if it was possible to stage the Match at the Lake. On reflection what would have been useful was if more of those who attended the meeting on Friday the 8th had attended the meeting on Wednesday 6th.

The following matters are being taken forward by the GMC:

- The documentation supporting the Grand Match going ahead on 7 inches of ice is to be re-written in a format that can be handed to the police and emergency services.
- The plans for Loch Leven and Piper Dam will be reviewed and written up in a format consistent with the 'Purple Book' which is a reference book for hosting large events.
- A list of criteria will be drawn up that will allow the GMC to assess any other potential venues which may be able to host a grand match

Jim Paterson, Convenor, Grand Match Committee
Colin Grahamslaw, CEO
15th January 2010