

Ken Anderson: Bolton Wanderers' 'rogue chairman' under fire



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January 8 2019, 12:00pm, The Times

Football's authorities are facing calls for new rules to be imposed to prevent "rogue owners" taking over football clubs after questions were raised about the activities of the Bolton Wanderers chairman.

Ken Anderson, who took over Bolton in 2016, was previously disqualified from being a company director for eight years, and another club owner Dale Vince, the chairman of Forest Green Rovers, has alleged he reneged on legal contracts and described him as "untrustworthy".

Anderson — who bought Bolton for £1 and paid himself £525,000 in consultancy fees in his first year — was disqualified from being a company director in 2005 for transgressions relating to eight companies including diverting or seeking to divert company funds into a personal account, VAT discrepancies and failing to co-operate with receivers.

Bolton have serious financial problems and, as revealed by The Times last week, the Professional Footballers' Association had to provide a loan to the club in December to cover wages for that month and November. The club's subsidiary company, Bolton Whites Hotel Ltd, of which Anderson is the only director, is the subject of an outstanding winding-up petition from HMRC over unpaid taxes.

Vince said that he felt forced to speak out after claiming that Anderson had reneged on promises and legal contracts to sign the Forest Green player Christian Doidge — who has been on loan at Bolton for the first half of the season — last week. He told The Times: "I know now that he was disqualified as a director for eight years and I really think the EFL needs to toughen up its owners' and directors' test. Football clubs are precious to people and there needs to be a much stricter test.

"From my dealings with him I would describe him as a rogue chairman, a slippery character and untrustworthy. We had a conversation on Friday and I said I would sue for reneging on the contracts. He just said even if I bankrupted the club he would get paid up as he is a secured lender while we would only get 10p in the pound."

Vince said that Bolton had not paid Doidge's wages for the past four months — Forest Green have done so instead — and that he would approach the EFL about the case.

In a statement on Bolton's website, Anderson rejected Vince's comments. He said: "I found the chairman of Forest Green Rovers Dale Vince's media comments very disrespectful and misleading to say the least.

"For my part, I will not drop to the levels that he did in his various allegations to the press as I believe it will serve no practical purpose."

The accounts for Bolton's parent company, Burnden Leisure, show that Anderson was paid £525,000 in consultancy fees in the 2016-17 season, via his company Inner Circle Sports and Media. Burnden Leisure, which reported an operating loss of £12.9 million for that year, also paid £125,000 to Athos Group which is "owned by a family member of K Anderson" for consultancy services.

Bolton were in Sky Bet League One at the time and £525,000 was significantly more than the highest-paid director at any other club in that division that season, with 20 clubs in the Championship and eight in the Premier League paying their chief executives less than that.

Anderson and the former Bolton striker Dean Holdsworth took over the club in March 2016 after the former owner Eddie Davies had written off debts of £175 million. They paid £1 for the shares and took on a £4.4 million loan to cover tax debts. Anderson bought Holdsworth's shares in 2017 for £150,000.

Bolton's players went on strike in July over unpaid wages and the club narrowly avoided going into administration in September to repay the £4.4 million loan but were rescued when, four days before his death, Davies, via his offshore company, made a £5 million loan to Anderson, who then made a loan to the club. Bolton said last week that Anderson personally paid the players' wages for November.

Anderson is a resident of Switzerland according to company accounts. He ceased to be the person with significant control of Inner Circle Sports and Media on February 1 last year, and was succeeded by Vasily Anisimov, a Russian billionaire who was one of the names on the United States' "Kremlin list" of oligarchs with close links to Vladimir Putin.

Bolton said Anderson no longer had any interest in that company and had "never spoken or met the current owner", and that he had "other businesses called Inner Circle Sports and Media in other tax jurisdictions".

Anderson was disqualified from being a company director for eight years from October 12, 2005 for transgressions involving his firm Professional Sports International Ltd (PSI) plus seven other "previously failed companies".

The disqualification notice states: "Mr Anderson diverted/sought to divert PSI's funds by depositing them into a personal bank account in his own name and invoicing the name of another connected company." It adds that he failed to deal with PSI's VAT affairs and to co-operate with the administrative receiver.

"It has not been possible to determine the actual VAT liabilities . . . nor to determine the actual liability to the Inland Revenue for the 2002-03 tax year. Likewise it has not been possible to account for round sum payments from PSI's limited company account totalling £48,000 from October 2001 to February 2002."

Bolton's fans' groups have issued a joint call for a protest at the match against West Bromwich Albion on January 21 against what they claim is "mismanagement" by Anderson.

Damian Collins, the MP who chairs the digital, culture, media and sport select committee, said that football's owners' and directors' test should take into account a person's track record even if disqualifications had expired.

Collins said: "There should be a much tougher owners' and directors' test applied to people who sit on the boards of football clubs. The FA should have the power to make a subjective decision based on the track record of the director, as is the case in broadcasting."

The EFL would not be drawn on its owners' and directors' test but said it was in touch with Bolton and Forest Green "seeking an appropriate solution that meets the requirements of our regulations".

Anderson has been approached for comment.