

Away PL ticket allocation – thoughts following benchmarking exercise

Attached is a benchmarking matrix looking at the way five top Premier League (PL) clubs, including Chelsea, handle the emotive issue of away ticket allocation. The information was provided by members of the relevant Supporters Trust board.

The clubs were chosen as they are arguably Chelsea's peer group in the Premier League and I have contacts at each of their trusts. I have no contact at a Manchester City supporters group so they are excluded.

Some points stand out, and may be worth further investigation.

1. Away Ticket Allocation

- Chelsea's 60/40 Season Ticket (ST) holder / member split for away tickets is out of step with other leading PL clubs and, on that basis, is arguably hard to defend. Tottenham see access to away tickets as a key Season Ticket Holder (STH) benefit. Changing the existing policy at Chelsea, however, would be hugely unpopular given that STH's are in effect members of a closed shop, the low churn meaning that few members getting the chance to purchase one.
- The scheme at Tottenham, whereby a window is opened for 10-14 days for each away game and STH's apply online and at their leisure, those with most Loyalty Points being successful, would seem fairer and simpler than the current Chelsea system, and would reduce the need for supporters to log into the website at 07.00. It would not work of course, for away games where LP's do not apply, although a window followed by a lottery would certainly work, though may increase applications by those not intending to go. *Worth consideration.*

2. Loyalty Points

- Apart from Manchester United, all clubs surveyed operate some form of Loyalty Points (LP) system for allocation away (and in some cases home) tickets.
- The Chelsea policy of taking only the current season's LP's into account, rather than collating points over a three- or four-year period, is arguably fairer than at other clubs and certainly reduces the resemblance to a closed shop.
- Chelsea's policy of only applying loyalty points for the purchase of PL away games in London and against the main rivals (about 9-10 games a season) seems both sensible and fair, in that it gives more supporters the chance to attend away games. It is, however, out of step with the practise at Arsenal, Liverpool and Tottenham where loyalty points apply for all PL away games.
- One thought occurs. One way to limit the 'purchasing LP's to get scarce tickets' may be to finesse the LP scheme so PL LP's can only be used for PL games, FA Cup LP's for FA Cup ties etc, with the proviso that domestic semi-finals and all finals would be allocated as at present. It might not be popular with everybody but it might well be fairer. *Worth consideration.*
- Given that all Chelsea PL away games have sold out for the past couple of seasons, there is an argument to standardise the loyalty points allocation for all PL away games to just one point, as there is no need to artificially stimulate demand. This may have the added benefit of reducing demand for games where multiple points are currently allocated (see 4.).

3. Away Season Ticket and Similar Schemes

- Apart from Liverpool, all the clubs surveyed operate some form of Away Season Ticket (AST) or similar priority scheme.
- Concerns about closed shops for AST schemes (or similar) seems widespread but this is difficult to address without starting the scheme from scratch every season and allocating scheme membership on a random basis. At Chelsea, this would be without doubt very unpopular with existing scheme members and also, in all likelihood, increase the number of

spares available as, in most cases, it seems that members of AST schemes do attend most/all matches themselves.

4. Selling On Away Tickets, Collection Processes and an Away Ticket Exchange

- There are concerns, particularly at Arsenal and Chelsea, about supporters buying away tickets primarily or solely for the loyalty points they attract. On occasion, dozens of away tickets are offered for sale on social media and some, presumably, fall into the hands of touts.
- Demand at Manchester United has been reduced by the collection process for a randomly-chosen 200 supporters every away game, where ID has to be shown, though all away games are still heavily over-subscribed. Less tickets fall into the hands of touts and Manchester United claim the policy has reduced crowd problems and have introduced it for all their supporters for the forthcoming game at Leicester. Such a scheme would doubtless similarly reduce demand at Chelsea but implementation would be highly unpopular with many away travellers and would need careful finessing / announcement. It is also unclear whether such a radical and controversial solution is actually required at Chelsea, though there are concerns that other clubs may follow United's lead.
- An away ticket exchange for ST holders, mooted at Manchester United, seems a good idea and one that could usefully be taken forward at Chelsea. It could presumably be added on to the existing, and well-received, home ticket exchange. *Worth consideration.*

Conclusion

No two clubs surveyed have the same policy or process for the sale of away tickets. Chelsea's policy has some strengths but there may be potential opportunities to for the club review policy in terms of members being allocated 40% of away tickets; the introduction of away ticket windows; restricting loyalty point usage in particular competitions; allocating one loyalty point for all PL away games and implementing an away ticket exchange.