

Euro 2008 Review

Ticket Allocation, Distribution and Customer
Services

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Euro 2008 Ticket Allocation and Distribution

1 Overview

The objective of this document is to outline various issues faced by Scotland Supporters Club (SSC) members during the recent qualifying matches for the European Championships finals in 2008. In highlighting these issues, the Association of Tartan Army Clubs (ATAC) are not seeking to apportion blame but seek to ensure that lessons are learned and that in future ticket allocation and distribution can be handled in a manner that is less stressful for both SSC members and staff.

While ATAC accepts that we only directly represent the interests of a subset of SSC members we feel that the points raised in this document are common to all SSC members and cut across all the various socio economic groups within the SSC membership. In compiling this report we sought input from a number of sources representing both ATAC and non-ATAC SSC members.

2 Home Matches

2.1 SSC Membership

ATAC recognises the success in marketing the SSC following the rebranding of the former Scotland Travel Club (STC) to attract members who primarily attend home games and who previously felt the STC had little to offer them.

The primary reason for people to join the SSC is to secure match tickets for Scotland International matches both at home and away. For away games the allocation of tickets is dependant upon the host nation and we understand that an SSC member cannot be guaranteed a ticket.

However, we feel that for home matches all SSC members should be guaranteed at least one ticket for matches at Hampden and for that reason we would ask that SSC membership be capped at a level which allows that.

While this will inevitably lead to accusations in the media of a “closed shop”, it is an unfortunate side effect of the National Team’s upsurge in popularity following our recent good record and is a problem which successful club sides face where the vast majority of seats are sold as season tickets.

There will be a certain amount of natural wastage and a waiting list for membership is likely to be required so it will not be the case that it is impossible to join the SSC. It is also unlikely that for all but the biggest games that all SSC members will take up their ticket.

2.2 Home Season Tickets

ATAC would welcome the reintroduction of the “home” season ticket for the forthcoming World Cup qualifying matches. The understanding was that when this was previously implemented, the take up was poor, but in our opinion this was due mainly to the short turnaround given for applying for tickets, which made it difficult for friends to organise group applications in time.

We feel that with the upturn in home attendances and the fact that certain areas of the ground - specifically the North Stand - are now seen as the place to be that this would now be more popular, especially if the option to pay by direct debit on an individual match basis was available, with the understanding that the commitment would be for all four matches.

This would also help to alleviate the demand on telephone and Internet sales channels as a level of tickets would be “pre-sold”.

2.3 Allocation of additional tickets

Until such time as the SSC membership reaches a level at which it has to be capped – as outlined in section 2.1 – any additional tickets should be first offered to SSC members.

The allocation of spare tickets should be decided in a totally transparent manner and ATAC would favour a “Home points” system to reward the loyalty of SSC members who consistently order spare tickets.

ATAC recognise that even with a “points” system, it may be necessary to implement a ballot. This ballot should favour all sales channels equally with members registering an interest at the point of sale.

We feel that by attempting to distribute as many tickets as possible through SSC members this means that fewer tickets will find their way into the hands of touts. The low numbers of tickets available on the black market for the recent match against Italy compared to matches of similar profile where there has been a public sale supports this view.

ATAC would encourage the SSC to take the strongest action against anyone, including SSC members, who have been found to resell tickets for profit.

3 Away Tickets

3.1 Points System

ATAC believe that the existing rolling “10 point” system which rewards loyalty at away games is both fair and well understood and see no benefit in changing the fundamental operation of the system.

We would however like to see the system widened to cover allocation of tickets where there are differentials in the tickets made available by the host association, e.g. price, quality of seat. This was the case for games against both Lithuania and France and we feel that the system adopted for the France game is the one that should be adopted in future.

We are concerned over the number of SSC members who attempt to abuse the system by ordering tickets with no intention of attending the match with the sole objective of obtaining a point.

While we understand that it is not always logistically possible, we would ask that an “in country” pickup be used wherever possible. The recent pickup in Georgia pickup-wise ran very smoothly compared to Kiev.

The location and pickup times should be as convenient for fans as possible and ATAC are prepared to help wherever possible to facilitate this. The recent match in Georgia is an example of a location that was not convenient; notwithstanding it was in a part of town that the SSC guidance notes advised against visiting.

While understanding that there are often good reasons why people have to change plans at the last minute, we would support the SSC in taking action against repeat offenders, e.g. zeroising their points tally.

We would also support the SSC in taking serious action against members who are found to have been abusive to SSC staff either verbally or in writing.

We are aware of non-SSC members being allocated official SSC tickets for recent away matches and would like to be advised on what the current policy is following lessons learned from Kiev and Tbilisi.

4 Customer Service

4.1 General

ATAC understands that the SSC are understaffed and overworked, we also recognise that if you are pleasant and polite to people you will generally receive a response in the same vein. However, one common complaint is the conflicting and contradictory information that SSC members often receive when chasing either missing tickets or applications. This was particularly prevalent in the run up to the Italy game but has been the case for some time now. From the outside looking in it appears that the SSC does not have the systems, staff or funding in place to support a membership of this size.

This leads to frustration amongst SSC members who at best feel that their concerns are not being taken seriously and at worst feel like they are being fobbed off with fictitious excuses.

ATAC feel that the general levels of Customer Service are not what they should be for a subscription-based service that members are not treated as customers and as the membership of the club has increased so levels of service have decreased.

4.2 Self Service

We would imagine that the vast majority of calls and emails to the SSC are ticket enquiries, confirming receipt of applications and dispatch of tickets. Clearly these enquiries ramp up in the days and weeks before games and cause additional work for SSC staff at a particularly busy time.

Whilst recognising that not all SSC members have Internet and/or email access we feel that the SSC could make much better use of technology to both provide a better service to SSC members and to reduce the workload of SSC staff.

Of particular benefit would be an online system where SSC members could check the status of ticket applications, number of points, etc. Any system would have to be secure as a repeat of the France away game where some SSC members' personal details were made available to all others cannot be repeated.

For those SSC members who do not have access to the Internet, receipt of ticket application could be provided by use of a stamped addressed envelope at the member's discretion, a service previously offered in the STC days.

4.3 SSC Communications

We feel that official communications from the SSC are often unclear and could adopt a more fan-friendly tone. It is often the case that as soon as the SSC makes a statement on any topic the various Internet forums and email lists are alive with people picking holes in the statement. This undoubtedly further increases the workload on SSC staff as people contact the SSC seeking clarification.

As the ATAC representatives are fundamentally Scotland fans first and foremost we feel that we can help by acting as a sounding board or by reviewing SSC communication. In making this offer our intention is not to seek to influence policy, although if we think something is not workable then we will certainly feed that back.

Our intention is to help get the message across to SSC members in a clear and unambiguous manner and while we cannot guarantee that we can spot all the possible ambiguities we do feel that this is an area where we can add value to the SSC.

We will of course respect any confidentiality until anything is in the public domain.

4.4 SSC Guides and mail

ATAC feel that the "sporrans" guides are an excellent information tool for away games and would like these to continue. Video enhancements of this service available on the SSC website, and perhaps for download to mobile phones would also be welcome.

ATAC would question whether the A3 forms sent out for ticket applications are more costly than they need be. If cost savings were to be realised by using less expensive paper or by a reduction in content of the supporters pack and other collateral material then this would be supported by ATAC, especially if this were to result in either a reduction in, or a maintenance of, current subscription rates. We would especially like to see any cost savings in this respect to be used to augment the SSC administration team.

If for commercial reasons the current level of content in the supporters packs has to be maintained then this would be understood.

5 Italy home ticket distribution

Whilst recognising that the recent good form of the National team brings its own challenges and that there were always going to be supply and demand issues surrounding this match, we feel that there were serious shortcomings with how ticket distribution for this match was handled.

Appendix A. details the experience of one SSC member that we believe is by no means unique and which we feel is unacceptable.

5.1 Policy for allocation of additional tickets

The original ticket application form stated that SSC members would be entitled to a second ticket based on a “first-come first-served” basis. This was then changed citing overwhelming demand, however with multiple sales channels accepting applications on different dates, it is unclear how any kind of “first-come first-served” system could have been implemented. It was only once the Internet and phone channels opened and that no requests for second tickets were taken that it became clear any additional tickets would not be allocated on a “first-come first-served” basis.

The next stated solution was a “ballot” which although it would provide a fair and transparent means of allocating the tickets, was withdrawn. The perception is that as additional ticket requests were not taken at the point of sale for telephone and Internet orders that the implementation of a ballot had not been considered.

In both cases this demonstrates a serious lack of management forethought and planning.

5.2 Processing of Postal applications

Postal applications were received at the SSC within days of the forms arriving at members. Postal applications were not processed in a timely manner, and there was a lack of consistency in applying the rules for kids SSC numbers and accompanying adult ticket.

The delay in processing and lack of feedback to SSC members was unacceptable. There were cases of members not finding out their entitlement from the initial ticket sale until the day before the Telephone sale. There are other cases when there was no communication at all and the first members knew of their initial allocation was when the tickets dropped through the door, after the telephone sales.

5.3 Telephone sales for additional tickets

ATAC believes that the choice of a “telephone free for all” as the ultimate solution was only chosen as it was the easiest option for SSC staff rather than being the best option for SSC members.

There have been a number of well documented issues surrounding the operation of the phone lines however it is clear that not only were SSC members seriously inconvenienced and are subject to excessive telephone charges, what is unacceptable is that the response to these issues has been to blame the SECC.

We are firmly of the view that full consideration of the implications of any hotline should have been made by those responsible within the SSC with specific regard to staffing and costs. The call charging structure and methodology should have been communicated in advance so that members would be in a position to make an informed decision whether to call or not.

We are aware of issues surrounding the £5 special delivery postage charge, cases of people paying for special delivery and receiving through normal post and also having to collect after paying for special delivery.

One thing that is especially concerning is the time taken to sell a relatively small number of tickets compared to other major events which sell out in a fraction of the time.

The SSC must acknowledge and accept responsibility both for their own decisions and for the actions of their sub-contractors and must be able to provide assurances that this will not be repeated in the future.

5.4 Delay in Refunds for Italy tickets

ATAC are aware of a number of delays in issuing refunds to member clubs from the SSC in respect to payments for Italy tickets as a consequence of changing application criteria. A short delay is perfectly understandable however member clubs have been advised that refund could be as late as mid December, more than 2 months after initial application. We trust that you will accept this is an unacceptable position. We can give multiple examples however West End Bar Airdrie Tartan Army (WEBATA) are currently awaiting an outstanding refund of £1188.

5.5 SECC Charity donation from Phone lines profits

ATAC have written to the SECC in response to their press statement saying they will donate their share of the profits to Charity.

ATAC have asked the SECC to donate their profits to a Tartan Army Charity, namely registered charity; Tartankiev/Tartan Army Children’s Charity, not a charity of the SECC’s choosing. This request was copied to Gordon Smith.

ATAC requests the SFA fully endorse this request to Mr Closier, bringing some pressure to bear and ensuring this donation is made in a timely matter to draw a line under the whole telephone episode.

6 Summary of recommendations

- SSC membership capped at a level that allows all SSC members one ticket for Hampden Park.
- Spare tickets for home games to be offered to SSC based on demand (indicated at purchase of 1st ticket) and home points system. This will reduce touting and black market tickets. No premium rate numbers to be used at any time.
- Offer Home Season ticket with plenty of notice. This will generate early sales revenue and help alleviate pressure on and workload of the SSC.
- Continue with rolling 10 points system for away matches.
- Local pickups for away tickets whenever possible in convenient, central location. ATAC can help facilitate this with enough notice.
- SSC needs to be appropriately staffed and funded.
- SSC to make more use of technology and seek professional assistance to comply with all legal and security requirements. This use of technology will allow members to “self service” whenever possible.
- SSC to consider its members first and foremost in all decisions.

Appendix A – Unedited email sent to ATAC by SSC member.

As a supporter's club member who just received his first batch of tickets this morning (normal post after requesting but not being charged for, special delivery), I thought I could share my experience of buying a ticket for the Scotland v Italy game. I believe my experience is not unique.

Sept - Apply for 8 tickets (4 members) in postal application. Only get 4 so forced to apply in phone ballot for rest of tickets.

Sat 3rd Nov - Spent 4.5 hours on the phone trying to get additional tickets. Finally got through on number posted on Tartan Army Message Board (despite being told they would only answer on the official hotline number), only allowed 3 tickets because they don't agree with postcode for one of my pals' addresses (despite me giving his full name, address and membership number!). One mate is let down but can't really be too upset because he didn't join the SSC. Haven't seen phone bill yet!

I thought my tickets should have arrived last week but didn't want to phone SFA or SECC because I appreciated tickets would not arrive any sooner if they had to deal with constant phone calls. However I was already beginning to sense something wasn't right and being honest, was worried sick over the weekend.

This week (week before the game), still no tickets so I start making some calls...

Mon - "Your tickets are in the post, all remaining tickets are being posted today" (SECC)

Tue - 2nd batch of tickets arrive, still no first batch. "All tickets are being posted today" (SECC).

Wed - Still no 1st batch of tickets. Phoned SECC - they have no record of ever having my first batch of tickets being ordered (despite the money being debited from my card) and I should contact the SFA if I applied by post (which I did). I'm now in a major panic that I don't have any tickets as I've heard stories of people cards being debited, then refunded without warning. Is the same about to happen to me??

Phoned the SFA, they told me the SECC are wrong and a large number of postal applications were passed to the SECC to deal with because the SFA were stretched (seems sensible enough to me).

Perhaps irrelevant (but I've left it in to make the point we have better things to be doing with our time)...

I was meant to be travelling to England on Wednesday afternoon to pick up my girlfriend and our 5-week-old baby (they were away to their Gran's for a few days). I had to cancel my trip because this needed to be sorted out (they would only deal with the card holder and to be honest I was starting to feel physically exhausted by the worry over tickets and didn't relish the drive - I know its only a game but this is how much it means to me and my friends).

By mid afternoon I've got 3 very anxious mates (two of whom have been to 3 away games this campaign spending a small fortune in the process) now phoning up on my behalf starting to cause problems and even talking about going to the SECC themselves (lets just say I'm the calm one out of them). My girlfriend and baby are now flying up at extra expense and I'm not very popular as you can imagine.

Due to the panic, my friends are discussing the horrible dilemma of seven guys deciding who gets the three tickets, mates are now talking about everybody picking an envelope and the three with a ticket get

to go etc. Other suggestions are we sell the 3 tickets face value (making somebody's day) and we all watch it in the pub. Can't believe we're even talking about this!

After getting nowhere on the phone lines, decided to travel to Hampden to speak to somebody. I would like to go on record and say the staff were very helpful despite being very busy, and even phoned took responsibility. After 30 minutes they came back and said I have tickets which the SECC say they sent out yesterday, if I don't receive them let them know by Friday and they will sort something out.

Anyway I decided to pop into the SECC to find out my seat numbers cos I still wasn't convinced they weren't referring to my first batch of tickets. The guy started searching thru a huge box of tickets (this is 5pm on Wednesday - exactly 3 days before kick-off) then phoned up to the call centre to see if they had the tickets up stairs (where they obviously had more boxes of tickets to search through). Remember I'd been told they had posted ALL remaining tickets on Monday, then was told they had been posted on Tuesday, then had been told my tickets didn't exist, now they were checking to see if my tickets were in the SECC!

Eventually I got confirmation that my 1st batch of tickets had been processed (despite being told that morning they had no record of it) and had been sent to me regular post. I nearly lost it because I'd specifically asked for recorded delivery on my form (I wasn't charged for recorded but had asked for it). Guy shrugged his shoulders and said "widnae worry mate, sure it will be fine, you've still got 3 days yet". I then asked where they posted them to; yup you guessed it, my old address! Luckily it was my parent's address.

Thurs - Tickets arrive at last, normal post amongst the junk mail and offers for the local supermarket. Delighted to have tickets, but still upset at the time wasted, the decisions I've been forced to take and the inconvenience of going across Glasgow to locate tickets.

A few things need to be answered after this:

The SFA now know exactly what the SECC are like to deal with, what are they going to do about it?

Why are the SECC lying to people about issuing tickets? Who is responsible?

Why were we able to get through to the SECC on an unofficial number for our 2nd batch of tickets?

Why did it take the SECC 2.5 days to sell 8,000 tickets, when Glasgow Green sold roughly the same number of tickets in 20 minutes?

Why were people left on hold for hours on end on a premium rate number?

Why are tickets being sent to people's old addresses? They told me tickets would only be sent to the card address, yet the SECC managed to send my two batches of tickets to 2 separate addresses.

What will happen to fans that have not received their tickets on match day? Somebody needs to reassure them urgently that they will get into the stadium because this is spoiling the build up and the mood of the "12th man". If the team walk out to a stadium with gaps, people arriving all thru the 1st half due to ticketing problems, its really going to affect the atmosphere within the stadium.

I'm sure I'm speaking for thousands of others who patience has been exhausted this week by this.