

# FAN ADVISORY BOARD



## FIRST QUARTERLY MEETING

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> June 2025

Time: 6:30 PM - 9:45 PM IST

Venue: Online

## Attendees

### Kerala Blasters FC Representatives

- Abhik Chatterjee – CEO
- Karolis Skinkys – Sporting Director
- Ayan Chatterjee
- Josphin Antony
- Aranyak Nanda – Club Presenter & Moderator
- Rishil S Kumar

### Fan Advisory Board Members:

- Ajay Haridas - Chair
- Somu P Joseph
- Sourab M Kalliyann
- Anandkumar - PWD Rep
- Rejin T Jays
- Cerin Pathrose
- Sajith AS
- Pranav B Pillai
- Muhammad Jabir
- Gokul Gopalakrishnan
- Rahul Satish
- Abijith PA
- Mathew George
- Rakesh RS

# 1. Introduction & Meeting Guidelines

- Aranyak opened the meeting by welcoming all members and emphasizing the importance of maintaining decorum and mutual respect throughout the discussion.
- He skipped formal introductions, noting everyone is already familiar, and requested members to use hand gesture emojis to indicate when they wished to speak.
- He invited Ajay to start the presentation.

# 2. Expression of Gratitude & Meeting Objectives

## Speaker: Ajay

- Ajay began by thanking the club for the opportunity to represent the fans and reiterated the board's commitment to transparency and open communication.
- He acknowledged the efforts of various fan groups and apologized for any missed feedback, emphasizing their intent to improve.
- Ajay extended birthday wishes to Rakesh, bringing a warm moment to the meeting.
- Rahul then welcomed everyone and outlined the agenda, which included updates from previous meetings, fan sentiments, club objectives, and community outreach strategies.

### 3. Addressing Online Abuse & Meeting Agenda

Speaker: Rahul

- Rahul raised the critical issue of online abuse and personal threats. He stressed that the board and club must stand united against such behavior to maintain a positive environment.
- He briefly went over the agenda once again, preparing everyone for the upcoming discussions.

### 4. Action items from previous meeting

#### a) Project Star

Discussion Lead: Abijith

- **Fan Concern Raised:** Abijith relayed that several fans have been asking if “Project Star” is just a marketing label without any real backing. He requested a meaningful update.

- **Club Response (Abhik):**

“We aim for excellence on and off the pitch. Recruited some of the best talents available in the backroom staff department. All departments have been asked to push to be the best possible versions of themselves. Concerns that were raised around Indian football and the current scenario have now affected any ongoing plans, which was unforeseen and is not in the club's control.”

## b) Head Coach Appointment

### Discussion Lead: Abijith

- **Fan Concern Raised:** Why did the club appoint David Català despite him not coaching any club for consecutive seasons? Also, why only a one-year contract?

- **Club Response (Karolis):**

Karolis explained the rationale behind selecting David Català:

1. Only 5-6 candidates were considered seriously.

2. Calm, mentally stable, strong personality.

3. Very strong and positive feedback from previous clubs and players.

4. Shows a lot of motivation.

5. Ready to join immediately.

6. Good impression to the club from Super Cup preparation even though he only got a few weeks and training sessions with the team. Karolis believes David will succeed.

7. Contract is 1+1 year with club option to extend and with automatic extension clause if club achieve specific pre-decided targets with him.

“We believe he has the potential to succeed. He’s already impressed us in a short span of time.”

## **b) Stadium Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PWD)**

### **Discussion Lead: Abijith**

- **Fan Concern Raised:** Requested an update on efforts to improve stadium accessibility for PWD fans.
- **Club Response (Abhik):**

“Club has taken this into consideration. PWD fans coming to the match can contact the club through a new section on the KBFC website in advance. There will be specific sections in the stadium with easier access. The club is preparing to host them better.”

## **e) New Training Facility**

### **Discussion Lead: Abijith**

- **Fan Concern Raised:** Requested progress update on the new training facility.
- **Club Response (Abhik):**

“The training facility will be ready by the end of September 2025. The club knows about the importance of transparency and fans asking for updates and pictures. But, we’re keeping it within the club for now to avoid any interference and protect it until it is finished. It is a big investment for the club and a project close to the owners’ hearts. It helps in controlling our football operations more effectively and is an important step forward for the club. Plans for fans to come and participate in beautification of the training ground when it is ready.”

## f) Club Licensing Status

Discussion Lead: Abijith



- **Fan Concern Raised:** Asked for clarity on why the club has licensing issues despite prior public assurance from ownership (specifically referring to Nikhil’s 2021 tweet).
- **Club Response (Abhik):**

“Don’t want to blame anyone or any particular body, but the club has no control over shops and entities in the stadium which have gas/CNG installations. The licensing authorities will consider this as a safety-related issue. AIFF licensing needs every part of the stadium under the club's control. It is routine to pay the fine to get an exemption, and the situation will likely be the same next year. When we qualify, we might need to move away from Kerala to play AFC games as no stadium in Kerala will get approval for these reasons.

During COVID-19, for two years, the entire infrastructure criteria was waived off, and the post was likely referring to a different set of circumstances and criteria during that time. All other concerns we had before have now been addressed.”

### **Additional Dialogue:**

**Somu:** “Will we be getting exemption in AFC, by paying a fine like AIFF?”

- **Abhik:** “No stadium in Kerala is equipped to pass AFC criteria. When we get the chance, we might have to play outside Kerala for AFC games.”

**Somu:** “Are we meeting all other AFC licensing criteria?”

- **Abhik:** “Yes.”

**Somu:** “What about using Greenfield Stadium, Trivandrum?”

- **Abhik:** “It’s under Kerala Cricket Association control, so not feasible for us.”

## g) ISL Refereeing Concerns

Discussion Lead: Abijith



- **Fan Concern Raised:** How does the club address grievances related to refereeing errors?

- **Club Response (Abhik):**

“We will raise and give feedback to the federation normally. Clubs have a meeting with the Chief Referee Officer at the beginning of every season. Coaches will also have meetings with senior referees. We raise our concerns. We do not want to use refereeing mistakes as an excuse and must create a team that can manage and win games despite human error.”

## 5. Club updates

### a) ISL, Durand Cup & League Uncertainty

Discussion Lead: Abhik

#### Club Update

“This is a sensitive topic as discussions are currently ongoing. There is not enough clarity and everything is uncertain about the league. Bringing players for the Durand Cup when there is uncertainty on when the ISL starts will be a tough call. At this point the club needs to protect its economic situation and prioritize its long-term health, as we are not sure what to expect in the future. Playing the reserve team will also be an expense. Some clubs are participating because there is no extra cost as the tournament is being hosted in their city. Provided an example: if you want to buy a new car and lose your job, you obviously won't buy the car. The situation is very complex and serious. It is more serious than it's being portrayed on the outside. There are jobs in Indian football which will depend on the outcome and it will begin with the Supreme Court judgement which is shortly expected. We need to wait and watch.”

### **Fan Suggestion (Ajay):**

Suggested comparing club expenses with potential gains like prize money, trophy, reputation, and fan trust, even if using the reserve team.

### **Club Response (Abhik):**

“It was considered and discussed in great detail. We have to consider the worst case scenarios. We understand that not everybody will understand this and our thought process and we respect that . However, this decision is taken to protect the future of the club.”

### **Fan Question (Rejin):**

Asked if the club will be ready to act swiftly when ISL dates are confirmed.

### **Club Response (Abhik):**

“We will be ready and are doing the background work in all aspects, but have to wait for official confirmations before executing anything. We will be good to go the moment we can resume.”

### **Fan Sentiment (Gokul):**

Raised concern about fans’ disappointment over Durand Cup non-participation.

### **Club Response (Abhik):**

“The decision might change according to the situation as it is changing day by day. The club might participate if the Durand Cup is postponed. We understand the sentiment, but the club is taking a decision that’s best for its long-term health. We also wanted to participate and win it, but the situation is not the best.”

## 6. FAB Operational Highlights (Mar–Jun 2025)

**Discussion Lead: Gokul**

### **FAB Updates:**

- Strong operational framework set up.
- Over 200 fan feedbacks gathered via forms and surveys.
- 30+ social media updates across 5 platforms.
- Key focus: transparency, ticketing, merchandise, rebuilding trust.

### **Club Response (Abhik):**

Congratulated and conveyed the special appreciation from the club owners for everything the FAB has done in the past months.

### **a) KBFC Women’s Team – “Our Girls”**

**Discussion Lead: Mathew**

- **Fan Question:** Asked for future plans of the women’s team.
- **Club Response (Abhik):**

“We need to be in an area where we can financially support the women's team consistently. We want to start with local talent from Kerala, without putting too much pressure on them. Focus will be on gradual growth rather than winning IWL immediately. It’s about providing pathways and creating a long-term platform for talents to emerge and to strengthen the women’s game. We can only go down this path once we are confident of being able to sustain it long-term.”

### **b) KBFC Academy & Reserve Team – “Our Kids**

**Discussion Lead: Mathew, Ajay, Rejin, Somu**

- **Fan Questions:**
  1. Update on AIFF Academy accreditation, KPL, and Reserve Team pathway.
  2. Whether the club has tie-ups planned with colleges.
  3. Concerns over poor RFDL performance.
  4. Appreciation for Tomasz Tchorz and question on his replacement.
  5. Number of reserve players ready for the senior team.

## Club Response (Abhik):

- In KPL, KBFC fielded a strict U21 team, focusing on development rather than only results.
- Club fell short in RFDL; disappointed but already planning improvement.
- Plan to organize a school league under the KBFC banner (not college).
- Regarding Tomasz: His contract ended, and he had other plans. Replacement search is underway.
- Coaches from the reserve side are being integrated with first-team operations.

## Players Ready ( Karolis )

- Ebin Das
- Jagannath (LB, born 2005)
- One goalkeeper (born 2007)
- Sreekuttan expected to feature more in senior team.

## 7. Review of Sporting Director Karolis Skinkys – 5-Year Recap

Discussion Lead: Rejin

### a) Season 2020–21

**Fan Question:** Why were key players like Ogbeche and Jhingan released?

## Club Response (Karolis):

“It was a COVID season, but it’s important to not find excuses on any past decisions that did not go well. Decisions were taken based on finances and potential risks. From that season, we went for people ideal for us and not necessarily big names.”

## **b) Season 2021–22**

**Fan Question:** What worked during this season’s recruitment?

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“We found balance as the league went on, also due to injuries. By character, by mentality we were a good, hard-to-beat team.”

## **c) Season 2022–23**

**Fan Question:** Why was the foreign core broken? What happened to squad depth?

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“We had good-quality players. We had players performing well after the ISL, outside the country. We did not use players well. A painful year to remember. Injuries also went against us.”

## **d) Season 2023–24**

**Fan Concern:** Weak bench strength and injury troubles.

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“We had good players. They were enough for the season. But injuries were significant. Mentions about Pritam Kotal, who was signed due to the fans’ request of bringing a national team-level player. However, the signing didn’t turn out as expected.”

## **e) Season 2024–25**

**Fan Question:** Why was the coach changed mid-season? Why was the campaign disappointing?

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“We considered a new coach during the league. But Tomasz was good for us at that point in time. We did not start well and that affected the entire campaign. I am not at all happy with the 5<sup>th</sup> season.”

## f) Transfer Policy & Strategic Direction

**Discussion Lead:** Rejin

**Fan Question:** What worked during this season's recruitment?

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“The team will be built in the coach's vision. Won't chase senior Indian player profile without extreme consideration. Instead, we will continue to develop young talents and have a mature team that grows together. We will have good-quality players from India and abroad, within our budget. Noah and Luna – as profiles, for all practical reasons, it is a perfect match to have both in the team because one is a runner with movement and goalscoring and one is an intelligent creator with playmaking abilities. Mentions Milos' case can be avoided in future – won't make the same mistake. Focusing on young foreign players – we are continuing the project. Keep believing in us. We are doing everything we can.”

**Fan Concern:** How fans can still keep faith without any achievement? (specifically referring to Karolis's 2021 interview in ISL webpage).

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“We understand the disappointment. We must keep moving forward.”

## g) Agent-Related Allegations

**Discussion Lead:** Rejin

**Fan Question:** Why is there speculation about one agency behind most club signings?

**Club Response (Abhik & Karolis):**

“Recruitment is never done through agents. That's not how things work. It's always a collective decision involving all parties – the player, clubs, agents, owners, etc. The owners are keeping tabs on all the accounts and nothing is approved until they give the green light. There are a significant number of ISL players across all clubs from a specific agency. -

Agents come into the picture only after the coach and sporting director decides on a player and approaches that player. The club has systems in place to ensure things are done properly in the best interest of the club. There are multiple people involved within the club in taking and executing decisions. We see the videos that are circulating and the allegations that are flying and it is deeply painful to see the same. Owners are aware of each and every payment made and also know which agencies they are paid to. At this moment, whatever is being deduced are co-incidences and bad judgement calls.”

**Karolis:** “It is the players who choose the agency and not the other way around. There are lots of assumptions based on these things, which is why platforms like FAB are important to have conversations and provide clarity.”

## **h) International Trialist & Scouting**

**Discussion Lead: Ajay**

**Fan Question:** Status of the project (case: Justine Emmanuel)

**Club Response (Karolis):**

“It’s still ongoing – Justin wasn’t up to the mark as a first-team player, but it was a perfect investment. Also adds that there will be scouting in countries like Nigeria, Columbia and Thailand – Karolis and his team will be travelling.”

## **8. Fan Engagement**

### **a) Fan Groups**

**Discussion Lead: Jabir**

**Fan Concern Raised:**

- Representation of fan groups in FAB.
- Transparent communication regarding approval or rejection.
- Support for away match.
- Clarity on ticket allocation policies.
- Permission and support for fan group merchandise.
- Greater visibility for fan-led activities.
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## **b) Fan-Club Relationship & Respect**

**Discussion Lead: Jabir**

### **Fan Suggestions:**

- Treat fans with respect, especially on social media. Avoid blocking fans without valid reasons.
- Club may ignore masked or abusive accounts but should engage with genuine criticism.
- Define internal staff code of conduct for interacting with fans.
- Establish a fan grievance redressal mechanism.
- Annual review of fan complaints and resolutions to improve accountability.

## **c) Fan Engagement – Campaigns & Recognition**

**Discussion Lead: Ajay**

### **Suggestions Presented:**

- Launch a Fan Recognition Series.
- Bring back "Yellow Man" and "Psycho Admin".
- Appoint a regional presenter.
- Acknowledge fan-relevant days.
- Support viral fan content.
- Develop a KBFC mobile app.

**Club Response (Abhik):**

“The club is developing an app, FAB will be invited for the BETA testing.”

## d) Interactive Campaigns & Storytelling

Discussion Lead: Ajay

### Suggestions Presented:

- Fan-designed jersey contest.
- “My First Match” story series.
- #VoiceOfTheBlasters campaign.
- Fan blog section on the official website.
- Monthly contests for art, videos, and reels from fans.

## 9. Club Vision & Long-Term Direction

### a) Vision

Discussion Lead: Ajay

### Suggestions Presented:

- Build a winning mentality across the club.
- Invest in player development with emphasis on sports psychology.
- Retain and strengthen the team core.
- Align all club efforts to fan-led vision and culture.

### b) Heritage

Discussion Lead: Ajay

### Fan Suggestions:

- Bring back the KBFC Mascot.
- Revive the iconic Yellow Bus.
- Launch a retro kit and classic merchandise line.
- Visibly celebrate KBFC history across platforms.
- Bring back the KBFC Music Album.

## **c) Sustainability Initiatives**

**Discussion Lead: Ajay**

**Suggestions Presented:**

- Promote environmental responsibility in operations.
- Launch sustainable merchandise options.
- Provide sustainable transport incentives.
- Create an eco-conscious fan experience.

## **d) Inclusion & Accessibility**

**Discussion Lead: Anand**

**Suggestions Presented:**

- Improve physical accessibility at stadiums.
- Ensure a safer and inclusive matchday environment.
- Senior citizen-friendly access policies.
- Train staff for handling diverse fan needs.

# **10. Commercial matter, media and marketing**

## **a) Communication Strategy**

**Discussion Lead: Cerin**

**Suggestions Presented:**

- Timely updates and progress reports.
- Social media listening and clarification.
- KBFC website – primary source of truth.
- Sharing advance team information.
- Benchmark with top clubs.

## **b) Public Relations**

**Discussion Lead: Cerin**

**Suggestions Presented:**

- Regular media partnerships.
- Adherence to brand guidelines.
- Event calendar.
- Brand perception audit.
- Club motto for 2025-26

## Club Response (Abhik):

- Club moving to a minimalist design aligning with global trends and best practices.
- Club motto for 2025–26: #MoreKeralaThanBefore – this is the club’s overall motto and media direction for next season.

## c) Marketing Strategy

Discussion Lead: Cerin

Suggestions Presented:

- Data driven Ad strategy.
- Involve former players
- Timely campaign execution.
- Hyperlocal engagement.
- Kerala themed merchandise.
- Engaging Malayali football content creators.

# 11. Matchday and Non-Matchday Operations

## a) Facilities and Stadium Experience

Discussion Lead: Somu

Suggestions Presented:

- Proper Cloakroom
- Water
- Cleanliness
- Post-match lighting
- Pre-match buildups
- Better seating
- Family friendly
- Halftime culture
- Toilet
- Safety
- Support team to help travelling fans

## b) Ticketing

Discussion Lead: Somu

Suggestions Presented:

- Use KBFC website to sell tickets
- Student discounts
- Family ticket with kids’ activity box
- Group offer for boosting attendance in North and South galleries

- Free water with every ticket
- Implementing 3 tier rates for opening, marquee and other matches
- Paint all chairs yellow and fix damaged chairs
- Better facilities in VIP stands
- Seating change for away fans  
Seat numbering

### **c) Season Ticket**

**Discussion Lead: Ajay**

**Suggestions Presented:**

- Tiered tickets, such as basic, premium, and global packages
- Personalized items and improving card quality
- Fulfilling promised benefits
- Loyalty rewards
- Value additions

### **d) Merchandise**

**Discussion Lead: Rakesh**

**Suggestions Presented:**

- Launch KBFC Official Brand store (online and offline)
- Official merchandise kiosk at the stadium
- Use KBFC website to sell merchandise
- Wide range including training kits and polos
- Streamline online ordering and delivery processes
- Leverage brand partnerships with better marketing and storytelling
- Very affordable stadium jersey

### **Club Response (Abhik):**

- Quality will be good. The cost will be affordable. Costs will not be much different this year. Everything that the players wear, will be available for the fans to purchase.
- Full player gear will be available for fans to purchase.

## 10. Community Commitments and Outreach Strategy

### a) Community Commitments

Discussion Lead: Sajith

Suggestions Presented:

- Celebrate achievements of past and present players
- Reflect Kerala's culture in matchdays, merchandise, and social content

### b) Grassroot Engagement Strategy

Discussion Lead: Sajith

Suggestions Presented:

- Partner with local arts and sports clubs
- Conduct branded campaigns via local clubs
- Support local football activities
- Sponsor local events.

### Club Response (Abhik):

“Assured that the club would like to execute many of these and is already working on them. The club believes a lot in such activities and has great plans on this front. The club can do a lot with these ideas and there's a lot of potential. Appreciated the ideas and time that FAB put into these. The entire team will review and act on them by working with FAB. The club will share trackers on the activities. Mentions hosting a potential “Indian Football Conclave” which would bring together different stakeholders of global and Indian football.”

## 11. Open Floor Discussions

- **Abhik:** Requested FAB to email all questions and other unfiltered suggestions. Different departments will follow up.

- **Mathew:** Requested an opportunity to speak about FAB at the Indian Football Conclave.

**Abhik:** Club would love to have FAB speak at the event.

- **Pranav:** Asked about Yellow Bus revival

**Abhik:** Suggestion noted. Feasibility depends on sponsorships.

- **Jabir:** “As a fan and as someone representing the larger voice of the supporters: at the start of this meeting, we looked back at Karolis’ 5-year journey with KBFC. There were ups and downs. We’ve seen the passion, we’ve heard the explanations, and even the frustrations. But the truth remains that KBFC still hasn't won anything. KBFC is the only club without a major trophy, which is painful for fans. Now, we’re looking at the coming season with renewed hope, but clear expectations. We want to believe in this ‘KBFC Star Mentality’ project – but to make that belief real, we need to see serious intent from the club. That means making the right signings, building a strong squad, and most importantly – playing to win the title, not just to compete or reach the playoffs.”

**Karolis:** “The club understands the feeling and passion and shares what the fans feel – mentions that everyone at the club is trying their best to win.”

- **Ajay:** Requested annual season review publication.

**Abhik:** Acknowledged and will explore

**Aranyak Nanda (Closing Remarks):** Thanked the FAB members for their dedication and efforts and reiterated that the club will reach out to work on everything discussed and put it into action. Made closing notes before adjourning the meeting.