

# The Four Year Plan



Saturday 17th December 2011. The Day that the most eagerly anticipated film for QPR fans was released – The 'Four Year Plan', the documentary about the everyday goings on at Queens Park Rangers Football club in the last four years. From behind the scenes in the boardroom, to in the changing room before and after games. It gives Every QPR fan the knowledge of what exactly was going on at our club at the time.

**Summer 2007:** Queens Park Rangers Football club was saved from liquidation by wealthy backers Flavio Briatore, Bernie Ecclestone, Alejandro Agag, who were later joined by Lakshmi Mittal, Amit Bhatia and Ishan Saksena. The opening credits of the film show the changes that were made to the clubs facilities throughout the four year period.

The opening scene is in the 2008/2009 season, and an away trip to Birmingham. It starts off with Flavio, Saksena and Amit Bhatia travelling to Birmingham. There is a bit of humour between them, when Amit spots a Birmingham fan magazine depicting Flavio and Bernie Ecclestone as Dr Evil and Mini Me. Right from the off you can already see the sort of character Flavio Briatore is and he doesn't seem amused. He starts by insulting Martin Rowlands after missing the chance to score in a previous game. Then during the Birmingham City game, Rowlands again come under scrutiny from him, stating, 'I want to sell that idiot'. Amit, on the other hand, looks really positive right away communicating with fans, and spending time out to talk to them. After the game, Flavio and Amit are joined by Gianni Paladini. 10 games into Iain Dowie's reign, Flavio is already talking about the idea of sacking him stating that he has no strategy and he is a hooligan.

This was just a clip of what's to come. In a reserve game vs Southampton, you then see Flavio telling Dowie to tell the players to pass to Tomassi more, it was clear to see that Flavio and Dowie didn't see eye to eye, with Dowie saying he was asked by Amit if the two got on. Not long after this Flavio decides that he no longer wants Dowie in charge of the club, and you see a scene with Gianni Paladini trying to fight Dowie's case. An away game at Swansea when we were held 0-0, seemed to be enough to make Flavio's mind up, and that was it. The end of Dowie's tenure, after 15 games in charge.

During a training session you then see Gianni, Flavio, and Agag discussing methods of how to communicate with Gareth Ainsworth the then caretaker manager during the game, about changes that Flavio would want to be made during the game. In other words, Flavio trying to play as manager.

In a clip of Bernie Ecclestone at the club, he is seen in the home changing room, telling Flavio they need to cut down on expenditure on players water, that for me shows that Bernie was clearly only there for money reasons. In a game against Cardiff, They are down to 10 men, and we are level at 0-0. Flavio wants Mahon to come on, he then orders Gianni Paladini to inform Gareth Ainsworth, of the change he wants made. It is then joked that soon enough QPR will have Flavio himself in the managers box. Gianni gets the message to Gareth, through the masseuse, and Mahon comes on. He went on to score the winner in that game, and Flavio looked as smug as I think I have ever seen him.

Paulo Sousa is then appointed manager, and right away it's clear to see that Sousa is under pressure right away. This is the part of the film that Gianni Paladini is portrayed as the bad guy, and during a period that QPR went 12 hours of football without scoring a goal, The scrutiny on Sousa was getting bigger and bigger. With attendances dropping, and the team dropping points things did not look good for Sousa. In a meeting with the owners, Sousa got into a disagreement with Flavio and Gianni about recent results and performances, with Sousa trying to distance himself away from the work Dowie had previously done. It was clear from this stage Sousa was not going to last long, and Gianni did not get on with him.

With Flavio trying to think of ways to cut costs and make more money, the idea comes about, that we parted with Dexter Blackstock. At the time our top goalscorer at the club. We see a scene with Dexter being handed a contract to go on loan to Nottingham Forest. Enter Fitz Hall who says 'Dexter don't sign it' and then asks Gianni why we are selling our best striker, to which he says its not me. The game after Dexter left following against Crystal Palace was to be Sousa's last game in charge of QPR. After talking to the press after the game, Sousa said that Dexter was sold behind his back, and the decision was made by the board. This statement then resulted in Sousa losing his job, and an altercation happens in the changing rooms, in front of Neil Warnock and Keith Curle who were at Crystal Palace at the time. With Gianni and Sousa exchanging words he is then sacked from QPR for divulging confidential information.

It was clear that fans were now beginning to get unhappy with Flavio and the boardroom actions. After a game that Fans sung 'We want our Rangers back' Flavio is then filmed outside telling fans, that he wants the names of the fans singing, or he will sell the club. It seems that Flavio does not like the scrutiny himself.

### **Season 2009 -2010**

Jim Magilton is appointed QPR Manager, and things seemed to be going steady, and the team are picking up results. Things were going well and everything seemed on the up. Or was it? Results started slipping away, with them so too did the trust that the board had in the manager. After a game against Watford there was an incident that involved Jim Magilton and Akos Buzsaky, which resulted in Magilton losing his job by mutual consent. You don't see much during this time, just talks about finances, and the cost of flowers in the boxes being cut. We then see Paul Hart also come and go in a short space of time. The fans then decided to make clear their thoughts, and are filmed singing '*Four Year Plan, You're having a laugh*' outside the stadium.

It is now becoming clear to Flavio, and the rest of the board that there is a huge problem. They call a meeting with the players to discuss their feelings, and it's clear to see the players were disillusioned and they didn't know what was happening at the top of the club. This then causes Flavio to say he will take a backseat, that he will step down as Chairman but still have input, through someone close to him. That person was to be Amit Bhatia, who filled the position as Chairman, with Gianni Paladini taking a role as Sporting Director. Flavio is then seen stating we have had 5 or 6 idiots in charge and that we need a strong coach. The fans and the players could sense a difference right away, just without Flavio being there, putting the pressure on everyone to perform. Although Flavio did still have involvement in the club, it was much more of a reserved role.

The appointment of Neil Warnock is down to the work of Amit Bhatia, who worked hard on agreeing fees with Crystal Palace for him. It was clear to see right away that the 2 of them had a good relationship. You could also see that Neil Warnock was not going to stick by and be told what to do, joking that a "Winners Only" sign need to come off of the changing room doors. A 3-1 home win against WBA, in Warnock's first game in charge were a sign of what was to come. Neil went on to keep us in the division that season, finishing 13th mid table.

### **Season 2010-2011**

With Neil Warnock having had the backing of the board and bringing in 9 players, was then able to build a squad together. You could now see the bond growing between Neil and Amit, and between all the players, They looked a lot more relaxed.

First game of the season, and QPR at home to Barnsley, Amit turns to Gianni and tells him this season we do not scream and shout at the players and that they stay positive. And there was a

lot to be positive about, with the players putting in performances week after week, the board for once seemed happy with what was going on. Amit Bhatia was now really starting to come across as a top bloke and his love for the club was starting to become apparent. He was communicating with the Manager, asking him what he needs and also communicating with the players congratulating them.

Then after a 19 game unbeaten run we fall to our first defeat of the season against Watford at home. It seems that even after an unbeaten run like that, you were still not safe from Flavio. It seemed that the one loss and Flavio had forgot about every other bit of hard work Warnock had previously done. And in a phone call with Gianni Paladini, Gianni has to stick up for Neil, saying that after a 19 game unbeaten run, sometimes you just need to accept defeats. It seems nothing can please Flavio. The team sitting top of the league, having lost their first game of the season after 20 games was not enough.

We are then shown a phone call taking place, with Amit Bhatia, and an unknown party. I believe it's most probably Mittal. But he goes on to state that "The 2" had made an offer to Bernie Ecclestone to buy 17% of his shares, therefore making them both have equal 50% of the club, to have it rejected. It seemed that somehow, Bernie and Flavio had sold their shares in the club to each other, and the majority owner was now Bernie Ecclestone over Flavio Briatore, and the deal was rejected. Amit seemed confused, after seemingly having struck the deal previously, to have them change their mind.

Amit Was now coming across very positively indeed, Agreeing to give Neil Warnock what he needs to take us up to the Prem. And he actually spoke to the manager asking who he would like, and what he thinks is needed! A much different approach to that of Flavio Briatore. The run continued and the team came to within 1 point of winning promotion, yet still Flavio was not pleased. It didn't make sense. He had now claimed that Warnock was scared to win. Can this man not be pleased.

On to the Faurlin affair. Gianni claimed not to be worried, and that there was no wrongdoing that took place. This is what he said to everyone, including Flavio and they are seen having a massive disagreement about the incident, with Gianni protesting his innocence. He goes on to say that he played his part by bringing the player to the club but that is it, The legal stuff is nothing to do with him. But he was positive that they wouldn't be deducted points but did admit to the possibility of a fine.

On to Watford where QPR won the Championship title, with a 2-0 win. Cue some amazing scenes. Fans, players and staff all celebrating. Gianni Paladini is seen crying. I think it is clear to see that Gianni does have a love for the club, and you see the emotion come out when the announcement was made, that there was to be no points deductions.

So to round up, my opinions have slightly changed about people, but not about Flavio Briatore. The film answers a lot of questions that all QPR fans would have been asking, "what is

happening at our club?”. This film definitely lets people know. Flavio seemed to use us as a play toy, Thinking he could play owner, manager and possibly even one of the players positions too. Bernie Ecclestone doesn't really make many appearances in the film, but I still think he's a money grabbing bigot. Gianni Paladini comes across as both the bad guy and the good guy. At times you can see that he loved the club, and did care about what was happening, but other times it seemed he was too destroying the club. His fallouts with managers did not help and I think some of the players didn't really have much respect for him either. Amit Bhatia is the person that stands out the most for me in this film. His passion for the club is clear for everyone to see, and having stuck by through the four years, with them clowns in charge, I have the utmost gratitude and respect for the man. I'm so thankful that Amit still has involvement in the club, and we also have a lot to thank Tony Fernandes for too, because after seeing this film, it has made me even more grateful, for the work he has already done. Long may it continue.

Anthony Hassan