

# Who is who in United ownership rumours



EYES ON TANNADICE: New multi-club ownership models could see Brighton, Southampton or Brentford, all inset, as Dundee United stablemates.

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**R**eported interest in Dundee United from English Premier League clubs Brentford and Brighton has Tangerines fans talking.

Both EPL sides' owners already have – or have had – stakes in additional clubs in Europe, as multi-club ownership models become increasingly popular with English clubs' mega-rich custodians.

A relaxation of Scottish FA rules around multi-club operations has seen billionaire Bournemouth owner Bill Foley plough £6 million into Hibs, in return for a 25% stake.

Dundee's relationship with Burnley has not yet involved significant investment from Clarets owner Alan Pace, but the American has refused to rule out purchasing a stake.

The Scottish game is seen

as a place for English clubs to develop young talent physically, along with being a relatively cheap way to access the group stages of European football, where big money can be made and star youngsters put in the shop window.

So how have Brighton and Brentford gone about their multi-club activity?

Plus, we cast an eye over Southampton, whose owners already have three clubs – and intentions to expand further.

## Brighton

There has been no greater “punching above their weight” success story in the EPL over recent years.

Their chairman, Tony Bloom, became the majority owner of Union Saint-Gilloise in Belgium just over five years ago.

Last year he reduced his share after both clubs

qualified for Europe. Uefa confirmed there was no breach of their rules.

Bloom, said to be worth more than £1 billion, is at the top of a football operation with an incredible record in recruitment – making huge profits in the transfer market but not at the expense of on-pitch achievements.

In recent years Brighton have used St Andrews University as a pre-season training base and, in 2021, entered into a partnership deal with Hibs, ironically.

The tie-up was described as about sharing info and resources, more than player loans or swaps.

Pathway development manager at Brighton is ex-Scotland international, David Weir.

## Brentford

Like Bloom, Brentford owner Matthew Benham

has a background in betting and analytics.

They have not been in the Premier League for as long as Brighton but are also showing clubs with much bigger fan bases, budgets and expectations how smart-thinking and on-point player trading can trump cold, hard cash.

Benham bought a 60% stake in Danish top-flight club FC Midtjylland in 2014. Three league championships and regular European followed before he sold up to a Danish billionaire last summer.

It was recently confirmed Benham is willing to sell Brentford, either partially or a controlling stake, but would he/they be interested in acquiring one elsewhere?

With former Dundee defender Rhys Weston and ex-United captain Steven Pressley on the staff at the London club, there is no

shortage of Scottish football knowledge.

## Southampton

Sports Republic, a London-based investment firm, has three clubs.

The Championship side, in automatic promotion contention under former Scotland international, Russell Martin, are the jewel in the crown.

Turkish outfit Goztepe became the second club in the portfolio in August 2022, before the acquisition of French side Valenciennes in July last year.

It is understood Sport Republic intend to expand further and have already made progress in unifying sections of its football business, such as scouting.

The firm was set up by Rasmus Ankersen, a previous director of football at Brentford. Former United head of youth Andy Goldie is academy director.

## Public split over ending ScotRail drink ban

The Scottish public is “about 50-50” on ending a drinking ban on the country's publicly-owned rail service, MSPs have heard.

The ban was brought in during the pandemic in a bid to curtail spread of the virus, but has not been rescinded.

Appearing before the net-zero, energy and transport committee, ScotRail chief operating officer Joanne Maguire said the results of a public consultation on the issue had been provided to Transport Scotland.

The survey was conducted by asking those who logged on to the rail service's Wi-Fi for their view.

She told the committee: “That was part of the feedback that we have reported back and there's no clear winner.

“It's roughly around a 50-50 split on views of alcohol.

“We're conscious it's a policy decision because there's a broader impact of alcohol on society, not just the safety of our trains.”

Ms Maguire was unable to say when the results of the survey and other feedback on the ban will be presented to the Scottish Government.

A spokeswoman for Transport Scotland said: “It is clear a wide range of opinions are held by passengers, staff and other interested parties about alcohol on trains.

“Ministers will take time to carefully consider diverging views, in line with the broad range of recommendations made in our recent report on women and girls' safety on public transport, before making any decision.

“Until then, the alcohol ban will remain in place.”

Alex Hynes, outgoing managing director of Scotland's Railway, said it was for Scottish ministers to decide.