

Abu Dhabi Week sits down with Big Shot CEO Mike Brightmore to find out more about the company's revolutionary AED 10 million partnership with the UAE Pro League's Baniyas Football Club



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself and how you came to join Big Shot?

I actually came to the UAE nearly 13 years ago. I arrived in 2000 to set up an arm of the Al Futtaim group and worked with them for 12 years. Then I was asked to come and join Big Shot and the rest is history.

Can you tell us a little bit about how Big Shot works?

Basically, Big Shot has the rights to distribution of all the home tickets for Baniyas Football Club. We do this through creative marketing of the tickets – when someone buys a ticket for one of the home matches from our distribution points they get the chance to play some free games and also get entered into a draw to win some big prizes.

Why did you choose Baniyas?

The approach was done at quite a high level between the owners of Baniyas Football Club and one of our owners, who is quite an eminent local. They got together and struck up the partnership between Baniyas and Big Shot.

What's the ultimate goal of the Baniyas promotion?

Well, the ultimate goal is to ensure that local football is supported as it should be. There's a great following here but it tends to come more in the form of watching matches on TV at home or following it in the newspapers rather than actually going to experience live football. That's it in a nutshell – to increase awareness of the game and boost match attendance. We want more bums on seats.



Do you watch UAE football and have you got a favourite team?

[Laughing] Baniyas, of course! No, I'll be completely honest with you, I hadn't watched a football match in 13 years until this association with Baniyas, but I think now I've only missed one home game so far this season.

And what do you think of the general standard of football in the UAE?

The quality is not actually that bad, there are a lot of really good players, and like a lot of things here it's relatively new. I don't think people really realise the quality of the football that's on offer. I believe one of the main problems is the sheer amount of choice for football fans. I mean you turn on the TV and every night you can watch matches from the English, Spanish or Italian leagues – there's a huge amount of competition. It's now just a matter of making sure people

realise the difference between live entertainment and sitting in the armchair.

You had your first Big Shot Grand Prize Draw at Marina Mall last weekend. How did that go? Magnificent, my goodness! What a stressful couple of days but wonderful fun. Who knows how many people actually came through the stand in those two days, it was just impossible to monitor accurately but it was many thousands of people. We had lots of games going on – things like speed kick competitions, where hundreds of people tried to knock the leather off a ball to win prizes – and of course we sold an awful lot of tickets.

Then we had the big draw on Saturday, with the Economic Department there to make sure everything was done properly, and it was just wonderful. We gave away a car [Dodge Challenger] and a big bar of gold [worth AED 100,000]. The best thing about this for me is that these prizes are life changing for the two guys who won – both of whom were Filipino men. I mean, everybody would be happy to win these prizes but to actually change these two fellow's lives? Well, it's just wonderful.

Are you planning to expand further in the UAE in terms of other teams or sports?

As far as Baniyas goes, we're hoping to open up in RAK by the end of the month and we'll be expanding throughout all of the emirates as quickly as we can. In terms of other teams, other sports? Well, we're tied to Baniyas. We've got an agreement with Baniyas and anything that we do from now we will do with their full support. But if anything else came up and we all thought it was worth doing then yes, of course we'd look at other opportunities.

Finally, do you think the promotion has had any effect on home attendances?

Well, it's a bit difficult to say really – we've only had three home matches since we started and the attendance varies so much from team to team. We'll only be able to determine how much of an effect we've had in the longer term as we're able to compare games with the same team. I mean, we know that lots of people we've sold tickets to are going to the games so that's nice to see and we just have to hope that the crowds keep growing.

Jon Muller