



## the first Dutch phoenix club

In The Netherlands, there is one club with many similarities to Wimbledon. RBC have had issues with their local authorities, dodgy directors and harsh treatment by the Dutch FA, however, they didn't give up and restarted this season in the 9th division of Dutch football, ground sharing with a local non-league club just outside their own city. They are the first ever Dutch professional club where the fans made a re-start in local non league, using clubs like AFC Wimbledon as an example.

RBC is a club in the small Dutch city of Roosendaal, near the Belgian border, just 20 miles north of Antwerp. The club was founded by a group of friends in 1912 as Excelsior and soon joined the Roman Catholic FA. After 3 championships there, they joined the FA of the province of Brabant in 1919. Because of this, they had to change their name to Oranje-Wit (orange-white) as there was already a club called Excelsior in Rotterdam. After only two seasons in the provincial leagues Oranje-Wit were promoted to the leagues of the national FA, KNVB, in 1921 and they changed their name to Roosendaal. Finally, in 1927, the club merged with Roosendaalse Boys and changed their name to "Roosendaal Boys Combinatie", abbreviated to RBC. Back then all Dutch football was fully amateur and RBC was never

a major player in the amateur era. When the top flight turned into a professional league in 1954, RBC was playing at the second level, but in 1955 they were amongst 24 lower league clubs who joined the professional ranks. Most of the following seasons were spent in the second division, until relegation in 1969. When, in 1971, the professional leagues were restructured, the third division was disbanded and 11 clubs were forced back into non-league football, not on sporting results, but based on potential and attendances. RBC was furious with KNVB and appealed in court, but this was unsuccessful and they were forced back into non-league football.

RBC wanted to get back to professional football as soon as possible, but as there was no promotion or relegation between non-league and professional football back then, this was not easy. After 3 championships in non-league, they finally were elected back into the professional second division in 1983. They stayed there until 2000 when they shocked everybody by winning the play-offs for promotion to the Eredivisie. They were relegated straight back but bounced back up again in 2002. This is when it started to go wrong for the club. The directors were desperate not to drop back again and acted like they were a bigger club than they actually were. When they were relegated again in 2006, high risks were taken to go straight back up, which didn't happen. The club returned to what it has been for so many years, an average club in the second division. The debts from the previous seasons kept causing trouble, almost every year fans needed to get in action to save the club. The 2010/11 season was disastrous for the club and just before the last match they got a 3 point deduction because of financial mismanagement. Since 2010 relegating to non-league had been possible and this was only narrowly avoided by a win in the last match. The financial problems were still big, a CVA was being discussed and the

club needed support from the local authorities as well. Many Dutch clubs have been saved in this way over the last years. In a very controversial council meeting all options to assist the club to stay in existence got rejected. The council didn't want to put any money or effort in RBC, despite them supporting plenty of other sport clubs and organisations in the borough, plenty of which were commercial institutions. As a result, the club entered liquidation on 8 June 2011. This was too late to resurrect the club in non-league and a season without any football followed.

In Dutch football resurrection of clubs by their fans is something that had never happened so far. However, RBC fans refused to let their club die. AFC Wimbledon was often mentioned as one of the best examples to follow. In September, fans came together to start exploring the route back into non-league football. Sponsors were sought and the club tried building a case to start as high as possible. Clubs dropping out of professional football other than by relegation are normally allowed to restart at the second non-league level, but due to the football-less season KNVB took the (very harsh) decision to force the club into the absolute bottom, the 7th non-league level (9th level overall). Appeals and protests followed, but they were unsuccessful. Even this didn't put the fans off from restarting the club and members for the new club were being recruited. Robert Maaskant, the manager who led the club to their 2 promotions in 2000 and 2002, became the 50th member. As 50 members are needed to start a football club in The Netherlands, RBC came back into existence on 2 December 2011, 6 months after the liquidation.

New members, some high-profile, including former players and managers, kept joining and a board was formed. The aim is to get into the higher ranks of non-league football as quickly as possible. Plans were to ground-share with a local non-league club and to start with 7 teams, including a supporters' team and 4 youth teams. Everything looked positive again for the club. However, local non-league sides eventually withdrew their support as they were afraid to lose their youth players and RBC couldn't find a new ground in Roosendaal. The club looked dead before it had even started.

Still, they didn't give up. In the village of Wouwe Plantage, south of Roosendaal but still part of the borough of Roosendaal, club RKS SV Rimbøe was prepared to share their ground. Finally the club could concentrate on football again. Three teams were initially formed, the first team and two youth teams, a squad was assembled consisting mainly of players from higher divisions who took the step down to play for RBC in the 9th level of Dutch football, a level comparable with step 7 in English non-league football. The first training session and friendly were attended by, for that league's standards, a very high numbers of fans. The first official match in over a year will finally be held on 18th August, a game in the regional cup, away against RKS SV Rimbøe, the club who they share the ground with. A new journey will begin, with the hope of getting back into the professional leagues. They got there twice before, can they do it again?

### HOPE AKPAN'S YOUNG FAMILY MEMBERS NON HOMOPHOBIC TWEETS



Nice try, cheese graters, cheese is already great.