



Arsenal Football Club Fans' Forum
4.30pm – 5.30pm April 22 2021
Online Video Call Meeting

Fans' Forum membership 2020/2021

REPRESENTING	FIRST NAME	SURNAME
16-21 Year Olds	Zak	Wagman
AISA	Drew	Gray
Arsenal Supporters Clubs - Domestic	Jan	Szbala
Arsenal Supporters Clubs - Overseas	Peter	Høst
AST Member	Akhil	Vyas
Away scheme	Michael	Anjos
Club Level	Fred	Dowd
Disabled Supporters	Anne	Hyde
Ethnic Minority Member	Draco	Wang
Family Enclosure	*Fergus	Keating
Gold Members	Robert	Kramer
LGBT Supporter	Joe	White
Over 60 Year-Olds	John	Thater
Red Members	Ben	Buckstone
RedAction Member	Raymond	Herlihy
Silver Members	Jake	Coare
Women's	Suzanne	Goodband

*Alternate

Arsenal representatives

Arsenal FC (Chair)	Mark Gonnella
Arsenal FC	Josh Kroenke
Arsenal FC	Vinai Venkatesham
Arsenal FC	Peter Silverstone
Arsenal FC	Tom McCann
Arsenal FC	Alun Francis
Arsenal FC	John Beattie
Arsenal FC	Mark Brindle
Arsenal FC	Tom McCann
Arsenal FC	Mic Conetta

Minutes:

This special meeting was called to discuss the proposed Super League.

Chief Executive **Vinai Venkatesham** opened the meeting saying he would give some background to the “sorry tale”. He stressed by explaining what happened he in no way intended to soften the club’s apology.

He was clear that Arsenal were 100% not the authors or originators of the proposal. In this situation it was clear the train was leaving the station with the project about to be launched. He said we had to make a decision about what it would mean for the club if we did not join, and the league happened. He said it became immediately apparent [after announcement] that we had made not only a bad decision but a terrible one and we got out as quickly as possible.

He explained that now we needed to say sorry to lots of people - our players, our staff, the football authorities, other Premier League clubs and most importantly our fans. His focus now is to repair the damage and move the club forward, not forgetting the mistakes made.

Josh Kroenke said leadership is about recognising when you are wrong, apologising when you are wrong and ensuring you learn for the future. He said he was here to explain and listen. He said there were two key questions going into the Super League. 1) What is worse, a Super League or a Super League without Arsenal. 2) What do the fans want? The said this was a much more complex question – particularly taken from a global perspective.

Having looked at both those questions, he said we got the decision wrong and that’s why we are here today. However, he pointed out we continue to have concerns about the stability of the football pyramid. We will continue to work on that and apologised again on behalf of his father and KSE for the angst that has been caused.

Akhil Vyas (AST) said he hadn’t slept all week trying to fight this alongside his day job. He pointed out that it seemed no fans had been asked the question about what we want. He asked if tournaments without sporting merit are a good thing and why did we sign up to the Super League?

Josh referred to his point about what was worse – a Super League without Arsenal or a Super League with Arsenal.

Akhil asked if we are still contracted to the Super League and how the costs to leave the Super League will be paid.

Josh said KSE would be covering all costs.

Vinai explained we are leaving and are working through the legal process.

Akhil asked if we could guarantee we would not be part of a Super League 2.

Josh confirmed that was the case, we would not be part of something without sporting merit.

Akhil ended by asking if **Josh** would engage with fans more in future and would he consider fan representatives at board level.

Josh said more interaction with fans was a goal which had been de-railed by the pandemic. From a board perspective he said there would be more interaction.

Jake Coare (Silver Members) referred to comments from 2019 where **Josh** said Arsenal fans should be excited. He asked was this to be excited about the Super League?

Josh said he wanted people to be excited for the future of Arsenal Football Club.

Jake also asked if KSE have long-term investment plans for the club.

Josh confirmed they do.

Zak Wagman (16-21 year olds) said he was also ashamed about what had happened. He asked when **Josh's** father would speak to Arsenal fans, could he guarantee Arsenal will never play their home matches away from Islington and why should fans believe him today? He also asked when **Josh** would next be speaking to fans?

Josh said he understood trust had been shredded and part of today was to start trying to build some sort of relationship with supporters. He confirmed we would always play home matches here in London and would be speaking to fans again at the next meeting.

Raymond Herlihy (Red Action) said the whole debacle reflected badly on KSE and he questioned if they felt they were still fit and proper custodians of our football club? He said the majority of Arsenal fans did not think KSE were fit to be owners of Arsenal Football Club and would they consider selling their shares?

Josh explained he believes they are fit to carry on as custodians. He was here today to start to piece things back together and pointed out that he was still excited about the summer plans which remain the same today as they did before. He understood he might be met with distrust and scepticism.

Barry Dixey (AISA) said that the fans were speaking with one voice. He said they will be pushing and lobbying Government to get fan representation at board level. He asked what the view was on that?

Josh said he wanted to interact in a more meaningful way in forums like this and at board level. He said the power of Arsenal fans had been spectacular to see. He said there were pros and cons to fans on boards but accepted it was something that was up for discussion.

Barry also asked who made the ludicrous decision to enter the Super League?

Josh explained it was a board decision.

Ben Buckstone (Red Members) said he did not understand why **Vinai** said we were not the orchestrators of this when Stan had been named as Vice Chair.

Vinai replied that Stan was never appointed or considered to be a Vice Chair and this may have contributed to suggestions Arsenal were drivers of the project.

Ben also asked if all the ESL meeting notes and minutes could be shared.

Vinai said any documents were subject to confidentiality so would not be disclosed.

Ben said millions of people would look at Josh as a hero if he got involved and helped make this club great again. He said he had an opportunity millions of people would bite their arm off to take. He said he was disgusted.

Josh committed to being here more and try to rebuild trust in the future. He had planned to be over here more but that had been interrupted by the pandemic.

Draco Wang said some fans understood the financial situation the club had been going through but was concerned about upholding the club's values.

Josh said we have always tried to be true to our values, from running the club in a self-sustaining way to a reflection of everything through history. He said this was an inflection point where those values were not upheld. He said this was a moment in time where we did not honour those traditions.

Draco also asked what the punishment was likely to be from the governing bodies for joining the ESL and who was going to pay for it.

Josh explained that anything related to the Super League will be handled via KSE.

Peter Høst (International Supporters' Clubs) said fans of Arsenal had never trusted the owners. He said it was really important for more engagement with fans and that fans wanted him to consider his ownership of the club. **Peter** asked what will be done to provide more engagement with fans.

Josh said there will be more meetings like this and face to face meetings like the ones before the pandemic. **Josh** said he was aware there had never been trust and he was here to start build that.

Suzanne Goodband (Women) asked what was missing from the board to make the decision and what he would do differently if another opportunity came along.

Josh said there were time constraints which rushed the decision. If another proposal came along, he said we would consult with supporter groups but if a similar proposal to this arrived the answer was clear and it would not be entertained.

Suzanne suggested fans forum members could sign NDAs to improve the quality of conversation at meetings. **ACTION** for further discussion.

Jan said media reports suggested we had already incurred £8m to a share in the SuperLeague and asked would those be paid by KSE. He also asked if any people made redundant last year would be re-employed.

Josh repeated that KSE was covering all outside costs and the club was not incurring any costs. On the redundancies, **Josh** said difficult decisions were made. **Vinai** said that the decisions on redundancies were due the extreme impact the pandemic, as has been explained in previous supporter forums, with the intention of being more stable and efficient in the future. He also explained the £8m figure was completely wrong.

Joe White (GayGooners) said there had been many difficult conversations with fan groups across the game and said our position as leaders in the equality fan movement had been put at risk because of the decision. He asked what the club was going to do restore our standing and support the supporters' voice and pre-eminence.

Vinai said we will be working hard to restore those relationships and to restore Arsenal's good name and reputation. That would be started by apologising to the other clubs in the league.

Fergus Keating (Family) said the self-sustaining model was not working and when would he start investing substantial sums into Arsenal. If not, he asked, when are they going to sell?

Josh said they have supported the club over the last several years and the question is part of the issues facing the game. He said you can't always be looking for the next person to pump tens of hundreds of millions into a club - that is not sustainable anywhere. He said we are not afraid to be aggressive which may have been noticed over the last few transfer windows. He said funding was part of the discussion being had with the 6 Premier League clubs and in Europe. It's not sustainable and recruiting the next wealthy person was not right for football.

Fergus ended by asking when he wants to sell.

Josh replied that they have no intention of selling.

Vinai said if the football industry is based on finding enough people who can just pump money in then the game is in real trouble. He also pointed out that KSE have refinanced the club's £220m stadium debt, we are going to lose well over £100m this year which KSE are standing behind and the same will be true for whatever we do in the transfer window this summer.

Josh said it was a question which went to the core of the issues in football. He closed by saying he loves the club, he knows we have not represented the club in a positive manner and he committed to be interacting a lot more, pushing the club forward and listening to everyone more in the future.

Akhil requested an action to work out how to engage with fans more at board level.

Date of the next meeting will be arranged in due course.

April 22, 2021