



Arsenal Football Club Fans' Forum
6pm – 7.30pm September 16th 2020
Online Video Call Meeting

Fans' Forum membership 2020/2021

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

*New members

Arsenal representatives

Arsenal FC (Chair)	Mark Gonnella
Arsenal FC	Vinai Venkatesham
Arsenal FC	Alun Francis
Arsenal FC	Ivan Worsell
Arsenal FC	John Beattie
Arsenal FC	Mark Brindle
Arsenal FC	Tom McCann
Arsenal FC	Mic Conetta
Arsenal FC	Mairead King

Agenda

1. Welcome – (New Members)

Mark Gonnella welcomed the new members – Jake Coare (Silver Members), Ben Buckstone (Red Members) and Draco Wang (Ethnic Minority members)

2. Minutes and actions

Minutes noted with no outstanding actions

3. Club update - Vinai Venkatesham

Vinai explained the club has gone through a lot of change during the summer which was well documented and we continue to adapt to working in different ways as a result of the COVID protocols. He said we are working hard to be ready for when we get the go-ahead from Government to let fans into the stadium again. On the football front he said the mood is positive and optimistic. We had a great finish to last season and everyone is encouraged by the start to the season at Fulham. We all look forward to a successful campaign.

Zak Wagman (16-20s Representative)

Please could Vinai outline the role that Tim Lewis is playing at the Club going forward?

Vinai explained Tim Lewis has joined the board as a non-executive Director. He will be undertaking the typical non-executive director role; to provide third party support, challenge and perspective to me and senior staff. He is a senior Clifford Chance partner, has worked with KSE for many years, and is an Arsenal fan based in London. Have known him for many years – razor sharp and hugely experienced. I was very happy for him to get involved. We are working very well together and already adding lots of value.

Akhil Vyas – (AST Representative)

Arsenal refinanced the remaining long term stadium debt (£200m) with a loan from KSE UK Inc. We were told in the past that refinancing these loans is too high (admittedly the pandemic may have changed this) - what made the decision more appealing now? And is the new loan interest free or what payments will occur?

Vinai said he appreciates the question but we need to keep these matters private. There is a cost to refinance these loans but felt it was in best interest of the Club to do so, in light of the impacts of C-19.

Akhil Vyas – (AST Representative)

With Mikel now first team manager, rather than head coach, what are the main differences between the roles? Also, we welcome the comments Vinai made last week on not favouring agents. with the scouting department being restructured, what can you tell us about how we'll be scouting players? What role does Stat DNA play?

Vinai explained Head Coaches are typically responsible for coaching the team, and managing the coaching staff, but not wider responsibilities. That is not what Mikel has been doing from the first day he joined the Club and does not do justice to his capabilities.

Mikel alongside Edu will be responsible for all areas of our first team football operation for example medical, high performance, analytics, recruitment. In terms of scouting, he said we have modernised our scouting team – smaller team with more responsibilities. There will be more video scouting and use of StatDNA.

Akhil Vyas – (AST Representative)

Lastly on the subject, Raúl once told us that the head coach's role was to identify positions which the structure would take away and find suitable players - with Mikel's new role, I imagine Mikel will be a lot more involved?

Vinai explained Edu and Mikel make the technical recommendations together. They are in constant dialogue with each other, and regularly with Vinai and the board.

The process is as follows:

- 1) Define what position we need to strengthen
- 2) Define characteristics we want from a player in that position
- 3) Analyse the options in the marketplace against our criteria - filter to shortlist
- 4) Estimate transfer fee and salary per player on our shortlist
- 5) Determine top target(s) and negotiation approach – signed off by board
- 6) Contact club and agent

Vinai was clear that the identity of a player's representative had nothing to do with our choice of player, but the importance of agents within the football industry.

Peter Hoest – Arsenal Supporters Club Overseas Rep

Why is Raúl no longer here?

Vinai explained this was a Board decision and going forward we will operate with one leader to drive the Club forward. He explained that he had greatly enjoyed working with Raúl who is a very talented professional and a good friend.

Peter Hoest – Arsenal Supporters Club Overseas Rep

The executive group at Arsenal may be the youngest in the PL. How would you describe the pros and cons of this setup?

Vinai said he assumed the question was talking about himself and the main individuals on the football side. I don't really see what age has to do with it, and haven't given that a moment's thought. Huge amount of experience in the team. Mikel: 16 years straight in the PL – knows this league inside and out. Former Club Captain. Edu: Technical Director at Corinthians and Brazil National Team. Invincible. Per: Passionate about young player development. Presented his vision to Fan Forum before. Hugely powerful with young players and their families. Club Captain and World Cup winner. He pointed out that whilst he doesn't like talking about himself he has been in top level sport for 14 years and at Arsenal for 10.

He said it's a dynamic, ambitious, energetic team that is driven to succeed. But it's not just 4 people – there is diverse experience and skillsets across senior teams in football and non-football.

4. Loyalty programme

Mic Conetta, the club's Head of Digital Experience, said that work was underway on developing a fan loyalty programme for the start of the 2021/22 season. He explained the club wants to work with supporters to develop this programme and a sub-group of the forum will meet to develop the initiative in more detail.

5. Arsenal Foundation - how fans can help

Arsenal Foundation Director **Mairead King** and Women's representative **Suzanne Goodband**, outlined details of the Coaching for Life programme which is run by the Arsenal Foundation and Save the Children in Jordan and Indonesia. They explained that it's a ground-breaking programme supporting girls and boys which goes way beyond pure football coaching. It's designed to help young people build their potential and resilience and develop strong futures despite their extreme living circumstances. **Mairead** explained that funding has been hit because of COVID-19 and she and **Suzanne** have been exploring ways to harness support from Arsenal fans around the world. It was agreed to set up a sub-group of members alongside Arsenal staff to move things forward.

6. Questions

Draco Wang – Ethnic Minority Rep

In case of the second national lockdown, has the Club considered an alternative back-up measurements at both competitive and financial levels?

Vinai explained that we can take confidence that we have demonstrated we can create a secure environment where we can train and play matches. We have shown so far we can do that and discussions continue with the Government on when fans can return to matches safely. That remains the focus.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

The Membership packs. Are these being sent out to only those renewed for 20/21 season and when can they be expected.

Supporters' Liaison Officer **Mark Brindle** explained they are being sent out to renewed Members of Red and Silver and Purple in November. Further to the meeting we can clarify that no decision has been made on whether supporters who have put their memberships on hold for year will receive the packs or be offered the opportunity to purchase.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

JGs currently receive a free stadium tour voucher, but the parent still has to pay full price which then stops a lot of people still going as would make it expensive with a couple of parents, spending in the shop etc.. Could JG parents if also a red/silver receive a family entry discount.

Mark Brindle explained that we offer the Junior Gunner team free tour tickets as part of the added benefits of membership. Stadium Tours however have to pick up the cost of the child going free which is why we have to charge the parent to come in. All members do receive a 10% discount in Retail and on Tours so that benefit does already exist for them.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

Previously we have touched on the Family Enclosure ST holders having limited access to online services, the ticket transfer service is only available on the phone to the box office. Is there an update on this? and would we have full use of the online service for tickets won in the ballot?

Ticketing & Services Director **Ivan Worsell** explained this enhancement is on the roadmap but we still don't have a confirmed date on when this service will be implemented. Members of the Family Enclosure will be balloted into that area and this will be managed in the same way as it has been in previous seasons with members in this area having to call us to get their tickets transferred. It would be advised that an account is created online prior to calling the service centre to use this service.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

On the same subject, would JG/Cannon/Young Gun tickets won on the Ballot would they be upgradable to an adult ticket in our bubble if the kid couldn't make a late night game for example And if these tickets are placed outside of the FE area would they still be charged the standard child prices.

Ivan said tickets will not be placed outside the Family Enclosure for members from this area. We have gone to great lengths to ensure that the balloting system will place successful members into their seasonal area. We are happy to upgrade a child ticket for a night game that they cannot attend, paying the difference in price, but we wouldn't be willing to upgrade the same members ticket for every game they are successful to an adult, as our aim to follow our standard practice within this area.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

Any updates on Rail Seating / Safe Standing?

Stadium Director **John Beattie** said there were no updates at the current time. The priority at the minute is operating within COCOVID guidelines and getting fans back in the stadium safely.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

Updates on Phone apps / E-Wallets for stadium access.

Ivan explained we are very much still working through this as we were hoping to pilot at the end of last season and the beginning of this one! Moving to digital is key in our thinking and technically we have upgraded the system and stadium to be able to use however we need to pilot over a period of time to enable us to manage and educate fans as the challenges are both technical and cultural.

Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Rep

Is the club still proceeding with events to remember the 70/71 double winners 50th Anniversary - which may just be online videos / interviews now.

Communications Director **Mark Gonnella** explained we will be marking this important milestone in an appropriate way depending on what we're allowed to do at the time from a COVID-19 point of view.

Jake Coare – Silver members representative

Will silver members be able to be fully refunded for this season if it becomes clear that silver members won't be able to attend Home games throughout the season, or partially refunded if attendance is only allowed part way through the season?

Mark Brindle said we hope to be able to welcome fans back as soon as possible and safely increase the capacity during the 2020/21 season. We will share further information if we are able to allocate tickets to Silver Members. This will constantly be under review as we aim to maximise the number of supporters able to safely attend matches at Emirates Stadium. Mark pointed out that Silver Memberships are not solely focused on ticket access and they come with other benefits including 10% discount on retail online and in-store, a membership pack, access to online events, and the chance to win prizes and rewards from the club and our partners.

In response to a question from **Drew Gray (AISA)** around rebates/ticket access for silver members, the club agreed to take this away for further discussion.

Draco Wang – Ethnic Minority Rep

Can the Club give an update on supporting the Anti-Racism Campaign for the rest of the season, given the fact that the Premier League has decided to change from the 'Black Lives Matter' patch on the shirt to 'No Room for Racism'?

Mark Gonnella explained the club has an ongoing Arsenal for Everyone campaign which has been running for many years. This is designed to drive equality and diversity across every aspect. We will give our full support to the Premier League campaign as well as driving our own programme. The PL has also developed a new initiative to make it easier for players to report online abuse. This has resulted in court action. This is where you can help as fans. We all need to work together to drive abuse of every description out of our game. Some of the comments made on social media are simply unacceptable.

Draco Wang – Ethnic Minority Rep

Whether the Club has taken extra consideration to ensure a safe environment for those ethnic minority supporters, for example East Asians, from potential racist abuses, as multiple targeted attacks had occurred in the UK since the outbreak of coronavirus.

John said we have made plans to keep all supporters as safe as possible when you can come back to the stadium. Any racist abuse will be dealt with as it always is. He reminded members of the importance of supporters reporting incidents at the time as tracking down the culprits afterwards becomes very difficult. He also encouraged fans to be prepared to follow any complaints through with statements so sanctions can be applied as necessary.

Akhil Vyas AST

The AST was pleased that following collective pressure from many Supporters' Trusts that the Premier League will now show every game live in September. This arrangement needs to continue into the Autumn when games will also be behind closed doors or have greatly reduced crowds. It is a matter of fairness to all fans who can't attend perhaps for financial or health reasons or because they can't get tickets to have access to live coverage. Will Arsenal support this?

This question was not asked in the forum due to time, but **Vinai** confirms we are strongly in favour of finding a solution for Season Ticket Holders who cannot attend games due to C-19 restrictions to be able to watch games on TV. He was pleased that a solution was found for September. He explained that the Premier League is working to see what can be done past that date, and that we are supportive of finding a solution.

Akhil Vyas AST

The recent arrangements for the return of fans has shown that the Arsenal ticketing system is showing its age. Do the club plan investment to improve the ticketing system so that a better service can be offered to supporters?

This question was not asked in the forum due to time, but **Ivan** confirms the impact of Covid- 19 and our recent arrangements have meant that we are pushing the functionality that the ticketing platform provides. Where possible in an effort to help with the process the solution has been supplemented with other pieces of software which are not integrated to make the journey simpler (i.e. web form opt in to for the initial payment) The explained we will continue to work with our ticketing provider to develop the solution.

Drew Gray – AISA Rep

What input does the Club have over broadcasters' changes to match scheduling? We've have had two recent instances of changes - one for to push KO back by 15 mins (a v Liverpool) & one that changed the date twice from its original date and time (h v West Ham). These kind of changes particularly have a considerable effect on Arsenal members who travel long distances to matches, whether home or away

Mark Gonnella explained that broadcasters have invested significantly in the rights to PL matches. They are aware of the implications for supporters on changes to kick-offs and this is an on-going discussion. Mark also pointed out that things are even more complex in the current environment but broadcasters were always keen to settle times as soon as practical.

Drew Gray – AISA Rep

The majority of fans have to travel far distances and are wary about using public transport at the moment. Can the club assure us that they will or have already discussed fully with TfL and the railways about getting fans to and from the ground, for example by running extra underground and overground trains to and from the ground? And that the number of people in the ground will not just be set because of safety in the ground, but also through calculating safe means of travel.

John explained we have had talks with TfL, and they assure us that their services are running at about 95% of capacity but the usage is more like 30% so they see no reason why a reduced crowd cannot be easily catered for.

Drew Gray – AISA Rep

Given that the club have already indicated that parking restrictions are unlikely to be lifted by LB Islington and AISA appreciates the sensitivity of doing so in terms of AFC's community relations, would it be possible to organise (with TfL or a private company) a park-and-ride scheme to and from the stadium utilising the TfL car parks at Arnos Grove, Cockfosters, East Finchley, Finchley Central, West Finchley, and Woodside Park?

John said park and ride schemes are not very efficient in these times as you would only get about 20 people on a 50-seater coach and with the answer from TfL these are not thought necessary.

Drew Gray – AISA Rep

Can the club provide an update on fans returning to watch Arsenal Women at Meadow Park?

Mark Gonnella said there was currently no clarity on this and that we remain in the hands of Government and protocols.

Peter Hoest – Arsenal Supporters Club Overseas Rep

To avoid confusion between 2 names, can we maybe stop using the name 'Supporters Forum' (for instance on Arsenal.com) and officially name this meeting the Fans' Forum?

Mark Gonnella put the suggestion to a vote and it was agreed to change the name to the Arsenal Fans' Forum.

Peter Hoest – Arsenal Supporters Club Overseas Rep

With both Sir Chips Keswick and Mr Friar stepping down, what is the status of the board now? For instance, is there a chairman?

Vinai explained the board now consists of Stan Kroenke, Josh Kroenke, Lord Harris and Tim Lewis. He said there is no Chairman and there is no requirement to have one.

Peter Hoest – Arsenal Supporters Club Overseas Rep

In an interview, Vinai said: "I think we can do a better job of communicating with our fans. We need to be clear about what we're doing and what our plan is and we can get better at that." That sounds good. My question is then: what is the plan?

Vinai said we have done a lot of work to communicate with our fans. This has involved more media work, more transparency at forum meetings and some follow up discussions with fan groups. However it's something he wants to continue build on in the future and we need to keep improving. **Mark G** added that fans could see other examples of the club communicating differently in the shape of how the Aubameyang contract renewal was announced directly to fans on Instagram. He said this was the first time a major player had done this. Referring to the question about "what the plan is" **Mark** stressed the plan is to get back into the Champions' League where Arsenal belongs and compete for more trophies. **Vinai** noted the great support of our fans and how critical it is for us all to have our fans right behind us.

Peter Hoest – Arsenal Supporters Club Overseas Rep

Why are the pre-season friendlies kept so secret?

Mark explained that pre-season was conducted in a unique environment with many players missing and at different levels of fitness. Most friendly games involved teams made up of first teamers and U23s. They were not representative of how we will line-up and play so the decision was made to keep coverage to a minimum.

7. Mr Friar

Drew Gray – AISA Rep

AISA would also like to take this opportunity to put on record our thanks and gratitude to Mr Friar OBE for his enormous contribution to our Club for 70 years. We wish him a well-deserved happy & healthy retirement.

8. AOB

9. Date of next meeting (tbc)