



Minutes
Arsenal Football Club Supporters' Forum
6pm – 7.30pm February 17th 2020
Board Room
Highbury House

Supporters' Forum membership 2019/2020

REPRESENTING	FIRST NAME	SURNAME
16-21 Year Old Representative	Zak	Wagman
Arsenal Supporters Club – Domestic	Jan	Szbala
Arsenal Supporters Club – Overseas	Peter	Host
AISA Representative	Drew	Gray
Disabled Supporters	Anne	Hyde
Club Level	Fred	Dowd
Family Enclosure	David	Hurrell
Gold Members	Robert	Kramer
Red Members	Sarah	Coppock
Over 60s	John	Thater
LGBT Supporter Representative	Dave	Raval
RedAction Member	Raymond	Herlihy
Shareholders	Simon	Stern
Away Scheme Member	Michael	Anjos
AST Member	Akhil	Vyas
Women's Representative	Suzanne	Goodband

Arsenal representatives

Arsenal FC (Chair) Mark Gonnella
Arsenal FC Raul Sanllehi
Arsenal FC Vinai Venkatesham
Arsenal FC Alun Francis
Arsenal FC Ivan Worsell
Arsenal FC John Beattie
Arsenal FC Tom McCann
Arsenal FC Mark Brindle

Apologies:

Sarah Coppock – Red Member
Simon Stern – Shareholder
Robert Kramer – Gold Member
Anne Hyde – Disabled supporters

Agenda

1) Welcome from Mark Gonnella

Mark thanked members for making the effort to join on a non-matchday. The fact so many people were present confirms this works well and will be the plan moving forward.

2) Opening address from Vinai and Raúl

Raúl explained how the recent training camp in Dubai had been a big success. It provided Mikel Arteta with quality time on the training pitch and was also valuable from a team building perspective. Ultimately, he said, the success of the trip will be seen in the results and we made a good start with the win against Newcastle. He added that everyone remains very positive about the remainder of the season. There are plenty of matches to play to climb the Premier League and we also have the Europa League and Emirates FA Cup to compete for.

3) Rail seating proposals

Stadium Director John Beattie explained that we have recently received a detailed independent study into the viability of installing rail seating Emirates Stadium. We are still examining the details but there were two potential options presented, both of which come with high levels of complexity. We will continue to work through the implications, which include capacity loss and potential sight line issues for the standing fans. JB reminded the forum that the Government has yet to pass legislation to make this happen, and the broad perception that rail seating could increase capacity at Emirates Stadium was incorrect.

Vinai explained that we need to carefully examine the potential challenges of rail seating at Emirates Stadium which can be summarised as capacity loss, relocation of season ticket holders, potential requirement to rigorously enforce sitting in other areas of the ground and cost; and weigh these up against the benefits.

4) Feedback on the membership pack and handbook

Mark Gonnella said the Arsenal Digital team who produce the membership pack and handbook were requesting feedback in advance of preparing next year's edition.

Members were asked to provide feedback on the following questions by **Monday February 24th**.

What have been your favourite and least favourite elements of the membership pack in the past few seasons?

Do you still want a handbook?

What did you think about the handbook this season? What did you like, didn't like?

Do you find the historical or current content more useful/interesting?

What other content would you like to see in the book?

How important is it to you that the information is correct as at the end of the transfer window?

Would you be interested in other books being included in the membership pack? What sort of book would you like? Historical? Statistical? Season guide?

5) AST submission on improving atmosphere and home credits

Akhil Vyas from the AST introduced a paper exploring how more could be done to ensure fans attend home matches including through a home credit system. The paper proposed that fans be rewarded for attendance and for putting their unused tickets onto Ticket Exchange or Ticket Transfer.

Vinai noted the Club were in complete agreement with the AST around the importance of maximising attendance. He explained it is an industry wide issue, with no easy fix, but that the club had identified it as a key priority moving forward.

Ticketing and Services Director Ivan Worsell explained that a lot of work is being done to see how things can be improved, including the recent update that allows tickets to be posted to Ticket Exchange much closer to the time of the game. Work continues on Ticket Exchange and Ticket Transfer with usage increasing again this season. We are trying to drive earlier posting as season ticket holders will have more chance of selling if they do this. We also continue to run campaigns to drive awareness of the service from Season Ticket holders with a low attendance.

In the longer term Ivan confirmed we have a number of projects looking at what we can do to improve fan experience and drive attendance, he said this includes donation to charity mechanics and home match credits. It's a wide-ranging initiative which is being evaluated, prioritised and scoped.

6) Pre-submitted questions

John Thater – Over 60s

Lower tier standing and the role of the stewards: this arises from the fact that while all the North Bank lower tier stand the wing blocks-12 and 13 in particular-are a mixture of sitting and standing. Standing throughout is usually confined to the back 5 or 6 rows of 12. Recently however some fans in 13 have been standing in rows 15 and 16 while all in front of them are sitting down, necessitating everyone behind to have to stand up. Requests for them to sit down have been ignored. Recourse to stewards has also proved ineffective. At half time in the Leeds match I gave a detailed breakdown of the situation to the steward who listened attentively but subsequently did nothing. What is club policy, if any?

Stadium and Facilities Director John Beattie said standing in seating areas is a problem that all clubs around the country have to manage. In theory this is not allowed and the stewards are tasked to get people to sit. In practice this is almost impossible as the task has to start from the front of the block and it takes time for the stewards to get each row to sit. Once this is accomplished something happens on the pitch and everyone stands again so the process needs to begin from the front again. The stewards then get complaints of being in the way and receive levels of abuse. Therefore, currently they are instructed not to attempt to get people to sit but keep the aisles clear.

David Hurrell – Family Enclosure

Since the incorporation of Block 26. There is an increased adult presence in the family enclosure - not seniors, and without children. And then there is foul language throughout football, it's not an issue the odd word happens, but the increased use of the C word from the block 26 songs. They are sitting directly being and next to kids who are 5 to 10 years old. Can this be kept an eye on, or perhaps they shouldn't be in the family enclosure, What will happen in a year or 2 when these 18 years olds are no longer cannon members.

John Beattie explained regular meetings are being held with the group in block 26. They are a young group trying to build atmosphere. Unfortunately there are older ones (not linked to the group) which often gravitate to them and cause the issues. There have been a couple of bans from that section over the last few games and we continue to work with them to prevent further issues.

Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative

Please could you explain the accountability process for senior staff and executives in the Club? In the absence of shareholder AGMs, how do KSE scrutinise the work of and hold club executives to account, to ensure the highest quality performance from everybody involved?

Vinai Venkatesham explained our structure is that under the board we have an Executive Team that represents all areas of the club (led by Raul and himself), and then 3 Leadership teams across each of Highbury House, Hale End and Colney. Each department has objectives set at the start of each season, and each individual has corresponding objectives set for them individually. Those objectives are reviewed formally once midway through each season and once at the end of each season with informal reviews happening more regularly than that.

At the senior level each member of the Executive Team reports – and is therefore reviewed by either Raul or I; and Raul and I are reviewed by the Board and ultimately KSE.

Zak Wagman

Where does the Club stand on when the summer transfer window should close? Has this opinion changed since the last time the Premier League voted on this?

Vinai Venkatesham said we believe that the PL window closing before the rest of Europe puts PL clubs at a competitive disadvantage – at the end of the window we can sell but not buy. Our preference would be for the window for all the top leagues to close before the PL season starts, but as that does not seem likely we voted to move the window closure back to the end of August at the last PL shareholder meeting. Sufficient votes were gained for this to happen at the last PL Shareholder meeting.

At the original PL vote a couple of years back, many clubs (including Arsenal) voted for the window to close before the start of the PL, hoping that Europe would follow, but this did not happen.

Raymond Herlihy – RedAction Member

Is there an update on the safe standing possibilities for Emirates Stadium?

(Answered above)

Raymond Herlihy – RedAction Member

Do AFC have any input into Kick off times? Fans have had to suffer some very unfriendly kick off times this season, limiting their transport options home.

Vinai Venkatesham said the rights the PL clubs sell to broadcasters do grant them wide ranging abilities to choose kick off times – in essence they can move any match to any of the slots they have purchased. We do appreciate the challenges this creates, in particular for away games, and we look to put on transport to ease the journey home for fans as best we can.

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters' Clubs (Overseas)

What is the status of the 'Transition Team'? At the last meeting, you told us a little about them and their work, but it is not something that it is easy to find info about on our website.

Raúl Sanllehi explained that the absence of a B league in England means there is a gap on how players move from academy football to senior football. The transition team, consisting of Freddie Ljungberg, Steve Bould and Ben Knapper, has been brought together to identify individual routes for our Academy players – whether moving up to the first team, going out on loan or staying with the U23s. They understand the qualities of each player and what they need to develop further.

We look for loan clubs who will be able to give players the right opportunities in the right environment to develop and come back to us ready to push for the first team, or if that ends up not being realistic having demonstrated their value for a move to another club.

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters' Clubs (Overseas)

Raul and Vinai told us that no player would enter the last two years of his contract. What is the status on this and which exceptions do we currently have to this?

Raúl Sanllehi said our intention when players have 2 years to go is to either sell or renew. This does not always apply for young players as there are limitations on contract length and for players towards the end of their playing careers

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters' Clubs (Overseas)

Santi Cazorla has stated that he was hurt "not to be able to say goodbye to a stadium that made me fall in love." (about The Emirates)

Would it be possible to invite him for a game, where we thank him for his contribution, and give him the chance to say thank you to the fans?

Raúl Sanllehi agreed we would love to have Santi back. He is well loved by us all at Arsenal and it was a real shame he could not have a chance to say goodbye. It's difficult as he is still playing, but we will of course be in touch to arrange something at a suitable time

Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative

At the moment, Junior Gunners graduate to Cannon Club and then red membership, but this used to be to silver membership. This means that tickets for former Junior Gunners are more expensive than they used to be, at the age when most young people are either getting their first job or moving to university - financially tough times. Why did this change and is it possible to revert the change?

Ivan Worsell explained that Silver Membership is capped and new Silver memberships are allocated from members who do not renew. Originally when Red level members joined, they were placed in a queue by their joining date for Silver membership, whereas Cannon Club

members were just elevated to Silver at the appropriate time after their Cannon Club eligibility ended.

It was evident that the vast majority of members who were upgraded to Silver were coming from the Cannon Club and may only have held membership (Junior Gunner then Cannon Club) for c. four years versus a Red level member who had held membership for significantly more years and were being leapfrogged. This was felt by both the Club and fans, as being unfair and so the policy was changed. Now both Cannon Club and Red Level members are allocated a Silver membership based on chronological order of when they actually joined the membership scheme. We do believe this to be the fairest way to allocate Silver Memberships.

Michael Anjos – Away Scheme Member

Is there any possibility for existing away scheme members to once they've renewed their season tickets, to renew their away scheme membership online without having to wait for the form and send back in the post.

Is there any possibility for existing away scheme members to have the choice of choosing upper or lower tiers at certain away grounds as at present we are given upper tier without any choice?

Ivan Worsell said we are looking into the possibility of Away Ticket Scheme Members being able to renew their membership online once their Platinum/Gold or existing TC memberships are renewed. We are confident that this will be in place for the start of the 2020/2021 season. There would also be a function that would allow the member to update their payment card at the same time once their Away Scheme is renewed. He added that if an Away Scheme member has a preference of which tier they would prefer to be located, we would kindly ask that the member emails the box office with their request to be seated in the Lower Tier rather than the Upper Tier and we will endeavour to assist with their request.

Raymond Herlihy – RedAction Member

Can you share actual attendance data for matches so far this season? What are AFC doing to ensure that paid for seats are filled for the rest of this season and beyond?

Ivan Worsell explained we do not disclose actual attendance data. This is standard practice across most clubs. We can say that our attendances continue to improve.

Raymond Herlihy – RedAction Member

There have been recent improvement to the Ticket exchange, with it remaining active much closer to KO time; can AFC share some details on the success of this?

(Answered above)

David Hurrell – Family Enclosure

Ticket Transfer / Exchange. Every time, the method of ticket transfer changes, one time it's collection, another activated cards, another pdf is emailed. why is it not consistent and why can we not still use the online ticket transfer service, just make it so the child's ticket has to be transferred to a child's digital account of JG. And also, why can you not put the ticket exchange seats online instead of having to phone box office for them.

Ivan Worsell said that he would investigate further if more detail could be provided. He added that the ability to send a print at home ticket via the Service Centre is new this season and is initially being used on a small scale. However, this will be the only medium for F/Enc transfers going forward. In respect of the Online TT/TX for Family Enclosure Members, due to the complexities involved ensuring that the permissions within the area are maintained and the correct monies from TX sales are added to the members' account, significant development work is needed. Telephone is currently the only way we can assist with supporters' individual requests whilst ensuring that the enclosure permissions are adhered to. This has been added to our development roadmap for discussion with our ticketing platform provider.

David Hurrell – Family Enclosure

Getting things done for kids before the match. You have the xbox ones in club level with the Arsenal PES game. Maybe having a few of those in the FE area concourse that will give the kids attending so mingle and have something to do, Could be turned off 45 minutes before kick off when the teams come out and warmup - it would encourage parents to come in early. I have not seen the football cage in the shop open at all.

Tom McCann said we are always looking at ways to engage our younger supporters – such as the very popular 'Junior Gunners Takeover' earlier in the season. We have also had Gunnersaurus visiting the GA concourse recently. Installing Xboxes would be tricky due to the fact that GA concourse is effectively an external environment, so the machines would be subject to wind and cold.

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters' Club (Overseas)

Phone and Wi-Fi connection issues at The Emirates. I noticed that David Ornstein said, that he did not go to the Frankfurt home game due to bad signal on his phone when he is in the stadium so he was unable to work. What are you doing to improve phone connection at the stadium?

Tom McCann explained phone connectivity is always a challenge when 60,000 people are placed in close proximity within the stadium, which is itself a closed, concrete structure – this is not unique to Arsenal. We are looking at some technological solutions to improve 4G coverage within the stadium and this is a work in progress. We do offer WiFi in the stadium, but this is also naturally challenged at peak times – to retrofit reliable high-speed WiFi into an existing building is both invasive and expensive, but we are assessing this and also keeping a watching brief on the development of 5G.

Fred Dowd – Club Level

Club Level Ticket Prices and Rebate 2020/21 - the timeliness of the rebate payment and the level of rebate should we fail to qualify for any European competition next season.

Vinai Venkatesham confirmed that prices for next season will be flat across both GA and Club level, varying only based on the qualification for Europe. This is the 6th season in a row that prices will have been held flat on GA, and the third season in a row on Club Level.

Tom McCann said we will be offering an 8% reduction to Club Level season tickets in the event that we are competing in the Europa League. There would be a greater reduction if we are not competing in any European competition – this is tbc and would be confirmed and communicated if / when necessary. The refund process itself is complicated by a number of factors, such as the fact that some fans pay for their Club Level tickets via a split of payment methods (card, bank transfer, cheque, etc.) and at varying times, some fans have outstanding Ticket Exchange credit and others are moving their seat location or changing their membership holding, etc. Our view is that the best service is for all fans to get their refund at the same time via one direct payment. This means we must engage in a period of reconciliation, which takes time; the refunds are then processed en-masse and issued as quickly as possible. We are working on ways to streamline this process, particularly for those who pay for their seats in one full payment on a credit or debit card.

Drew Gray – AISA Representative

Catering and payments within the stadium

Tom McCann said the move to cashless in March had been driven by a big increase in the use of cards across the stadium. 93% of payments are currently made by card and this is rising. This move is also in line with our stadia including the Oval and Spurs.

Drew Gray – AISA Representative

Ticketing and access to the ground. Facial recognition and security.

Ivan Worsell explained that we continue to look at the new technologies in this area. GA testing for Apple products will be completed by the end of the season and we will be looking for full rollout including Android devices by the end of next season.

In terms of facial recognition technologies, we continue to monitor but there are many technical and logistical challenges with this technology in a football stadium environment.

Raymond Herlihy – RedAction Member

Please provide an update on the 'returnable flags' initiative in the Clock End – is this likely to be extended to more fixtures and / or the introduction of more flags? Is there a defined budget for such fan led initiatives within the stadium?

Mark Brindle

After some initial teething problems at the end of last season when the retention rate on the flags was as low as 60% we have continued to get the message out about the flags being 'returnable' and the retention rate has improved to around 95%. This has been aided by us collecting the flags at half time from the front of the stands. Even with a retention rate of 95% we will eventually run out of flags but we do now have a lot of spare flag poles and we will be looking to replace flags with some new designs. We will also look to fans to design flags and or make their own as we now know what is allowed in the stadium.

Dave Raval – LGBT Supporters Representative

The reception at Highbury House proudly shows the honours of our men's first team on the wall, and rightly so. Can however provision be made to show the success of our women's team prominently in the reception area, too?

Vinai said we are hugely proud of our Women's team – most successful in English football and WSL champions. They train at London Colney, Women's Football is represented on our Football Leadership team, they were part of Emirates Cup and they play at Borehamwood where our U23s play – on same surface quality at Emirates.

They are integrated in our high profile marketing campaigns (e.g. kit launches), and imagery across all of our offices, Hale End and Colney. He confirmed they don't feature in reception at Highbury House and that when we next refresh that area this is something we will take into account.

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters' Clubs (Overseas)

As foreigners, we often find it difficult to pronounce the names of our players.

Could you make a feature on the website with a short video with each player in which they present themselves and how to pronounce their name?

Mark Gonnella said he would talk to the club's media team about getting players to pronounce their names in the pre-season media content capture.

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters' Club (Overseas)

Will you announce the real attendance as well as number of tickets sold?

Answered above

AOB

There was a question in AOB asking if Arsenal would host another fan Q&A event in the close season as happened last year.

Mark Gonnella explained that the situation is as per the discussion at the last Supporters Forum. The club is committed to engaging with fans and answering their questions and concerns, but that we cannot contemplate a repetition of the event of last year which reflected poorly on the Club as a whole. The club will consider alternatives, for example a repeat of the interview with Raul and Vinai with Laura Woods at the end of the season.

A question was asked about whether the use of agents has changed in recent years, in particular which agents we use.

Raúl explained there has been no change and that the identity of the agent was a natural consequence of whoever our preferred player target is from a technical perspective. We are willing to deal with all agents and have good working relationships with a large number of agents around the world.

Vinai explained that the natural order of things was to first select the position we would like to strengthen and the characteristics of the player we would like in that position. We would then identify players against those criteria and positions. This technical assessment is led by Edu and our internal technical experts, of course heavily involving Mikel.

After that we would assess against our budget and other player needs, to determine the preferred player(s). It is only at that stage we identify the agent of the preferred players. Raúl stressed that the agent is a key person regarding the final decision of where the player is going, therefore it is a competitive advantage to have the strongest trusting relationships with agents around the world.

Date of next meeting - June tbc