



Minutes
Arsenal Football Club Supporters' Forum
6pm – 7.30pm May 6th 2020
Online Video Call Meeting

Supporters' Forum membership 2019/2020

REPRESENTING	FIRST NAME	SURNAME
16-21 Year Olds 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 60 Year-Olds	John	Thater
LGBT Supporter Representative	Dave	Raval
RedAction Member	Raymond	Herlihy
Shareholders	Simon	Stern
Away Scheme Members	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 Mark Brindle
Arsenal FC Sue Campbell
Arsenal FC Tom McCann
Arsenal FC Peter Silverstone

Agenda

1) **Welcome**

Mark Gonnella welcomed all members to the first ever virtual Supporters' Forum

2) **Minutes & matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.

3) **Updates from Vinai and Raúl**

Managing Director Vinai Venkatesham and Head of Football Raúl Sanllehi gave updates on the current situation relating to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Vinai started by saying the thoughts of everyone at Arsenal are of course with those directly impacted by the virus, and we are hugely thankful to healthcare professionals and key workers worldwide who are keeping us all safe.

He outlined how the Club had planned well, so when Mikel contracted the virus we could move quickly to close our sites and get the whole organisation working from home efficiently.

Vinai explained the impact of the virus on football – in all countries and at all levels – is dramatic and hugely concerning. Even for a Club as big as Arsenal, who run our finances in a responsible way, the impact is significant. People should not think the bigger Clubs in the game are immune from the economic effects of the virus.

He said our revenues from matchdays, broadcast and commercial are under risk. Games may be played behind doors, we may not be able to deliver to broadcasters what they have been promised, and commercial operations such as our retail stores and stadium tours are closed. Our pre-season tour will almost certainly not happen. In regard to our sponsors they are being hugely supportive, but of course many of their businesses are under strain.

As a result, we have taken significant measures on the cost side, to plan in a responsible way. This has included operating spend and capital spend cuts as well as reducing Executive Team earnings over the next year. The players are playing their part. We are the only club in PL whose players have volunteered a cut rather than deferral – 12.5% of annual earnings. We are proud of how the players have stepped up. There is also support being provided by Kroenke, Sports & Entertainment.

Vinai stressed that right from the start our people have been our key priority. Our permanent staff hear directly from the senior team pretty much every day, and we have around 500 staff on a weekly call with us. They can ask any question and we answer every one. He explained the focus is on protecting their jobs and base salaries. We are not looking at redundancies and all are being paid in full. The club's 1,500 casual workers are also being paid in full until at least the end of May.

Vinai explained the work being done for our local communities and further afield. We have delivered 45 tonnes of essential supplies to local boroughs with our partners, made six figure donations to local charities and organisations and driven NHS staff who need our help to work. In addition, we have offered our stadium facilities to the NHS, supported schools with digital

learning resources, been calling our most vulnerable fans and supported the participants we have in our programmes in Jordan and Indonesia.

This is what our community team have been doing for last 30+ years and it is great to see it getting wider recognition at this time, but it is just business as usual for this team.

Vinai talked about how everyone was really pulling together at this time to protect the Club, our people and our community. You learn more about people in tough times and the values of the Club were really shining through. There is much to be proud about despite the challenging times we are in.

At the current time players are going to Colney for individual exercise, much like they would do in a public park. They are not in training in any form we would recognise. It is strictly controlled.

Looking ahead Vinai explained that there is much focus on how and when the Government will ease the lockdown and signal a return to work. Football needs to develop safe protocols for that return in the same way as all other industries, and the first step on the journey back to playing matches will be returning to train in small groups. Protocols for this first step are currently being created on a league wide basis through discussions with experts, players, managers and government. It will be a requirement to ensure no resources are taken from where they are most needed on the front-line. Protocols for further steps would be developed as we learn from this first step and based on the conditions at the time.

Vinai closed by restating the Club's commitment to finish the Premier League season, if and when it is safe and appropriate to do so. He stressed it is our belief that the sporting outcomes for this season are best finalised on the pitch by players, even if in not in the way originally planned, if that is at all possible. The alternative of deciding sporting outcomes in meeting rooms, cannot be right.

Raúl said that we are looking to make the very best of the situation and ensure we are strongly placed when restrictions are eased. There has been a strong feeling of togetherness across the club and communication has improved across all areas. He said we are trying to make the right decisions for our people and the club every step of the way. We are also engaged in all the key discussions in England and Europe around developing a return.

Raúl paid tribute to the players for accepting the 12.5% pay reduction. They understood the threats to the club's income and the rationale behind it. He also explained about the exercise activity the players are currently doing at Colney. This is all about providing them with a secure and safe environment. They are on their own and all the social distancing protocols are being followed at all times. He was hopeful that in time, subject to the Government advice and under the guidance of the medical experts, the training will develop further as a return to action comes closer.

He also explained the work Mikel Arteta has been doing with the players and coaches, holding daily calls and bringing the team together. The aim in everything is to make this time count. An example was a recent call between Mikel, Edu and the Head Coach of the LA Rams Sean McVay. Mikel suggested the meeting and the coaches spent two hours discussing how to maximise training in the current time. Both accepted they had learned a lot from each other which will help them develop.

On the transfer window Raúl was clear that there is too much uncertainty to talk about transfers. There are questions over money plus the timings of the season and any transfer window. He was clear that this crisis would create a new environment and stressed the priority now was for the club and team to come out of this in the best possible way.

4) Questions

Drew Gray – AISA Representative

If PL gets the green light to restart but with matches being played behind closed doors what options will be available to supporters to watch live? Will they be able to view online 'live' at home & at what cost? Some supporters may find that paying to watch a game of football is not their highest priority at this moment in time. If season ticket / ticket holders are unable to view online (for whatever reason) will a refund option be available? There certainly should not be any charge to watch, after all people have paid to present AT a match not to watch on television - and they also will have paid for tv licences and many for Sky/ now or BT subscriptions.

Vinai: If fans are not at matches, we will offer all those who have tickets for those matches a credit for next season or a refund. It is not currently clear if there will be any changes to the normal broadcast arrangements due to the pandemic, but the Premier League is in active discussions with our broadcast partners.

There is a groundswell of opinion that the well-being of those who would need to be in attendance (both playing & non-playing staff, officials etc & their families) is deemed to be secondary. How will the club ensure that there will not be a negative impact on the already pressurized Emergency Services if games are resumed? What plans/discussion are in place between the Club and those Emergency Services organisations?

Vinai: Hopefully I have answered that in the opening address. Health concerns are not secondary, but the primary concern. As I said earlier staying at home until the virus is no longer here is not realistic for any industry, including football. So, like other industries guidelines are being developed to enable a first step back towards normality – training in small groups. These will be developed by experts, involving players and also government sign off.

On matches – PL are in discussions to ensure emergency services are not put under strain.

It may just be 'paper talk' but how does/would the club feel about The Premier League spending £4m on testing players at a time when those more in need of a test can't get tested?

Vinai: Any testing for players would not take away from government capacity. The Premier League have been clear on that.

Drew Gray – AISA Representative

Will Covid-19 have any impact on the announcement made at the last Fans Forum in February that Season Ticket prices for season 2020-21 were to be frozen?

Akhil Vyas AST

Have we begun to look at timings for refunds for this season - would they be provided to supporters soon as the season is either void / behind closed doors?

Ivan Worsell:

As mentioned at the last Supporters' Forum ticket prices will be still be frozen for next season.

We have looked at timings and we obviously want to do this as quickly as possible. As you will appreciate it is quite a sizable operation refunding thousands of transactions so we have been exploring what tools are available to help deal with this in a bulk format rather than on an individual basis which would take an age. The work is well underway and we are hoping that we can minimise the time this process would take.

Akhil Vyas AST

What about the 'cash injection' in a media story a few weeks ago from KSE? It has been the single most frequently asked question as you can imagine.

Vinai: As ever we are in regular contact with our board and owners. KSE are providing financial support to the club, but we are not going into the details.

Anne Hyde - Disabled Supporters Representative

Many disabled supporters are either shielding or self-isolating because of Covid 19 and are likely to be doing so for the foreseeable future until a vaccine is found. Could the club give us an indication as to how this will affect season ticket holders and what provision is going to be put in place for the 2020/2021 and possibly 2021/2022 seasons so that current season ticket holders will not be disadvantaged.

Ivan Worsell

The Club is evaluating the long-term implications of COVID 19. There is a working group set up (including the Disability Access Officer) to explore what these implications are, and this will be fed back at a later date once the work is completed.

Drew Gray – AISA Representative

Can the club provide an update on the impact of going 'cashless' for the WHU game way back on March 7? Both the positive & the not so positive.

Tom McCann: The implementation of cashless was extremely smooth – we had no technological issues and feedback from fans was overwhelmingly positive as fans were able to be served quicker at all food and drink outlets. Very few supporters raised any issues – largely due to the comprehensive communication plan rolled out well in advance. Going forward, we expect this to become far more commonplace as cashless transactions are considerably more sanitary than the exchange of cash.

Drew Gray – AISA Representative

Our members are registering their concern and disquiet at the 'tired' and apparent dilapidated state of the Emirates. From the daily accumulations of rubbish and dog mess to the longer-term issues of weeds thriving, stains and damage to surfaces, and grime and colour fading on the bridges and banners, it does not present the club in a positive light. Who is responsible for the general upkeep, upgrading and restoration of the immediate vicinity of the stadium complex - and is there a plan to bring the Emirates and its surrounding back to a standard worthy of the name 'the Arsenal'?

John Beattie

We currently only have a skeleton staff on with only security, groundsman and a few maintenance people at the stadium. There is only one cleaner who is responsible primarily for cleaning the areas where the staff are working. They do occasional cleans of the podium when there is time. These are aimed for daily but not always are they achieved. This involves removing rubbish and dog mess. There are a few weeds growing but this is not essential maintenance and therefore we will not be sending staff in to clear it.

For your information we do not own the bridges they are the Council's and so they take responsibility for maintaining them.

Peter Host – Arsenal Supporters Club (Overseas)

There has been some talk about Arteta having Arsenal DNA and Arsenal values. How would you describe what those are?

Raúl: Togetherness is one of our key values. He explained how when Mikel joined the club he insisted on visiting all our offices and meeting every member of staff. He understands everyone can make a contribution and wants to drive unity. A second value is acting with class, doing things the right way. Raúl said Mikel's knowledge, understanding and love of Arsenal is deep. He's always honest and direct and has fantastic energy and resilience. The third value is always moving forward. Mikel has the winning attitude. He pushes everyone to make things better, he looks for the best and maximum efficiency in everything.

How has this lockdown and the pay reductions affected contract negotiations? We saw Jordan Nobbs sign a new contract, but I'm especially interested in those contracts running out in 2021, such as Aubameyang and Saka, and I haven't heard much been said about those.

Raúl: Stressed he will not talk about specific players and private business. He reiterated the point that the current situation creates uncertainty but reminded people that decisions will continue to be made in the best interests of Arsenal.

AOB

Mark Gonnella said he was aware 5 members of the forum were due to step down. Due to the current situation he said we would review our next steps around this and we will be in contact with the individuals concerned in due course.

Date of next meeting - TBC