



**Arsenal Football Club Fans' Forum**  
**6pm – 7.30pm December 15<sup>th</sup> 2020**  
**Online Video Call Meeting**

**Fans' Forum membership 2020/2021**

<b>REPRESENTING</b>	<b>FIRST NAME</b>	<b>SURNAME</b>
16-21 Year Old	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	Ben	Buckstone
Over 60 Year-Olds	John	Thater
LGBT Supporter Representative	Joe	White
RedAction Member	Raymond	Herlihy
Silver Members	Jake	Coare
Away Scheme Members	Michael	Anjos
AST Member	Akhil	Vyas
Women's Representative	Suzanne	Goodband
Ethnic Minorities	Draco	Wang

**Arsenal representatives**

Arsenal FC (Chair)	Mark Gonnella
Arsenal FC	Vinai Venkatesham
Arsenal FC	Edu Gaspar
Arsenal FC	Alun Francis
Arsenal FC	Ivan Worsell
Arsenal FC	John Beattie
Arsenal FC	Mark Brindle
Arsenal FC	Tom McCann
Arsenal FC	Peter Silverstone
Arsenal FC	Mic Conetta

## Agenda

1. **Welcome**
2. **Apologies for Absence** – Michael Anjos (Away Scheme), Zak Wagman (16-21 supporters)
3. **Minutes & matters arising**  
There were no matters arising from previous meeting
4. **Updates from Vinai and Edu**

**Vinai** reminded the forum that our last meeting was in September which seems like a lifetime ago, the season had just started and we had won our first game away at Fulham.

He provided an update on what has been happening since then. He said the transfer window was not like normal. The dramatic impact of Covid-19 on the football industry meant that many clubs were severely financially constrained.

On incomings we strengthened the team in the key areas identified by our technical staff:

- A versatile attacking player: Willian from Chelsea
- A Left-sided Centre Back: Gabriel from Lille
- A number 6 in midfield: Thomas Partey
- Also brought in a blend of youth and experience, the latter important given the large number of young players we have in the team
- Dani Ceballos stayed with us on loan and welcomed back Mo Elneny from Loan
- Brought in reserve GK – Alex Runnarsson

He explained that due to Covid, outgoings were more problematic across the industry

- Emi Martinez – Villa
- Lucas Torreira and Matteo Guendouzi on loan
- Left with too many players for squad lists meant Mesut, Papa left out of UEFA and PL lists and William S from UEFA list
- Despite all the stories – these were technical football decisions by Mikel and his technical staff purely on sporting criteria

Vinai explained the Club made significant investment in the transfer window – following significant investments in previous windows – against our ambition to get back competing at the level we need to be back competing at.

He explained we're clearly not getting the results any of us expect in the Premier League, and that everyone is working hard and sticking together to turn it around. Believe results will come. Vinai explained we are not ignoring what we see on the pitch – being carefully evaluated by Mikel and his technical staff.

There is no getting away from the fact we are going through a very difficult and challenging moment, but are convinced we can get things back on track.

He explained that away from the pitch – Covid continues to have a dramatic impact.

- Significant losses last season from broadcast rebates
- Significant losses this season and last from lack of spectators
- Difficult commercial marketplace

He explained how we continue to support the local community at this tough time – last week reached the milestone of half a million meals delivered to residents across Islington, Hackney and Camden. Continuing the long history and tradition we have at Arsenal for outstanding community work.

He told the forum how delighted everyone was to have fans back in the stadium, albeit now we are back in Tier 3. He is convinced we can do this in a safe and secure manner and thanked Supporters' Groups for their support around our approach to ticket ballots and sales.

**Edu** took questions on a number of topics. He addressed recent reports of unrest in the dressing room which he said were wide of the mark, and was clear that the players are fully behind Mikel. However, he accepted that some players are unhappy when they are not playing. This should be expected and is an issue faced by every club.

He was also asked about the January transfer window and whether we would look to re-register players that were not registered for the first part of the season. **Edu** said the whole industry is suffering because of the pandemic but we have a plan for the window to try and find the right player for the right position. However, he pointed out it is not the best window to do business. He said now is the time to stick together and for everyone to take responsibility, coaches, staff, players, everyone. He said it's clear everyone is together and working to get things right on a daily basis and turn the situation around.

**Edu** was also asked about the opportunities being given to young players. He said we have a young squad who are getting game time. Young players have been given debuts in the Europa and this is a key part of our approach. He said it's important to give the players the right opportunities at the right time. In answer to a specific question about William Saliba, **Edu** explained he needs time to develop to be an Arsenal player. Last season he had injury problems and difficulties in his family life. However, he is a good player and will have a good future with Arsenal.

**Edu** closed by insisting everyone at the Club wants to succeed. He accepted the team needs to show more creativity but the team had been getting results before. He pointed to our form at the end of last season and the start of this and remains confident we will grow and succeed.

**Vinai** was asked by the **AST** and **Robert Kramer** about the club structure following recent changes and if this is now the way forward.

**Vinai** said we have simplified the model. There is active engagement and involvement of the Board – Stan and Josh Kroenke our owners, plus Tim Lewis and Phil Harris. Vinai said he has executive responsibility for matters on and off the pitch, as CEO, working closely with the Board. On football matters, the Board and Vinai work closely with our technical experts

He said Per is responsible for running the Academy. Per is a strong leader and has a very capable management team across all the core disciplines – coaching, recruitment, education, player welfare etc. Mikel and Edu are responsible for running the first team. They form a powerful combination and have a strong team across all the disciplines Coaching, Recruitment, Medical/High Performance; Operations, and Analysis.

We have significant experience and expertise across our football departments and technical recommendations come from Per for the Academy and Mikel + Edu for the First Team.

Vinai said it's time for stability and no other changes are planned (other than current recruitment of a Director of Football Operations, a post previously held by Huss Fahmy), but like any sensible organisation we will continually evaluate our structure and adapt as required.

### **Fund-raising for Arsenal Foundation**

**Mark Gonnella** explained that like many charitable organisations, funding for the Arsenal Foundation is under pressure because of the pandemic. Mark tabled a suggestion about how we can work more closely with fans to galvanise a global fund-raising effort across the Arsenal family. The idea would be to create opportunities for supporters around the world to make a direct contribution to the programmes funded by the Foundation and potentially to foster some competitive spirit amongst fans to drive support. It was agreed to set up a sub-group to explore this further and try and launch a fan initiative towards the end of the season

### **Questions:**

#### **Jake Coare – Silver Rep**

**With the upcoming government vaccination programme due to start. Will supporters have to prove they have been vaccinated against COVID-19 to attend Arsenal matches?**

John Beattie

We would follow Government and Premier League guidelines on this matter.

**Would it please be possible to have an update on the silver members renewals for the 2020/21 season, and could any updates be sent to silver members to easier their concerns since a survey I sent to the club shows unhappiness over the membership process for 2020/21 season.**

**This question was also asked by the AST**

**We're getting a lot of contact from silvers members - with it looking unlikely that they'll get the chance to get any tickets this season, has there been any thought / update to rolling forward their membership into next season?**

#### **And by AISA**

**Given the very welcome return of fans to the Emirates could we ask whether there has been any further discussion of the situation as it affects Silver Members? Since its still looks as if they have little or no chance of getting a ticket this season is it possible that these memberships could be rolled over to 2021/22 *gratis* or heavily reduced?**

#### **Mic Conetta**

Currently the changing external factors make it very hard for us to predict at this stage what the situation will be regarding ticket access for the rest of the season. This is one of the reasons why we have still not set a deadline for Silver renewals.

We have provided / continue to work on additional benefits for our members. These include:

- Season long 10% membership discount on Arsenal Direct
- 12 days of Xmas campaign (launched on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec)
- Virtual Experiences (planning for some additional events in the new year)

- Potential access to a limited number of tickets via our club partners – Our club partners, who have access to a limited number of tickets, have asked us if/how they can reward different elements of our membership base with their tickets. We continue to explore this option and our Silver Membership is a key group we will consider in such an offering.

The additional benefits are on top of the existing benefits related to the membership programme(s):

- Membership packs, currently being distributed to our full members
- Members Events - Members are invited to exclusive events organised throughout the season, 2 Away Screenings were held prior to fans returning
- Membership Rewards - provides our fans with exclusive access to a range of monthly prizes, opportunities to win signed merchandise and online Arsenal events (such as live Q&A with Players).
- Arsenal Player – All levels of members continue to have access to Arsenal Player, our online video channel featuring exclusive first team related content and behind the scenes access

We plan to include a recognition of the above in our end of year newsletter that will be sent out to our membership base during December.

Further information will be communicated once the environment is better understood.

**Jake Coare, Drew Gray (AISA) and Akhil Vyas (AST)** all drew attention to the fact some silver members have made an upfront payment for access to tickets this season and it is now increasingly unlikely they will get tickets to games this season. They asked the club to consider rolling over those payments to next season.

**Mic Conetta** reinforced the position that due to the changing situation around COVID it has been impossible to make a definitive statement on this matter. We will continue to look at this and update members in due course. **Vinai** re-iterated that we will continue to monitor the situation and understood the points raised by Jake, Drew and Akhil.

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Rep**

**The only question(s) I have would just be whether it would be possible for Mark/Vinai to update on where the Club stands (and if that position has changed) on the 5 substitutes debate and also on the Project Big Picture discussions.**

**Also asked by AST**

**Project big picture - Last month it was revealed that Liverpool and Man Utd were working on proposals for restructuring the governance of the PL. Were Arsenal involved in these discussions? Do Arsenal support the view of the AST that the PL should be based on one vote each with a fair revenue distribution**

**Vinai Venkatesham**

On 5 substitutes:

- We are strongly in favour of increasing the number of substitutes from 3 to 5
- From our point of view this is simply a player welfare matter – we had a very intense finish to last season, a very short close season and are back into a very intense season. The player load is very high, especially when considering teams are also losing players due to Covid for extended periods

- This is not about trying to gain an advantage. I hear the argument that clubs with large squads benefit from having more subs, but an equally valid argument is that the clubs with small squads have more to lose if players get injured. I don't know if there is an advantage and, if so, to who. This is simply about player welfare and doing the right thing for players.
- FIFA have allowed leagues to have 5 substitutes due to the impact of Covid. Every other major league – France, Germany, Spain and Italy are doing it. UEFA are doing in the UCL and UEL. The FA are doing it for the FA Cup. The EFL are doing it in the Championship, League 1 and League 2. The PFA believe it should change. I understand at a recent PL managers' meeting there was strong support for it to change. PL teams play more games, and more intense games, than any other league and we are about to enter into the most congested part of the season.
- So it is fair to say we think we should have 5 subs in the PL!

#### **On Project Big Picture:**

- We were broadly aware of the conversations, and the only conversation we had of real note was a couple of days before the story was in the papers
- From our perspective this was simply a small group of colleagues brainstorming around how best to develop the Premier League for long term success
- The idea was always to share these thoughts with the Premier League clubs when developed
- What is happening now is a league wide strategic review to consider how we best set up the PL for long term success. This will be broad ranging, with everything on the table for consideration. I imagine that this will include voting and revenue distribution and don't want to pre-judge those discussions
  - o On TV revenue distribution of course it is a balance – how balance ensuring competitiveness of the league through an equal share, whilst also rewarding sporting success and what is driving the TV revenues we are splitting
  - o On governance – again it is a balance. How do we ensure everyone has a say, but also that we have the right structures to ensure we are able to make decisions for the long term benefit of the league? For example, maybe turning down the most financially lucrative TV deal in a developing international market for the one which might best grow the following of the league?

#### **Peter Hoest – Overseas Representative**

**In light of the incident with David Luiz and Raul Jimenez in the game against Wolverhampton - what precautionary and reactionary measures does the club take in this regard, and what kind of safeguard is in place in case a player suffers longer-term head injuries such as CTE - even after retirement?**

#### **Mark Gonnella on behalf of Dr Gary O'Driscoll (Head of Medical)**

Gary is one of the game's leading authorities on the treatment of head injuries. He had many years' experience in rugby before joining us.

Arsenal takes the diagnosis, management and long-term oversight of concussion very seriously and abides by the guidelines and protocols established by the PL, the FA and FIFA.

All the players both at first team and Academy level have baseline cognitive function testing either using the SCAT5 test or with a computerised neuropsychometric test (IMPACT). These are a series of cognitive tests that are used on a fit and healthy player prior to the season that can then be used as a baseline to compare with cognitive function after any brain injury.

We use the Pitchside protocol for concussion recognition and practice with this tool so that all players and pitch side staff are aware of this (SCAT 5). The SCAT 5 also has detailed guidance on how to monitor the recovery of any symptoms of concussion and this is followed very closely. No player is allowed to return to any form of training until they are completely symptom free and have returned to their baseline levels of cognition. Once this has been cleared and the player is symptom free, the player then can gradually proceed back to exercise in a progressive and graded manner. Any symptoms that recur mean returning to the start of the process again.

With regard to the return to play there are also very detailed guidelines and protocols to guide this in the safest manner possible.

There is currently no definitive test to diagnose CTE. However, we are constantly in discussion with the PL, the FA and the PFA regarding means of screening and monitoring of players once they retire. In response to a question from **Jan Szbala** about David being allowed to drive home after the game, **Mark** reinforced the point that the player had passed all the protocols and was deemed fit to travel by the club doctor.

**Drew Gray – AISA Rep**

**Could the club give an update on the Loyalty scheme? AISA have polled members about it and should be able to offer some feedback at the forum (if this is appropriate).**

**Mic Conetta**

Firstly, we'd really encourage, and appreciate it, if our supporter's groups would use the name of My Arsenal Rewards whenever referring to the scheme. The quicker we all adopt this name the better! Thanks for your support on this.

The project has been moving along at pace and the focus has been on the programme design and build of infrastructure. The project is highly complex, and we are managing multiple workstreams across the club and our key partners. The current plan is to schedule a 2nd sub-group meeting, with our fan representatives, towards the end of Jan, which will be followed by monthly catchups as we move towards a user group trial at the end of the season.

We actively encourage feedback from all our sub-group members for consideration and will look to collate the feedback from AISA alongside the feedback received to date from Anne (disabled supporters) and Jake (silver members).

**Drew Gray – AISA Rep**

**As Arsenal open the games up to larger numbers of fans, can we have the club's assurance that the club is in constant liaison with Transport for London and Great Northern, to ensure that they can safely handle the influx of fans using their services when a match is on. As the board will know, in normal times underground stations and Great Northern's station at Finsbury Park are packed solid with fans trying to access and occupy platforms that were never built for this number of people. If TfL and Great Northern cannot give absolute assurance about their ability to cope**

**with the numbers within government guidance on safety during the crisis, will the club undertake to give a clear statement to fans that public transport operators are unable to give this assurance?**

**John Beattie**

We always liaise with the transport operators as part of the Safety Team meetings. As numbers hopefully increase this dialogue would continue and any information that was pertinent to travelling to matches would be passed onto the supporters.

**Draco Wang – Ethnic Minorities Representative**

**What is the Club's plan on safety measures when the capacity of the stadium is allowed to increase?**

**John Beattie**

We had a plan in place when we thought we could get 17,000 in so we will revert to that incorporating learnings from the lower events.

**Drew Gray – AISA Rep**

**We would be interested to know what the forum and the club's reaction to the recent PPV campaign is/was, could we get a response or discussion of this?**

**Also asked by AST**

**PPV - We welcome the decision of the PL clubs to end the 14.95 charge and thank Arsenal for their work on this. Will you commit to supporting the existing policy for as long as some home supporters are denied the opportunity to watch their club due to covid implications?**

**Vinai**

Agree that the right decision was to end the £14.95 PPV model. Thank AST for their constructive dialogue with us on that matter. Our view is that whilst significant numbers of fans are not able to attend matches due to government restrictions, at least season ticket holders should have the ability to watch non-UK televised games at subsidised prices or by them being included in the packages offered by our broadcast partners. At the moment the model is to include these matches in the packages of our broadcast partners, which I imagine will be reviewed as the season develops and hopefully more and more fans return.

**Drew Gray – AISA Rep**

**Likewise has the club anything to tell fans groups about the ongoing attempts to create a European super league or the proposed (and shelved) changes to the Premier League?**

**Vinai**

I think have answered question on PL previously. On Europe – there are always proposals out there around how best European football should be organised; whether from UEFA or otherwise. There is nothing particularly new or unusual there. Our approach is always to engage in conversations, when appropriate, to best protect our interests. We believe that is the responsible thing to do.

**Question on shirts: who decides what we wear, especially for home games? Odd to see us playing RV in blue for example.**

**Mark Brindle**

We play in red and white at home for all domestic matches but the change of strip against Vienna was a UEFA decision due to kit clashes with Vienna first and second kits. UEFA has very strict/rigid



provisions around kit clashes and in a situation like this we had no ability to alter the decision (obviously our preference is to wear our traditional home kit at Emirates Stadium).

**Dave Hurrell – Family Enclosure Representative**

**Is Gunnersaurus coming back for the league games, would have been good to see him around Block 10, and pitch-side last Thursday.**

**Mark Brindle**

Gunner never went away and will, as ever, be a presence at home games. He did go pitch-side on Thursday and will continue to do so.

**Is it true about the rumours that there is a new round of redundancies?**

**Vinai**

As explained earlier Covid has had a dramatic impact on our revenues. We took a number of steps to reduce our costs – for example reducing discretionary spend, players and executives volunteering pay reductions. Despite these measures it was unfortunately necessary to make redundancies. The decision was taken to reduce our cost base, but also to ensure our organisation structure is fit for purpose for a post Covid world which will be quite different. Redundancies are almost completed, but like any well-functioning organisation we will continually review our structure to ensure appropriate for the environment we operate within.

**Draco Wang – Ethnic Minorities Representative**

**Can we get an update on how the Club has continued to support local and global communities during the second wave of COVID, after the generous donation of £100,000 on the 24th March?**

**Mark Gonnella**

You may have seen we made our 500,000<sup>th</sup> delivery of meals into the borough on Friday. This is through a partnership with HIS Church and Islington Borough Council. This is meeting a key area of local need.

Our community programmes have been maintained where possible throughout the pandemic and in recent weeks we have been delivering projects at 80% of capacity. We know how important these programmes are in normal times and they are even more meaningful in this environment.

Looking at the financial support the initial figure was: £100k pledged to a community crisis fund + £50k via Islington Giving partnership. So far we have supported **33** different organisations and charities across Islington, Camden and Hackney. Those supported have included: local foodbanks, community centres, telephone support lines for refugees, support for adults with learning difficulties, support for rough sleepers, music therapy projects and many, many more. The Gunners' Fund is still open and taking applications.

**Akhil Vyas (AST)** and **Drew Gray (AISA)** reminded the forum that fans have also been raising money with £50,000 going to Islington Giving and another £5,000 raised for the Islington Foodbank. This was welcomed by **Vinai** and **Mark G.**

## **AOB**

**Drew Gray (AISA)** raised a point about the difference in atmosphere between the Rapid Vienna and Burnley matches. He wondered whether this related to the sales mechanic for the Rapid match which involved supporters having to physically take action to get a match ticket.

**Mark Gonnella** said that the atmosphere for both games was excellent and there was no obvious difference between the matches. Everyone was impressed by the noise made by 2,000 people.

**Date of next Meeting - tbc**

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year**