



Arsenal Football Club Fans' Forum

Tuesday 3rd May 18:00-20:00

Boardroom, Emirates Stadium

Fans' Forum membership 2021/2022

16-21 Rep	Liam Patel
ADSA	Anne Hyde
AISA	Richard Smith
AST	Akhil Vyas
Club Level	Fred Dowd
Ethnic Minorities	Draco Wang
Family Section	David Hurrell
Gold	Darren Epstein
LGBT	Joe White
Over 60's	Richard Stubbs
Red	Ben Buckstone
REDaction	Raymond Herlihy
Silver	Vacant
Supporters Clubs Domestic	Dave Harrold (Arsenal Scotland)
Supporters Club Overseas	Peter Host (Arsenal Denmark)

Apologies

Women	Linda Duffy
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Arsenal representatives

Arsenal FC	Khali Parsons – Senior Manager Fan Services (Chair)
Arsenal FC	Vinai Venkatesham – Chief Executive Officer
Arsenal FC	Mark Gonnella – Media, Communications & Community Affairs Director
Arsenal FC	Juliet Slot – Chief Commercial Officer
Arsenal FC	Tom McCann – Venue Director
Arsenal FC	John Beattie – Stadium & Facilities Director
Arsenal FC	Sharon Cicco – Head of Event, Safety & Security and Operations
Arsenal FC	Mark Brindle – Supporters Liaison Officer
Arsenal FC	Jim Gay – Fan Services Manager
Arsenal FC	Amy Trynka – Venue Projects Strategy Manager

Apologies:

Arsenal FC	Jon Dyster – Disability Access Manager
Arsenal FC	Mic Conetta – Head of Digital Experience

Minutes

1) Welcome

KP welcomed the group, including those joining online, and handed over to Josh.

Josh Kroenke shared how great it was to be there. He spoke of the rollercoaster season and the fantastic job that Mikel and the team were doing, expressing his optimism that we would get over the line for Champions League. He said it was brilliant to see young players thriving – mentioning Emile Smith Rowe, Bukayo Saka, Gabriel Martinelli, Ben White, Kieran Tierney and Martin Odegaard.

Josh expressed his gratitude for the fans, with the great support both home and away. He can feel and hear a whole new level of connection as we all pull in the same direction, which makes a real difference.

He spoke about the summer, with lots of work and planning already underway. He is looking forward to seeing how we make the squad even stronger next season.

Josh went on to share how exciting it is to see the women's game growing so fast, and that Arsenal will continue to be at the forefront, with our team pushing for the league title.

He spoke about investment in the new building for the women's team. He is also delighted to see more women's matches being played at the Emirates.

Football Update Vinai Venkatesham

Vinai began by agreeing with Josh's opening remarks.

He agreed it has been a rollercoaster of a season – one constant has been incredible support of our fans both home and away. Delighted to see the connection between fans, players and manager.

On the Men's side – given how much change has been made in the squad, and the age profile, we are ahead of where we expected to be at the start of the season at this moment which is encouraging.

But of course, we are behind where we want to be and that is competing for the biggest trophies in the game. We are confident we are on the right path, with a clear plan for the summer.

On the Women's side – we are delighted with how Jonas has settled in. We are in with a shout of a WSL title (at the time of writing). We continue to invest in the Women's teams –

the new building at Colney is an example. We continue to build the squad and support our staff as well as play more games at Emirates.

The Academy continues to be a really important part of who we are and our football model. We have seen Charlie Patino score his first goal, more players training with the first team and on the bench.

Another big objective this season was to continue to strengthen the relationship with ex-players – with more regular visitors to Colney, the 1971 double winning squad dinner next week and also at the Leeds game, and at the last match we saw Emile & Bukayo meeting Dennis Bergkamp and Thierry Henry.

Vinai shared how proud we are of our community work this season – brought alive by the “no more red” campaign, but also so much more. Also proud of how we have supported local businesses coming out of the pandemic with the “Arsenal Supporting Supporters” campaign, which continues.

Off the pitch – we are continuing our stadium investment plans. The areas that are underway and on track include the roof repairs, the ‘Cores’ project, new Big Screens, the light boxes around the stadium concourse, as well as starting to look at GA concourse perch seating. A lot of work has already gone into speeding up access to the stadium with turnstile upgrades.

We are in the midst of Club Level renewals, with demand very strong, an excellent rate of renewal.

Also, this season we have been filming the Amazon All Or Nothing documentary – this will be out in summer or autumn. It’s going to be a good look behind the scenes and we are sure all Arsenal fans will enjoy it. Let’s hope it has a great ending!

Vinai finished by sharing that we will be doing a piece of work over the summer to clarify the difference in purpose and between the Fans’ Forum and the Arsenal Advisory Board. It is natural that we have some crossover, but clarity is important.

2) Silver Members Rep – Election Update (MB)

KP shared there were no new members to welcome or retiring members to thank, and **MB** updated the group on the elections for Silver Member Rep which are underway.

Elections will be online this week, between 2 candidates. **Raymond Herlihy, REDAction** asked where the invitations to apply were shared, and **Mark Brindle** confirmed that it went out on the website, and social media. . There were 7 applications, but the criteria was that a candidate had to use their Silver Membership to be eligible, which discounted several applicants.

3) Minutes & matters arising

Minutes agreed for the previous meeting, no matters arising.

4) Updates from AFC

Commercial Update Juliet Slot

Juliet Slot (JS) began by sharing an initiative that has been prompted by Mikel, who feels a real connection with the fans. He has asked the AFC Team to work with fan groups on how we develop that matchday connection between the fans and the players, encouraging vocal support and building excitement towards kick off each time. We will be working closely with fan groups and supporters over the coming seasons, and the support of the Fans' Forum and your networks is important.

Another project we are working on internally is bringing together our Sustainability Strategy. We have already put in a lot of work into reducing our waste to landfill, use of renewable energy, and other initiatives, but the next step is to bring together the strategy into a single framework to encompass everything we do environmentally and socially. It is essential that we have fan groups involved in this and at the heart of what we do. JS will be seeking input from the forum members as this project progresses. We have some great partners that have sustainability at the heart of what they do and expertise that we can pull on.

JS moved on to the fantastic fan event that was held recently at the Tollington. This was part of the project to update the 'Cores' around the outside of the stadium. There is a plan to repurpose the current cores around the stadium environment to preserve the important and famous images.

We are working with a Turner Prize winning artist called Jeremy Deller along with the fan groups to bring alive and demonstrate the diversity and breadth of the Arsenal Community in 8 different executions.

Having held the fan event and a staff workshop, there will be a further workshop around the 23rd May, and a final around the 6th June. We will then have a launch event to showcase the artwork prior to installation.

JS then spoke about the changes to our previously overly complex membership structure, for which there were around 76 different price points and complicated ways to join. To simplify the ways fans engage with us and to ensure memberships are more accessible we have streamlined the offering to single price points for adults, additional ways to pay, and inclusive membership for disabled fans. We have also improved ticket access for young fans. **JS** then updated in response to a question from about events happening in the summer by sharing details of Ball Squad Trials, Junior Gunners Playing on the Pitch, and the Gunners Play Day all in May, as well as the events for adults via My Arsenal Rewards – the Training Ground Tour available by ballot, and the Members Play on Pitch also both in May.

Staying with My Arsenal Rewards, **JS** responded to another Fan Rep question from LP around why points expire at the end of the season, with the perception that this was shared

only recently. **JS** explained that this was communicated from the beginning, and the expiry date is displayed every time you log into your account. A key driver of the scheme is about attendance and seat utilisation and encouraging fans to regularly and actively engage throughout the season. The best way to use points is to use them regularly and not to save them up. Experiential opportunities such as the Training Ground Tour or the box experience can only be made available to a limited number of our 150k members, although the lifting of restrictions will open up additional opportunities.

Liam Patel, 16-21 Rep shared a date error on the My Arsenal Reward hub for Club Level Members

JS spoke briefly on the under utilisation of some Club Level seats and the importance of using Ticket Transfer and Ticket Exchange, filling the stadium giving opportunities to fans that want to attend in place of seasonal supporters that may be unable to.

Darren Epstein, Gold Members asked if there was any progress on the option to donate tickets, in addition to transfer and exchange.

Amy Trynka advised that we are working through the implications of tax and gift aid that we must consider, as well as working with Ticketmaster on developing the facility to donate do to the additional complexities. This is unlikely to be available from the beginning of the season, but we do expect it to be in the near future.

JS then moved on to a plea for support from fan groups and supporter Clubs regarding the new Home shirt launching soon and the connection with Arsenal Community that she hopes fans will find compelling. Although we can't share details yet **JS** would love for fans to support what we are trying to achieve and in doing so demonstrate their support of the Club and Community in this new and unique way.

Darren Epstein suggested that perhaps the Club could offer a shirt purchase at the time of season ticket renewal, thus giving fans the option to buy using their discount in one click, in one place. **JS** thanked **DE** for the great idea and will take that away to explore.

In response to a fan question from **Draco Wang, Ethnic Minorities** on summer plans, **JS** talked about the US preseason tour already announced – honouring our commitment that was cancelled due to COVID.

We will be launching our away kit in the US, and there will be some player appearances and some football development and coaching in America.

Mark Gonnella added that there are other games in preseason such as one in Germany, and the Emirates Cup – it's a busy pre-season this year.

Akhil Vyas, AST asked if the date had been announced for the Emirates Cup yet, and although not yet confirmed, it will be around the last week of July.

In response to several pre submitted questions from fan reps, Juliet spoke on Socios:

Akhil Vyas, AST had submitted the question: What progress had been made with a self-regulatory code for partnering with crypto currency companies, and **JS** explained that Socios has put in place their own regulation as no regulation currently exists, and that Arsenal are

comfortable with what they have in place including around age verification, transparency, how they communicate what they offer to their customers, and education. Also ensuring they protect users and that there are sufficient safeguards in place to protect assets held within the platform, and that they have a robust complaints procedure.

Darren Epstein, Gold Members had submitted 'As recently in mid Feb the price was £1.14 with the launch price being sold at £2, and is still under water as of the weekend, it would seem odd then that the club allowed another 500,000 coins to be sold without any kind of announcement, thereby diluting holders of the existing tokens. Why was there no announcement for the sales of these tokens in March and will that change with the sale of future tokens which there seems to be close to 35m available to sell. Without any statement on availability, it could be viewed as market manipulation' and also 'You stated at the previous forum, that these were not financial instruments, which has been Socios comment when asked, and the token is issued for engagement purposes. What percentage of the free token that were given to members have been redeemed to date?

JS shared that the 500,000 extra fan tokens had been released onto the platform for purchase should anyone wish to do so and take part in fan polls and engagement. Of the free tokens issued to members we have had 9,224 redemptions.

Darren Epstein in person asked why, if the tokens were not a financial instrument, has Socios sold 500,000 Arsenal tokens in March. **JS** responded that they have not been sold they have been released onto the platform should anyone wish to purchase them.

Darren believes it is unfair to put 500k tokens on the platform without notification, and that this dilutes the value of the tokens that fans have purchased. He believes fans should be notified if and when they release tokens onto the platform and referenced an article in The Athletic.

KP assured DE that his comments would be noted.

Richard Stubbs, Over 60s added his passionate objection to the relationship with Socios.

Venue Updates AT, TMc

Tom McCann introduced Amy **Trynka** who took the group through the following updates:

New Season Ticket Initiatives -

We will be announcing ahead of renewals this year that for the 2023/24 season we will not be inviting supporters to renew their season ticket if they have not utilised their seat for more than 10 games throughout the 2022/23 season. Utilise in this context means either use their seat in person, or make use of one of our ticketing services – Ticket Transfer, posting their seat on Ticket Exchange, or eventually Ticket Donation.

There will be clear communication around this setting out the purpose, and the options available to fans. This only impacts a small number of fans for this season, but we hope to see this number reduced further during 2022/23 with seats made available to fans that want to attend when season ticket holders can't.

Richard Stubbs, Over 60s asked why we chose the number 10, and Amy explained that this was a good starting point and in line with other Clubs with similar attendance challenges, and that this would be reviewed extensively.

Akhil Vyas, AST explained that this has been raised repeatedly by fan groups over several years, and they have engaged with groups from other Clubs that use this and it has been really positive.

It was made clear that as long as a fan posts their seat on Ticket Exchange that counts as using the seat for that match, regardless of whether Arsenal are able to then sell it. This initiative was received positively by the Fan Forum group.

Anne Hyde, ADSA raised the issue of disabled fans would be able to use the ticketing services, which will be progressed in a separate meeting. ?? asked what the data showed in terms of Club Level season ticket holders, and **AT** shared that while the under utilisation of seats was similar to GA the use of ticketing services was less.

Auto Renewals

AT shared that each year the vast majority of our Gold Members renew each season, with a small number choosing not to. The process of asking almost all of our fans to take action to renew no longer makes sense, and that we are moving to an auto renewal system so that the fans that need to take action are those that do not wish to renew. The period of time available to make their choices and take action will be the same, and the process of opting out will be easy, quick, and fans can do so themselves online. There will be clear and frequent communications ensuring all fans are aware of an upcoming automatic renewal, the payment dates, and how to opt out.

Season Ticket Waiting List

AT's final update was on the GA Season Ticket Waiting List (GAWL). We recently went out to all fans on the list to find out if they wished to remain so. The deadline to remain is the 6th June, and we have had 50% respond positively. VV reiterated how important it is that we have up to date data and people on the list have an intention to buy, so that the process of offering season tickets is not just efficient but also gives fans more time to make decisions, as well as giving us a more accurate estimate of how long the wait is.

AT spoke about the new process for new fans to join the list, which is moving to a one off payment only instead of the previous options of purchasing Plus memberships for years in a row or paying £15. The new cost for joining the list was reduced following fan feedback, although the waiting list payment is taken off the cost of a season ticket when offered and therefore does not generate revenue. **AT** shared the cost of £50 for adults and £25 for JGs and the group agreed this was reasonable.

TMc shared details of a couple of surveys, with the request for fan reps to encourage fans to complete these in order for us to gain real and useful feedback from our fans.

Firstly, we have launched a project to look at our food and beverage offering in GA areas, and we are sending out 3 surveys to different groups of attendees over 3 matches to get a broad set of responses – roughly a third of our fans each time

The other is the Safe Standing Survey going out this week. We really appreciate the working group that have collaborated with us on this. We want to understand our fans thoughts and feelings and the survey will be really instructive as to what we do next. We are fully committed to exploring this fully, and the survey is a key element of this so we ask that you encourage as many fans as possible to complete this. **MB** will share the survey with supporter groups to ensure they have the opportunity to input.

RH asked if there was any progress on Piebury Corner – TMc confirmed that the club is open to finding a solution but has been unable to do so yet, though we will keep talking to see if we can make it work in future. –

Tom then responded to the fan rep questions that were submitted in advance

Raymond Herlihy, REDAction - Anecdotal evidence suggests there is a younger crowd at home games this season. Do AFC track the average age of Season ticket holders? If so, is there some pre-pandemic info available to compare to the current season ST holders average age?

TMc - We do track it, and while the atmosphere would suggest a younger crowd of STH, that is not the case. However, more match by match purchasers are of younger age group which may be driving the atmosphere.

As we near the end of the season with most away game tickets sorted, what is the feedback on the decision to disband the away ticket scheme, and make more away ticket access a possibility for more supporters? Also from **Richard Smith, AISA Rep**: Ticketing - what's the latest? What's the news on the AWAY ticket allocation - has it worked? Any plans to tweak it next season?

TMc – this has been positive with up to a couple of hundred additional tickets made available to fans outside of the scheme. Anecdotally the atmosphere has been better in away ends this season – that could be the connection with the fans, or it could be the change in fans able to purchase.

Ticket exchange is now open up to 3 hours before kick off ; Is there much activity in the last 12 hours before KO or is it concentrated in the days before?

TMc – 14% of Ticket Exchange purchases are in the last 24 hours, and 10% in the last 3 or 4 hours, so there is a big update the closer we get. The recent demand has been off the charts, which is great for attendance and availability.

5) Questions

KP moved on to the pre submitted fan questions that have not as yet been responded to within the AFC update:

Raymond Herlihy, REDAction - *Has the live streaming of the Fans' Forum been discussed for future meetings? AST use this functionality and it works well.*

MG - We have looked at this but do not believe it is helpful in terms of having an open and frank discussion. The Forum is about ensuring we hear feedback from supporter groups and answer questions as fully as possible. The role of members is then to pass that information directly to their groups. In addition, full minutes are published on the Club website.

Richard Smith, AISA: *Post-match 'highlights' at the stadium - what's happened to them? Some weeks there are none, other week's 'highlights are just goals. Against Man Utd, the highlights made the result 2-0 to the Arsenal, the first half goals, the United penalty miss and Arsenal's near misses were all . . . missing. Previously, the video editors made up a selection of genuine match highlights. What's changed, and why? (No jokes, please, about there being no highlights to some matches.)*

MG – Highlights are very dependent on the live pictures provided by the broadcaster and the third party responsible for managing the content. We can't always guarantee the same production team each match day and this may cause some variance in the output. That said what you have raised re: the United game shouldn't happen. We will discuss this with the third party to look at improving our output.

KP – there were a couple of questions on Rwanda:

Richard Smith, AISA - *Fans are wanting to know when the club will make a statement about Rwanda. And from Peter Host, Supporters Club Overseas - What is your evaluation of the partnership with Visit Rwanda so far?*

MG - Our position has been clear. We have a long-standing partnership which is designed to support Rwanda's development. The partnership is with the Rwandan development board and funded by tourism receipts, aiming to grown one of Rwanda's main industries and reduce its reliance on foreign aid.

It's been highly successful in promoting Rwanda as a tourist destination and we will continue to work on this aspect of Rwanda's plan for growth.

Richard Smith, AISA - *is the club planning to discuss/make its position known on the UEFA Coefficient scheme?*

VV - The changes to UEFA competitions post 2024 have been discussed with the AAB and are topics discussed in PL and ECA forums. The feedback we received from fans has been the most objectionable bit of the reforms from their perspective is the concept of "leapfrogging" where a team – for example – finishing 6th could get into the UCL ahead of a team finishing 5th. This has been front of mind in discussions we have been in, and UEFA confirmed at the last ECA General Assembly they would amend the plans to remove "leapfrogging"

Peter Host, Supporters Club Overseas - *There is a song emerging by Louis Dunford that could be something like an Arsenal anthem. Would you be ready to invite him for a halftime talk at the Emirates, or something like that to help the song get played at a matchday?*

MG - We are aware of this and are exploring what may be possible. This is one for the supporters – there definitely seems to be an appetite for this song. What do you folks think?

There was general agreement that this song was received positively, and that it would be great to put it out there and let the fans grow this organically if it feels right.

Richard Smith, AISA - *What's the club's standpoint on a government regulator and its role, in relation to what's already in place as the Arsenal Advisory Board and Fans' Forum?*

VV - Tracey Crouch's review was published in November this year & the government made an announcement last month to support, in principle, the 10 recommendations of the review. Over the coming months there is much detail to be clarified and developed. In relation to the AAB and FF - one of the recommendations is for consultation with fans on key decisions which is the purpose of these 2 forums.

Akhil Vyas, AST - *Arsenal fans have been inconvenienced with many changes off kick off times of matches this season, especially for away games. Before the new broadcast contract is tendered will Arsenal commit to considering some form of arrangement for (a) guaranteeing notice of changes with at least a substantial notice period and (b) introduction of a quota so no team plays more than twice at home and twice away on a Monday or Friday night? For additional context AV shared that AST were meeting on this with the Premier League the following day, and they are seeking support with their standpoint.*

VV: Kick off times are set by the UK Broadcasters, and the UK TV deals have been “rolled over” for the next 3 seasons.

Of course, the 20 PL Clubs that set the parameters of sale and before the next round of sales I am sure there will be a discussion around impact on fans and also player rest periods/welfare.

He explained it is not easy to balance all interests as the calendar is very congested & it is difficult to fit all the games in – and the more restrictions that there are the harder that it can be. He noted this season has been particularly challenging due to Covid postponements

Follow up question – do you foresee any scheduling issues as a result of the World Cup? VV believes that it shouldn't have a huge impact unless we have a resurgence of COVID, in which case there will be very little room for postponements and movement of fixtures.

Draco Wang, Ethnic Minorities - *Follow-up to the racist attack on the Sikh Gooner in the Emirates*

JB: We have been in regular contact with the supporter and Police, and we have issued appeals for witnesses. It is still an open investigation.

Draco *Followed up with questions on how we may prevent future attacks, although very rare at Emirates Stadium.*

JB reiterated the importance of reporting, by speaking to a steward or via the text reporting number.

Darren Epstein, Gold Members - *Will the club be monitoring the sale of Chelsea and asking the Premier League for all details of the sale, bearing in mind the club has £1.5b loan outstanding to its owners holding company, and this money will need to be accounted for on any sale and not just forgiven. This could contravene Premier League financing rules and or have tax repressions. Given our clubs stated policy over the years of working with finance self-created it would seem that the loan owed to owners cannot just be forgiven with oversight and would therefore be of concern to all clubs.*

VV - We have no reason to believe the sale will not be done in accordance with the rules. The details of the sale will not be shared with PL clubs as will be confidential to Chelsea and their required disclosures to the PL.

Dave Harold, Supporter Clubs (Domestic)- *Can SCs purchase Away tickets on the SC extranet now that the Away Scheme is coming into its last year and will that mean more percentage of Away tickets can be allocated to the SC's. The incentive being to get more non season ticket Gooners to join SCs*

TMc - At this stage it's too early to make any commitments on away ticket allocations for the 2023/24 season. We're pleased that the change we made to the Away Ticket Scheme has resulted in more tickets being made available to our Season Ticket holders and we will continue to keep this under review.

Dave Harold, Supporter Clubs (Domestic) - *Can Home Coaches park to the front of the stadium. So we can get of and on and be safe rather than walk through gangs, stop the free for all after the game.*

JB - coach parking is set by our planning permission and not in our remit to change. Queensland Road is main parking area followed by Hornsey Street, Sobell Centre, Drayton Park and Finsbury Park for large numbers. Dropping off in front of stadium would block roads.

Richard Smith, AISA - *Arsenal.com - is it due for a redesign? While its coverage of the Men's first team is comprehensive, as are the pop up ads . . . information on matches for Women and Academy teams require commitment and mind reading abilities. As an instance, how were Members to know the final date for applying for U23s vs. Leeds U23s tickets without knowing there was such a date? (One of many instances through the season.) Is there a working party looking at improving the site and is it taking input from fans who use it?*

JS – Yes! We are pulling together a strategy on how we upgrade our content and experience across the website and the App. This will be an extensive and long-term project, with fans heavily involved.

MG - We have some shorter term plans to evolve the website to meet several Club objectives, including:

- Improving and simplifying the fan journey; sign up and registration
- New integrated video portal with a Netflix style interface and personalisation (equal presence for Men, Women, and Academy)
- New site wide search feature to be deployed across all channels
- Increasing engagement outside match days with games, polls, quizzes, and league tables
- Site performance (speed)

- We also have several additional features we are investigating on the Club app, which include locational services and in seat ordering. We are adding women's and academy fixtures, cup and league tables
- Looking to cover more live matches where rights permit, including Women and Academy

Questions we were unable to answer within the forum:

Dave Harrold - *Probably connected to No. 3 but are there any plans to refresh the external concourse with more food outlets, entertainment? It's very dull now.*

TMc - We are looking at this as part of how we improve the overall match experience for our fans. Particularly on food and drink, we've in the middle of a fan survey to all of our Season Ticket holders and purchasers of the last three games to understand what our fans want and how we can improve the offering. We're also exploring improvements to the concourse itself and will keep this group updated

Peter Høst, Supporters Clubs Overseas - *We've now seen 4 Arsenal players in the Premier League Hall of Fame, 2 of which have their statues in front of the Emirates. What is your view on raising more statues of legends such as maybe Ian Wright or Patrick Vieira or Arsene Wenger?*

MG - This is very much on our radar. Now we are out of the pandemic we can give it further thought. Obviously, a lot of work being done around the stadium this summer.

6) AOB