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**MINUTES**

**Arsenal Football Club Supporters’ Forum**

**6pm – 8.00pm October 10th 2019**

**Highbury Suite**

**Emirates Stadium**

**Supporters’ Forum membership 2019/2020**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **REPRESENTING** | **FIRST NAME** | **SURNAME** | **ATTENDING** |
| 16-21 Year Old Representative | Zak | Wagman | Yes |
| Arsenal Supporters Club – Domestic | Jan | Szbala | Yes |
| Arsenal Supporters Club – Overseas | Peter | Host | Yes |
| AISA Representative | Drew | Gray | Yes |
| Disabled Supporters | Anne | Hyde | No |
| Club Level | Fred | Dowd | Yes |
| Family Enclosure | David | Hurrell | Yes |
| Gold Members | Robert | Kramer | No |
| Red Members | Sarah | Coppock | No |
| Over 60 Year Olds | John | Thater | Yes |
| LGBT Supporter Representative | Angus | Moorat | Yes |
| RedAction Member | Raymond | Herlihy | Yes |
| Shareholders | Simon | Stern | Yes |
| Away Scheme Members | Michael | Anjos | Yes |
| AST Member | Akhil | Vyas | Yes |
| Women's Representative | Suzanne | Goodband | No |

**Arsenal representatives**

Arsenal FC (Chair) Mark Gonnella

Arsenal FC Raúl Sanllehi

Arsenal FC Vinai Venkatesham

Arsenal FC Ivan Worsell

Arsenal FC Mark Brindle

Arsenal FC Tom McCann

**Apologies:**

Anne Hyde – Disabled Supporter

Robert Kramer – Gold Member

Sarah Coppock – Red Member

Steve Cooper – AST Member (Akhil Vyas attending)

Suzanne Goodband – Women’s Representative

Alun Francis (Arsenal)

John Beattie (Arsenal)

**Agenda**

1. **Welcome from Mark Gonnella (Chair)**

**Mark Gonnella** welcomed members to the first forum of the season and in particular the new members. He reminded the forum that the purpose of the group is to discuss non-football matters although that will always form part of the agenda. He also encouraged members to distribute details of these meetings to their groups and explained that Arsenal will look to better communicate the key points discussed in supporters’ forums to the wider fanbase through Club media channels.

1. **Venue and fan experience director Tom McCann** gave the forum a tour of some of the new facilities on Club Level. He explained this was part of a major programme of work in the summer which had seen the club complete the addition of 800 seats in club level. Upgrades have been done to some of the bar areas with the aim of responding to the changing needs of club level members.
2. **Head of Football Raul Sanllehi** talked members through the summer transfer window which had ended successfully and was as a result of strong team work across the Club. He also praised the support received from the owners, Stan and Josh Kroenke. He reminded members about how important the development of young players is as part of our strategy and pointed to the fact that Joe Willock, Bukayo Saka, Ainsley Maitland Niles, Emile Smith Rowe and Reiss Nelson are all making first team contributions. In addition, the return of Rob Holding, Kieran Tierney and Hector Bellerin will make us stronger moving forward. He agreed that we now have a stronger squad than last season and said the ambition of everyone is that we reach the UEFA Champions’ League this season. Work is already underway on the transfer window next summer but he described the January window as non-strategic.

**QUESTIONS:**

**Safe standing**

**Raymond Herlihy – RedAction Member**

* Are the club able to share the details / results of the feasibility study that Vinai referred to at the Supporters Q&A regarding safe standing at Emirates Stadium?

**Steve Cooper – AST**

* At a Fans Forum last season, and at the end of season, we were told the welcome news that a study was being carried out around the options for Safe Standing/Stand up for choice at the Emirates and that supporters would get a chance to input to this work. Please can we have more details on when this will be brought forward and reassurance that it will cover the various different options for safe standing that the Sports Ground Safety Authority is looking at including Rail seating as installed at Celtic; Standing in existing seated areas, the recent installations at Wolves and Spurs, and the work being reviewed by Manchester United?

**Managing Director Vinai Venkatesham** explained theGovernment is considering changing legislation to permit safe standing but there is no clarity as to when this will conclude (seems like for season 2021/22 at earliest if there were to be a change). We are supportive, in principle, of implementing safe standing at Emirates Stadium. However, it is a very complicated issue and the pros and cons need to be evaluated fully and weighed up in conjunction with fans.

He said the stadium was not designed for safe standing and the key issue is capacity; safe standing cannot increase capacity (as 1 seat = 1 standing space). He said we have conducted an internal study which has established safe standing is only possible in the lower tier as the rake (steepness) of the upper tier is likely too high for standing to be permitted.

Unfortunately the shallow rake of the lower tier means there may be sightline issues for fans that remain seated behind or adjacent to standing fans (creating seat loss). The alternative of making the lower tier steeper would mean we would lose multiple rows at the back of the lower tier due to the overhang of Club Level restricting views. There would also likely be seat loss due to installation of segregation between seating and safe standing areas. Given we sell out for matches we would obviously need to carefully consider the impact of less fans being able to watch games at the Emirates vs. the benefits of safe standing.

He said other potential issues include: relocating fans who do not want to stand where their seats once were (relocation options would likely be limited), potentially being required to more rigorously enforce sitting in other areas and cost of stadium redevelopment work

Whilst the capacity issue has been looked into in detail by our internal study, he explained that we have now commissioned a study by external stadium experts from Holland to review what can be done from a third party perspective. We expect this to be completed by end of November and will bring the results back into the Fan Forum for discussion.

**Touting – Akhil Vyas AST**

* The AST has undertaken mystery shopping exercises of away tickets being touted and have engaged in dialogue with the Club as this is an issue members says causes great concern. We welcome the constructive dialogue to address this. Please can we have an update on touting initiatives planned for this season, particularly any "away ticket mystery shopping” and the warning messages proposed for the programme, online, on the LED pitch side boards and also in writing when away tickets are dispatched to purchasers. We would also like to discuss why Chelsea appear to be able to take more targeted action on touting outside their stadium than we are told is possible at Arsenal. Finally, on the issue of away tickets, can we ask what thought has gone into having some ID checks on matchdays, as other Premier League clubs increasingly do, to discourage the selling-on of tickets?

**Touting Update – Ivan Worsell**

Ivan explained what the Club already does in terms of the services and activities undertaken to combat ticket touting. This includes:

* Ticket Exchange and Ticket transfer; last season across all games 144,000 tickets were either sold or transferred. We are currently tracking at similar numbers.
* Use of technology to stop bot attacks
* The use of proactive data analytics and the application of that data to identify purchasing irregularities for further investigation.
* Awareness initiatives such as online advice, increased Club communications, proactive messaging to fans to buy from official Club sources only. We have also increased our communications and education to fans pre-ticket purchase to ensure fans are only buying from official club channels.

Ivan confirmed the Club have a dedicated resource and match day team to carry out:

* Spot checks on entering stadium
* Targeted checks in stadium
* Signage to discourage touts and purchasers
* Designated Club and police touting operations

He told the forum the Club is now actively purchasing away tickets on a match by match basis from unofficial sites and reiterated that we will take a hard line against any member found selling their ticket on. 6,500 members have been banned since 17/18 season.

He said more steps are being taken to combat what is an issue across most major clubs.

* PL Clubs are working closer together on best practices
* We are exploring new software to assist with the collation of case data
* Club in communication with various authorities concerning matchday touting operations.

**Ticket exchange**

**AST**

* There remains an on-going issue with empty seats at the Emirates. As is often raised this can be addressed through an effective Ticket Exchange. The Exchange used by Arsenal is far from this and over the years many improvements have been promised. Could we have an update on what enhancements are being introduced and when this will be?
* Despite the Ticket Exchange many people just leave their seats empty and need greater incentive to place them in the Exchange. The obvious way to change behaviour is to award home credits. The principle of such a mechanism is accepted and implemented by Arsenal for away tickets and is used to allocate both away tickets and cup final sales. So as the principle is accepted we do not understand why it is not used for home games. Please can we urge the adoption of this policy and have a detailed update on this option?

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative**

* Last year, Sunderland ran a scheme where unwanted tickets could be bought and donated to a local charity or season ticket members not attending could donate their tickets to local charities over the Christmas period. This was very popular and very effective. Is there any chance Arsenal could look into this scheme, perhaps over the holiday period, to benefit local causes? (See link: [https://www.shropshirestar.com/sport/viral-sports-news/2018/12/01/sunderland-fans-are-buying-tickets-then-donating-them-back-to-the-clubs-charity/](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/moRyCYEpot3rqK2tjXtVe?domain=shropshirestar.com)).

**Ivan Worsell**

Ivan explained Ticket Exchange is a major part of our approach to combatting ticket touting. Over the last 18-months our efforts have been focussed on working with our ticketing provider on a project to re-platform and move the Club to a hosted ticketing system which brings with it many benefits.

This has been a sizeable project for the Club and ticketing provider with a significant number of people involved in the project delivery and implementation.

The main focus has been to provide a stable and robust solution in a hosted environment improving all the back office and integration capability and allow for future development.

It was explained that a significant amount of this work undertaken will be unnoticed by supporters however it is key work that needed to be carried out.

In addition, he said there are several areas which will be visible to supporters when they are rolled out. The most significant enhancement will be the TX Plus, which will allow us to extend the service to run until three hours prior to kick-off compared to stopping the service 5pm on a Friday for a 3pm kick off on a Saturday. This service will go live in November, with the first game v Brighton & Hove Albion on Wed 4th /Thursday 5th Dec.

**Mobile NFC Stadium Access**

The club has been working with Apple and its stadium access control provider on a mobile entry solution for its season ticket holders.

The solution will allow contactless tickets to be added to the Apple Wallet on iPhones and Apple Watches, thereby virtualising season tickets to their device. This offers supporters cutting edge technology to enter Emirates Stadium.

Currently piloting in Club Level, we are hoping to go live in December, subject to various approvals then a full roll out by the end of the season. Work is also underway for all our turnstiles to be upgraded to allow for a future android version.

Ivan said the Club is looking into providing a ticket donation service and is working with our ticket provider on this future development. We currently provide thousands of tickets to local schools and good causes through our community department.

Vinai pointed out that in terms of ensuring maximum attendances at the Emirates, Ticket Exchange is important but we are kicking off an internal project as this is a challenge for the club and the game as a whole. This will include looking into home credits

**Baku final - AST**

* We attach with this question a copy of a letter we recently sent to UEFA regarding suggested improvements for how UEFA stage their finals following the awful experiences with Baku. Please can this letter be circulated to other Fans Forum members. We would like Arsenal to publicly support the proposals in the letter and add to the pressure on UEFA for change.

Vinai and Raúl reminded people how we expressed our concerns at the time, with regards to the situation for our fans and the fact we (club and player) felt we couldn’t select Henrikh Mkhitaryan for the final.

We are continuing dialogue with UEFA on these matters.

**AST**

* As next season is the 50th anniversary of 70/71 double winning season what plans does the Club have to commemorate this achievement? Would the Club host/ support a Supporters Dinner with the proceeds going towards those squad members most in need?

Mark Brindle said this is something we are exploring. As a club, we have provided support to several the squad from this period but we also recognise this may be the last time we can get everyone together to celebrate the 71 double. He said this is something we will work on with fan groups.

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative**

* Is there any possibility of a student discount for or extending the concessions to include students and/or young people for an Arsenal Women's Membership? The price of full membership stopped me, as a student with limited funds and away from London for half the year, from purchasing, but I would have done so if it were at concession price. Is there a chance to include us as concessions for this?

Ivan Worsell said we have put forward this suggestion to the women’s marketing team and will update the forum in due course.

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative**

* Manchester City just listed their European games on UniDays, a student discount website. Is there any possibility that Arsenal can list our Europa League games, which in the group stages are more available, on a similar forum? (See link: [https://www.myunidays.com/GB/en-GB/partners/mancity/view/online](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/ZWzgCXDxmCnwRlou7Wvnz?domain=myunidays.com))

Ivan Worsell said this is a good idea and explained that to create awareness, we do push out communications to the local community including the local university for specific fixtures, mainly Carabao Cup. We haven’t so far for Europa League due to some of the sale restrictions we must put in place to maintain segregation. Her added that our marketing team are already in conversations with NUS around different opportunities and will include this topic in their discussions. (i.e. existing offers Carabao Cup or for those games with no restrictions)

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative**

* Last year, Chelsea sent a delegation to the annual March of the Living, a Holocaust memorial event. I was fortunate to attend myself and it had a profound impact. Could Arsenal look into following suit? (See link: [https://motl.org/chelsea-football-club-honoured-to-participate-in-march-of-the-living/](https://protect-eu.mimecast.com/s/QekMCZ6OqCMJL19iMsWV6?domain=motl.org))

Mark Gonnella explained that as part of our Arsenal For Everyone initiative, we have done a great deal in this area over the years but it is local community focussed. This includes taking part in Islington’s high profile Holocaust Memorial Day event. We also deliver a programme of inter-faith faith events where we bring together pupils from different faiths.

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative**

* Can Arsenal use their platform to positively influence fans to lead healthier lifestyles? I know I would read a monthly fitness plan or blog from the fitness coach or nutritionist - is this a feature that could be added to a matchday programme or the website?

Mark Gonnella welcome this idea and said some work had been done with people like our commercial partner Vitality in this area. However, he explained it comes down to priorities. We have a lot to promote and at the moment this is not on our schedule but will always be under consideration.

**Zak Wagman – 16-21 Year Old Representative**

* Arsenal has a wide variety of types of staff. In an increasingly competitive and crowded jobspace, it is hard for young people to gain experience and understanding. Can the Club consider running an annual day where applicants can shadow individual club staff, such as physiotherapists, web designers, photographers or marketing staff, in order to benefit local young people and boost their employability?

Mark Gonnella said that a major focus of our Arsenal in the Community is to create employment opportunities for local people. We have placed more than 500 people into sustainable employment since 2012. This continues to be an area of focus for us although providing direct work experience programmes in the club is not part of our plan.

**Drew Gray – AISA**

* AISA would like to raise and discuss the issue of whether there are FA guidelines on how supporters in the stadium are informed about referrals to VAR as there seems to be considerable confusion about this at the moment?

Mark Gonnella said there are Premier League guidelines. Stockley Park is in ongoing contact with the officials and there are many checks as the game is in flow. If the match is going to be delayed for a full review they will liaise with our control room who will post the appropriate VAR message on our stadium screens.

**AOB**

Ivan Worsell explained that the Club and the authorities were in discussion regarding measures that need to be put in place for the Frankfurt game due to the number of visiting fans expected to travel. This is likely to include various restrictions to the services we provide. Ivan said this was a direct result of the challenges experienced when we played Cologne two years ago. Fans with tickets will be reminded of the importance of not selling their ticket on.

**Date of next meeting - February (tbc)**

**Ends.**