



Arsenal Football Club Supporters' Forum

10.30am – 12.30 December 10th 2016

**Board Room
Highbury House**

Supporters' Forum membership 2016/2017

16-21 Year Old Representative	Mr	Connor	Runswick
Arsenal Supporters Club – Domestic	Mr	Martin	O'Donnell
Arsenal Supporters Club – Overseas	Mr	Lars	Lundstedt
AISA Representative	Mr	Daniel	McCloskey
Disabled Supporter	Ms	Anne	Hyde
Club Level	Mr	Steven	Downey
Family Enclosure	Mr	Ryan	Maskery
Gold Member	Mr	Mike	Maloney
Red Member	Mr	Connor	Kielty
Over 60 Year-Old	Mr	David	Sharp
Ethnic Minority Representative	Mr	Vik	Dattani
Gay Supporter Representative	Mr	Dave	Raval
RedAction Member	Mr	Sam	Blackman
Shareholder	Mr	Michael	Francis
Away Scheme Member	Mr	Soran	Hourami
AST Member	Mr	Steve	Cooper

Arsenal representatives

Arsenal FC (Chair) Mark Gonnella
Arsenal FC Ivan Gazidis
Arsenal FC Mark Brindle
Arsenal FC Alun Francis
Arsenal FC Charles Allen

Apologies

Dave Raval – replaced by Ann Gibson
Steve Cooper – replaced by Lesley Williams
Sam Blackman – replaced by John Williamson

1. Welcome and agree minutes of previous meeting (Mark Gonnella)

Matters arising:

Can captions be used on pre-recorded material on stadium screens and the website? (David Sharp)

Mark Brindle (MB) explained, we have asked Arsenal Media Group to look into the feasibility of this. On the website the turnover of articles does cause issues with getting captions on all material but they are providing them on some content now and will continue to look to improve this service.

Able supporters are able to create groups together so that their tickets are grouped together. Disabled Supporters do not have this option at present so that they can sit next/near to their friends. Could the Club look at ways that a Disabled Supporter could either sit with a fellow Disabled Supporter and/or an able supporter? (Anne Hyde)

MB said disabled supporters are generally grouped together on the platforms and just in front of the platforms for the hard of hearing etc. If they want to sit with family members it is always worth asking the disability team and they will try and help. It is very difficult to provide this service at most games due to the problems with moving season ticket holders etc. However for some of the 'smaller games' there are sometimes opportunities to group people together.

Enhanced security is inevitable to ensure the safety of everyone at matches. However, some Disabled Supporters may carry certain toileting aids that they would not necessarily wish anyone to know about and certainly would not want to show to the public. Is it possible for better training of stewards at disabled gates and perhaps a modesty screen or room to conduct a bag search? (Anne Hyde)

MB said all Stewards have been briefed to handle such situations discreetly and with sensitivity and the club have not been advised of any problems so far with this system.

2. Ivan Gazidis overview

IG started by pointing to the annual update provided at the club's AGM. It shows how we are growing our revenues for reinvestment in the team and the club. Primary growth is coming from the growth in broadcast and commercial income. Ticket revenues are broadly flat as a result of not increasing general admission season ticket prices in seven of the eleven past seasons. He said the improved revenues have allowed us to invest both in the team and facilities with major works going on at Colney and Hale End. His view is the club is in great shape both in terms of facilities but also people where we have recruited top class specialists across every aspect of our football operations. In addition, he said, people should be proud of the work the club continues to do in the community, both here in London and further afield through our partnership with Save the Children. He said the investments include our women's team who have had big improvements in their own facilities, coupled with further investment in their playing squad. Looking at the first team squad, he said there had been a good progression over time. This was

due to strong acquisition and retention of players but also success in bringing players through our own system. A recent external report showed we were the top ranked English club for producing players. He said our summer signings had settled well and pointed to our goal-scoring record being the best since the 1930s. The team is focussed and determined and the message from our owner Stan Kroenke is one that he wants to win and to continue to invest in keeping our best players. He said it is going to be a tight race for the title but everyone is feeling focussed and positive and taking each game as it comes.

Robyn Boparai asked whether we saw any threat to our game from China in terms of losing players. Ivan said football had been made a priority sport by the Chinese President and they are making significant investments at home and abroad. However, he felt players at the top of their game would not particularly want to play in China at the current time but in the longer term it will become an interesting destination. Importantly, he said, the growth of interest in football and the Premier League in particular was a good opportunity for the future and China is a country we are putting considerable focus on from a marketing and commercial perspective.

3. Presentation by Des Ryan Head of Academy Strength and Conditioning

Des took the forum through a fascinating insight around the work done by his team to develop young players' fitness in readiness for the rigours of professional football. He pointed to the fundamental changes in the game over time which sees players working at higher levels of intensity over longer periods than ever. He also explained how work over recent years had resulted in a significant drop in injuries and lost training days.

4. Questions

Connor Kielty – Red Member Rep

Ticketing Policy

According to the Arsenal website, babies and toddlers need to buy a ticket to attend a game at the Emirates, making this difficult & expensive for parents who wish to take them. The likes of Man City allow children under 5 to attend free with an adult.

Also given the fact that young toddlers' view would often be restricted due to people standing can the club consider changing this policy and make it more family orientated?

Mark Brindle

It is all down to having the physical space in the stadium, which is why we require everyone to have a ticket. Manchester City allows 0-5s to attend without a ticket. They don't occupy a seat and must sit on the parent's lap. Equally if a 4 or 5 year old does not have a seat then they sit on the parent's lap, which causes issues with those around them. Our present ruling is that the attending child should be able to sit unaided on a tip up seat. If they are not able to do this we advise that we do not feel it is a safe environment and would not recommend the parent bring the child. We ask the parents to accept responsibility for the child's safety.

In terms of other clubs our policy is consistent with most others - Spurs, Chelsea and West Ham. We do feel this this is the safest and most practical way of dealing with this issue.

David Sharp (DS) – Over 60s Representative

Senior discounts

What internal discussions have been held this year about introducing a range of discounts for Seniors that would help bring Arsenal into line with all the other Premier League clubs?

Charles Allen

We talk about this regularly and it is hugely complex as our all seating and membership discussions. Moving large groups of fans around a fully sold out stadium is challenging but it is on the agenda. No decision has been made other than the commitment the club has made to a price freeze for GA tickets until 2017/2018.

DS circulated a one-page document to members and asked for this to be considered further by the club.

Ticket touts

What representations has the club made with the authorities to curb the activities of the increasing number of touts working close by the stadium in broad view of police and stewards?

Answer – Mark Brindle

We try and get the Police to do something but as there are reduced numbers of Police around now it is not always possible. We have been in touch with Islington as to whether trading standards can do anything and waiting an answer. The stewards can only move on from our land but these people are quite aggressive and all we can do is move problem a few yards.

Steven Downey – Club Level Representative

Ticket Exchange

At the previous meeting, it was stated that for Ticket Exchange, '77,000 fans used the service and 25,000 seats were transferred'. This is an important facility for supporters and for the Club to avoid empty seats and to allow supporters who do not have season tickets to attend games.

Sellers are charged 10% of their ticket price to use the service while buyers pay nothing above the normal ticket price and booking charges. Does this not seem unfair that the cost of the scheme is borne by season ticket holders who, after all, have already paid once for their tickets?

Could the club not change this fee structure, or scrap it entirely, in the interests of fairness and the fact that the scheme is in the Club's interests too? And if this charge is to "fund" the operation of the service, could the Club clarify the actual cost? If the average ticket price is say £100 that represents £250,000 of fees paid last year for the service on 25,000 seats transferred.

Daniel McCloskey/ John Williamson – AISA

Can the club provide an update on actual and potential improvements to the ticket exchange and transfer arrangements in operation, including improvements to the cashback service, for which we have campaigned for many years. Other improvements that we believe would benefit the club and supporters would be (a) to enable the schemes to operate closer to the kick-off time, (b) to automatically allow platinum members to purchase club level tickets on the ticket

exchange and (c) to make it simple for sellers to donate monies received to The Arsenal Foundation.

Charles Allen

We have done a lot of work on Ticket Exchange and invested in it significantly. 250,000 members have the right to use the system and this has created a market between fans rather than something run by a third party outside the club which can typically lead to fans being exploited.

The charges in place fund the investments into the system and the resulting growth in usage. He suggested a more realistic income figure on an average £40 cost of a ticket is £60,000.

In recent seasons this has helped us develop the ticket transfer service and cashback facility. Work is ongoing to improve access via mobile devices and we are also looking at developing systems to allow supporters to transfer funds from sales to The Arsenal Foundation if that want to.

IG added that the scheme is the best in existence and has involved significant investment well above the amount raised through fees.

In terms of developing the system, CA said operating nearer to kick off is just not practical and is not what fans using the system want. You have more chance of selling your ticket the sooner it goes into the system.

The Cashback service was introduced at the end of last season and is proving successful with 12% ticket exchange transactions drawing down funds accrued. Other developments for Ticket Exchange include enhancements for mobile and tablet devices in the New Year and in the longer term the ability to donate money received to The Arsenal Foundation.

Steven Downey – Club Level Representative

Cup Prioritisation

I am sure this has been brought up many times, but this is my first season as part of the Forum so... While I can appreciate that those supporters who are willing and able to go to away games are rewarded with a high priority, it is difficult to see how this can be the only measure of priority, particularly in light of the difficulty in obtaining away tickets. Can tenure of season ticket not also be used in parallel? Is it really fair that someone who has attended a few away games has a higher priority for cup final tickets than someone who has held a season ticket for 10 or 20 years?

Mark Brindle

We have looked at this many times and discussed with fans. Ultimately there are not enough tickets to meet demand and our approach is the fairest we can find. Let's hope we have the problem again this season!

Steven Downey – Club Level Representative

Club Level Half-time

I appreciate that this is a “champagne” question but it was raised to me directly by a supporter during half-time of the Chelsea game. A free drink at half-time is included in the price of a ticket in Club level. In the interests of speed, the drinks are pre-poured and laid out in tables on the bars. For many games, the number of drinks is not sufficient for the number of supporters and not everyone gets the drink that their ticket entitles them to. They are still able to get this drink from the bar, but this is invariably too busy and they are left frustrated (the person who asked me to raise this was very frustrated!). Could this not be easily addressed by supplying a few more drinks when the area is fuller? I realise that part of the issue, and maybe a large part, is that some people take more than they are entitled to, but unless the Club wants to try to enforce a ‘one ticket, one drink’ policy it seems better to make extra available.

Answer – Mark Brindle

We do pre-pour drinks based on the estimated take-up for any given match, trying to find the balance between satisfying demand and not having drinks wasted and poured away.

There have been incidents where we have had more than 600 drinks poured down the drain after half-time, so we have tried to reduce the wastage – unfortunately, on a few occasions, this has resulted in there being fewer drinks available than necessary, in which case we increase for the following match.

This is something we continue to monitor and take in to consideration the point raised – if there is a particular area where this is of primary concern, I would like to know about it, so that we can fix it as this has not been raised with us until now.

Martin O’Donnell – Arsenal Supporters Club (Domestic) Supporters’ Forum - Extranet

At the last meeting it was suggested that we might be able to cover many of the Forum questions and replies through email, perhaps as an actual Group Forum Format with each of the Forum representatives having password protected access. A little like the supporters’ clubs forum on the extranet. This would then allow more time at the Forum meetings for Arsenal to give us more of the news on initiatives planned and achieved. I think this is a very good idea.

Would it be possible to put such a forum into place prior to the next Forum meeting?

Answer – Mark Gonnella

This is a good suggestion and something I will explore.

Martin O’Donnell – Arsenal Supporters Club (Domestic) Away tickets

When Supporters’ Clubs place their Away ticket requests with the Fulfilment Team by email we have noticed that the credits are not added to the membership numbers for quite some time after the sale is complete, perhaps a week or so.

For example, using the sales for quick successive away games such as West Ham, Basel, Everton and then Man City, it means that when the ticket requests for Man City are emailed in, the credits for two or three of the previous sales have not yet been recorded on the memberships.

This could potentially result in failure for some memberships to purchase tickets for high credit games.

It is an admin issue, however can this be corrected such, that members credits are recorded as each sale is completed, prior to the following sale.

Answer – Mark Brindle

This issue was dealt with at the time (some two weeks ago) with a member of the fulfilment team. The Away Ticketing Manager has ensured that all tickets are processed and credits assigned in good time to ensure that no one misses the opportunity to purchase an away ticket for up and coming away fixtures.

The most important point that we would like to make is that whilst managing the fulfilment teams work load, no-one has ever missed out on the opportunity to purchase away tickets because their application for a previous away fixture wasn't processed on time.

Martin O'Donnell – Arsenal Supporters Club (Domestic) Availability of Away tickets

This topic has been discussed previously in various formats but is still often raised by members as a favourite topic:

As the Away tickets for the most popular fixtures are normally Sold Out before those with Low or No credits can apply, would it be possible to review the ticketing procedures to increase the possibility of those long standing and loyal season ticket holders with Low or No Credits to attend a few more games 'of their choice' and to help spread the tickets to more members. Various suggestions have been put forward by membership as follows;

- Could a percentage of tickets (say 10-15%) be made available for ALL Away fixtures for members with Low or No credits?
- Alternatively limit each Season Ticket holder to a maximum of say 15 Away games each season?
- Or expand the Away Scheme membership to more members?

Answer - Mark Brindle

We have spoken about this at great length at previous forums; our sales are tracking fairly similarly to last season with games selling out to similar credits.

As discussed previously it is a complex issue and any change from the current would need to be fully supported,

We have 16 different segments asking for an allocation of away tickets

The reality is, there not enough tickets – as we have said before the current policy is consistent with the way other clubs allocate. As a standard it is generally felt that tickets should be allocated to those who attend the most away games.

Daniel McCloskey/ John Williamson – AISA

Away supporter’s category

The individual benefits that the club offers Arsenal supporters travelling to away matches (including the additional £4 discount on tickets and occasional subsidised travel membership) should be ‘wrapped up’ into a new membership category, which would help to show the appreciation the club have for supporters, including many who travel to every away game in the UK and often beyond.

Answer - Charles Allen

We have been investing in the additional away ticket discount and subsidised travel but don’t need new level of membership as there is away supporter’s category.

Martin O’Donnell – Arsenal Supporters Club (Domestic)

This question was raised at the last Supporters Club meeting on 15th October. Slightly reworded here.

‘Meeting the Players’ as they arrive by coach to Home games has been popular and it is good to see this extended to the Supporters Club Plus format for this season. However it is disappointing, especially for younger fans and those travelling from abroad, that very often there is almost no connection with the players as they enter the stadium. This can leave a somewhat bitter taste to the ‘experience’. Most fans do understand that it is part of the pre-match build up, but younger kids would be thrilled if even a couple of players could stop for a few seconds to pose for a photo or sign an autograph. A few smiles and a wave to acknowledge that these kids are there would be an improvement. Maybe if the Players handed out some pre-signed photos? Could this matter be taken to the Playing Staff please? We feel that this is a small but very important matter to raise.

Answer – Mark Brindle

We understand the point here and the players have been spoken to about removing headphones as they enter the stadium. However, let’s remember this the moment they start to really focus on the game ahead and we will not encourage selfies and autographs at this point in their preparations. The special visits and supporter club access as players arrive is a unique privilege open to very few supporters and should be regarded in that way.

Conor Runswick - 16-21 Year Old Representative

Junior supporters

The Club's Charter confirms the commitment to offering concessions for junior supporters. However, it does not address a growing generational gap across Football where young supporters are unable to either afford or access tickets. In the 1980s some 28% of supporters at games were between 16 and 20. Now less than 10% are aged under 22.

How can the Club directly improve the proportion of young supporters/season ticket holders beyond concession tickets for category B and C games and access to silver membership? While these are positives, they do not affect the current generation gap at Home and Away games.

Additionally, for Junior Gunners and the Cannon Club – having Silver Membership after they turn 19 limits their future access to Away tickets, as they often lack the number of Away Credits which older fans have been able to maintain. Will the Club look into ways of offering more of our Away allocation to these younger fans?

Daniel McCloskey/ John Williamson – AISA

Various surveys and other information reveal that the average age of Arsenal season-ticket holders is amongst the highest of any professional football club in England. We commend the work already carried out by the club, especially the Junior Gunners scheme and the Young Guns Enclosure and believe that new initiatives are needed.

In particular we suggest that the Club should allow all season-ticket holders to purchase additional tickets for sons/daughters/nieces/nephews etc as a listed benefit of their gold or platinum membership. The details for the scheme would need to be worked out but we suggest a maximum of 4 additional tickets for an individual match (of which max 2 adults) for a max of 3 category B/C matches each season.

This additional benefit will ensure that more children and young people are introduced to live football at the Emirates Stadium and will, over time, help to build the numbers of future generations of Arsenal supporters. It will also produce an extra benefit of membership for all season-ticket holders and will re-introduce into the Club the way in which so many supporters became such in the past.

Answer Charles Allen

Not sure where the 28% has come from. Looking at the club's archives shows rate of concessions over time has been constant and historically even lower. We also know young fans will buy full price tickets with their parents so we are confident the numbers of young fans in the stadium is robust.

It is an area we work hard on. We continue to focus on the Young Guns' enclosure where 1,000 tickets are available for 12-16 year olds to watch B and C games. Part of the challenge is the lack of churn on season tickets but the work done through Ticket Exchange and Ticket Transfer means that most people who want to come to a game across a season, whatever their age, can and will. He said the demand for season tickets remains strong.

IG said that the lack of churn is also impacted by the approach of holding season ticket prices consistently flat.

Steve Cooper/Lesley Williams – AST
UAE Human rights

We have been contacted by the international campaign for freedom in UAE around the protection of human rights in the UAE and are keen to under if the club has any connection in the UAE as Emirates are one of the clubs main sponsors?

There has been a lot of focus on the Human Rights record of Qatar in the build-up to the 2022 World Cup. Similarly the UAE does not live up to the Human Rights standards that we in Western Europe expect and have long enjoyed. Given that Emirates, effectively the UAE state airline, is a major and now long-standing sponsor of the club, benefitting from constant virtually free advertising through the stadium name and a level of respectability through its association with Arsenal, does the club have a position on the Human Rights issue or recognise any conflict with its own values? For example, Arsenal actively supports LGBT initiatives while homosexuality in the UAE is a capital offence.

Answer – Mark Gonnella

I will not speak specifically about the UAE however as you rightly identify we strive to ensure that everyone associated with the club feels an equal sense of belonging – regardless of age, sex, race, religion or sexual orientation.

We have robust policies and procedures in place to tackle discrimination and this is fundamental to what we stand for as a club. This is part of what makes us an attractive partner for organisations like Emirates. They are an outstanding partner who make a significant financial investment with us and buy into what we stand for as a club.

Steve Cooper/Lesley Williams – AST

Standing

At the recent Premier League meeting it was agreed that the Premier League executive would start to prepare more detailed explanation of the position of Safe Standing as part of a review of Safe Standing/Rail Seating. Did Arsenal support this review and now that the Premier League is looking at the matter can Arsenal confirm that they continue to support safe standing as Ivan Gazidis and more recently Arsene Wenger have stated?

Answer – Ivan Gazidis

The recent Premier League meeting discussed safe standing

We supported the PL undertaking a review to ascertain whether it can be done safely and without reintroducing some of the historic issues in the game. As a result, the PL is going to take a look at this subject. This will take some time but the process has begun.

Steve Cooper/Lesley Williams – AST

Champions League

Increasingly the Champions League format is seen as dull and predictable with the same teams qualifying from group stages that appear designed just to extract more gate money and ticket revenue from fans. The new proposals are even worse guaranteeing more money to clubs based on how many times they have won the trophy in the past! (Which will of course also penalise Arsenal). What views does Arsenal have on the format? Do they support more revenue sharing to increase competition and excitement?

Answer – Ivan Gazidis

I have been involved in many of the discussions. UEFA have been concerned about the future growth of the Champions' League and making it sure remains attractive to the public and broadcasters. From an Arsenal point of view, the competition works very well as an adjunct to our main competition, the Premier League. However if you look at it from a Spanish, German, Italian or French perspective they don't have as healthy a domestic league so the CL is relatively more important. There has been a strong push from them to streamline the CL and make it smaller, involving only top clubs. UEFA has a broader perspective around its commitment to growing the game as a whole. In the context of all these competing demands, UEFA has struck a decent balance. No-one is happy with everything but for Arsenal it is close to the status quo and the changes are not bad. For football in general it has come out in a reasonable way.

Anne Hyde – Disabled Supporters' Representative

Arsenal Disabled Supporters' Association

The Arsenal Disabled Supporters' Association (ADSA) has been reformed with a new Committee. The launch was on 2nd December at the Arsenal Disabled Christmas Party which was organised by the Disability Liaison Team. The Association was set up in 2006/2007 Season and successfully has addressed some issues within the Stadium for disabled supporters. Since then 144 people have joined the Association and the new Committee are keen to increase the membership which is open to all disabled supporters, carers, family and friends. We have had a further 11 members join since reforming which is very encouraging. Membership is currently free but this will be reviewed yearly. The Committee will be meeting in the New Year to discuss aims, objectives,

and to decide on short, medium and long term plans and to find a Patron for the Association. Anne Hyde has been supported over the past few weeks by Alun Francis, Mark Brindle and Keith Reynolds (Level Playing Fields) to re-form the Association and I am delighted to inform the meeting that ADSA have now become a member of Level Playing Field and will become part of the Official Arsenal Supporters' Scheme in the New Year.

Anne Hyde – Disabled Supporter Representative

Empty Wheelchair Seats

Could the Disability Liaison Team look at ways to monitor empty seats at matches and to remind season ticket members that they are able to advise the Disability Team that they are not attending so the seats can be sold or re-allocated? It was noticed that at the Arsenal v PSG on the Upper Tier there were 7 empty wheelchair seats. It is not known how many empty wheelchair spaces were elsewhere in the stadium but this is still a significant number considering there are only 240 wheelchair spaces in the whole stadium.

Answer – Alun Francis

The Disability Liaison Team is always keen to promote the use of the Disabled Supporters Ticket Exchange as it prevents having unused wheelchair user and enabler seats and enables more Purple Members to attend games. So far this season over 150 disabled season ticket holder places have been sold on the Disabled Supporters Ticket Exchange. Also, some disabled season ticket holders have generously donated their tickets which, though the Community Department, the DLT have been able to give to local disabled school children. However, there are always some season ticket holders who choose to sell or donate their tickets for whatever reason.

Daniel McCloskey/ John Williamson – AISA

Recognising and rewarding loyalty

We are delighted to read that Mr Gazidis is “open to further ideas on the best ways to recognise individual supporters’ loyalty”. We suggest that the club (1) introduce a range of small benefits such as 20 year and 40 year badges, (ii) annual events for a random selection of supporters who have been season-ticket holders for at least 10 years (iii) occasional free vouchers for the Club shop for supporters who have been silver or red members for at least 10 years and (iv) vouchers for free entry for members to the Club museum, together with a family member.

Answer - Charles Allen

This is another complicated area but this year we have acknowledged everyone who has been a season ticket holder since the move Emirates Stadium. We will continue to develop our Member Rewards which is designed to recognise loyalty.

Daniel McCloskey/ John Williamson – AISA

Arsenal Ladies' matches

We believe that there should be more opportunities for the Arsenal Ladies team to play matches at The Emirates Stadium. Whilst understanding the practical difficulties involved we ask that this be prioritised and consideration be given to enabling an increase in the number of occasional matches that take place?

Answer – Ivan Gazidis

I would like to have more games but it has to be done on the basis that we grow the support successfully. There are also pitch considerations but it is very much on the radar.

Date of next meeting: March 11, 2017, subject to TV