

Mr I Gazidis
CEO, Arsenal Football Club PLC
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Dear Mr Gazidis

Here is a story about three generations of Arsenal supporters, their passions and their hopes for the future.

In the late 20's my father visited the old Highbury and was hooked. He became a great fan of Herbert Chapman and all he stood for. Hard work, fair play, honesty – the class of Arsenal was engrained in him, and then me as I was raised on the exploits of Eddie Hapgood, Joe Hulme, Cliff Bastin and Alex James.

I kept huge scrap books of anything to do with The Arsenal, and was finally rewarded with the first of many trips to Highbury, in 1956. My father stood at the top of the stairs leading to the stand, before beckoning me to join him. On reaching the top I was shell-shocked, I had never experienced anything like it. The noise was ear shattering, the place more alive than any single human being could imagine and the stadium seemed to house all of the people in London. He explained many years later that he wanted to see the look on my face, which became etched in his memory. Years were to pass before I repeated the process with my sons. I can still see the sheer unadulterated joy on their faces.

Needless to say as soon as I received my first weekly pay packet I visited Highbury. My journey into heaven and hell had begun. I saw great games and great players and poor games of such mediocrity that I vowed never to return. Like so many before me and many since, I always did. The Arsenal blood truly did run thicker than water.

My greatest night at Highbury took place on Tuesday 28th April 1970 when we played Anderlecht in the second leg of the European Fairs Cup, having lost the first leg in Brussels 3-1. It was an amazing night for so many reasons. I took my place in my usual spot on The North Bank some twenty minutes before kick-off, with everyone thinking we had little chance of winning. The almost maniacal desire of the Arsenal players to win the ball, use the ball and score was a sight completely alien to me and probably everyone else. My unsung hero of so many encounters – John Radford – scored the second and I knew then that we were not going to lose. Like so many others I was swept onto the scared turf at the end to salute our heroes. I took the last tube home and was on such a high that my mother was firmly convinced that I had taken an illegal drug.

My uncle Joss, a Belgian national, lived in Anderlecht and sent us congratulations after the game (a few years later my cousin, a certain Jimmie Haynes played centre-back in Anderlecht's first team). It was a night of great memories that has never faded!

Some years afterwards my Belgian family arranged tickets for me to visit The Heysel Stadium in Brussels to watch the European Cup Winners final between Arsenal and Valencia on 14th May 1980. All of the Haynes family in Brussels went and only the result spoiled a great day.

We were on holiday in Spain watching the game against Liverpool in 1989. For some strange reason my sons and I were the only ones supporting Arsenal with some 30/40 others all rooting for Liverpool. None of them gave us a chance. The rest is history, we were smiling, everyone else scowled.

My sons have been to see our beloved team on so many occasions but they always remember the year of the double finals with the greatest affection. When we met Sheffield Wednesday twice at Wembley in 1993 it was clearly our year. We went to all three matches, having driven from Hampshire in the early hours of the morning to be first in the queue for tickets for the FA Cup final replay. We did it because we could afford to do so; sadly not any longer.

We have followed and supported Arsene Wenger from the beginning. His style is our style and we have seen some wonderful moments of skill. Dennis Bergkamp scoring with a header at Wembley; his amazing skill against Leicester; Thierry Henry's pace and power; the sheer blooded mindset of the famous back four/five; the doubles, the trophies, the skill, drive, energy, resoluteness and crazy scenes and recently the magnificent new Emirates Stadium. A couple of years back we enjoyed the tour and the museum.

All things change but alas now not for the better.

Our family Arsenal stone that sits proudly outside the Emirates is now alone and lost. Our family motto 'In Our Blood' is on the wane. The plans for the next generation of Arsenal fans from our grandchildren are dashed. Why? Your charging policy has priced us out of the market place for tickets.

Over the last few years the cost of silver membership has increased disproportionately. This year the club requested an annual subscription of £45 as you know. That's £135 for my family before we start.

The suggestion that we can access the Arsenal Player for free was a bit of an insult. Why would all three of us want access? Clearly we have not been able to purchase tickets as often as we would like which is solely due to rising costs of a global recession. To hit us with a continually rising upfront charge is too much.

Your system is now flawed in favour of those with money, not those loyal supporters that have been with the club through thick and thin. Clearly it is more difficult for those living some distance for the ground to attend matches; travelling expenses, food and drink etc. have all increased let alone the cost of membership and tickets.

So why do you not put in place a system where those living outside a certain radius from the ground get a discount on say a maximum of six tickets each per year and thus a free or greatly reduced membership fee? It works for golf clubs and other organisations so why not with a football club? It would only be open to those with a history of supporting The Arsenal and not open to fair-weather friends. You have the details on your records.

There is much talk about the cost of the stadium, the sale of the flats, the cost of players transfer fees and wages and of course the cost of salaries to the executives of the club. You know far more about this than I. Let me just say that I believe that The Arsenal appears to be a well run and financially sound club but that the current pricing is eschewed in favour of the corporate and the rich. It does not seem to be our club anymore. Did I not hear the fans singing 'We want our Arsenal back?' the other evening?

The cost of implementing a scheme on the lines that I suggested would be inexpensive, yet would generate so much goodwill. Those long standing supporters whom have been with you through the good and bad times would be able to once again visit the Stadium and see the team that they love. I hope that you read this letter and that I do not receive some meaningless platitude from an aide. I believe in my Arsenal and I hope that I can continue to do so in the future. Do remember that the future for us all, are our children and our grandchildren.

The big question is whether The Arsenal Football Club still believes in me and my family?

Thank you for reading the very brief Haynes / Arsenal history! I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Mr R. Haynes