

# Manchester United Fans' Forum – Minutes

## Friday 30<sup>th</sup> April 2021, Teams Video Call

### Forum Members Present

Chas Banks	MUDSA Secretary
James Coatsworth	STH Rep
Keith Coutts	65+ STH Rep
Alan Harvey	STH Rep
Janine Kasmir	Local Rep
John Massey	Executive Club Rep
Rick McGagh	STH Rep
Anthony Stewart	Family Stand Rep
Kieran Stockton	Official Member Rep
Ian Stirling	Fans' Group Rep
Mick Thorne	MUSC Rep

### Club and Foundation Officials Present

Richard Arnold	Group Managing Director
Charlie Brooks	Director of Communications
Sam Kelleher	Head of Ticketing & Membership
Claire Mulroy	Ticketing & Membership Services Manager
Collette Roche	Chief Operating Officer
Ed Woodward	Executive Vice Chairman

Topic	Speaker	Topic Notes
<b>Introductions / Apologies</b>	CR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'd like to thank you all for making time to meet today, especially given the short notice.</li> <li>This forum has worked closely together in recent years, and we want that relationship to continue in the future, the main purpose of this meeting is to listen to your feedback, but before that Ed would like to say a few words.</li> </ul>
<b>Introduction from Ed</b>	EW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome everyone to today's meeting of the Fans' Forum and thank you for making the time to be here at short notice.</li> <li>I hope that - notwithstanding current issues - we were all able to enjoy the performance and result last night, which demonstrated once again the progress being made under Ole.</li> <li>Clearly, it was important to convene the Forum in short order to provide an opportunity for you to express your opinions and discuss recent events.</li> <li>We will provide as many answers as we can today but, mostly, we want to listen. It's clear we did not do enough of that before the Super League decision. Today is our first step towards putting that right.</li> <li>You will all have read Joel's open letter to fans last week apologising for the Super League decision and I would like to add my personal apology to this Forum.</li> <li>I know that you will feel angry and let down by the lack of consultation and by the way the proposal failed to recognise the vital principle of open competition. Proper discussion would have helped us avoid the mistake we made.</li> <li>While there would have been a substantial increase in solidarity payments from the leading clubs to the rest of the pyramid, we fully accept that there were fundamental elements which were badly misjudged.</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As Joel said last week, we failed to give enough weight to the essential principles and traditions of sporting merit which are so vital to football.</li> <li>We want to restate our commitment to those traditions. I can assure you that we have learned our lesson from the events of the past week and we do not seek any revival of the Super League plans.</li> <li>Manchester United is fortunate to be in a relatively stronger position than many because of the resilience of our self-sustaining model.</li> <li>We have a disciplined, long-term approach which has allowed us to navigate the pandemic, while continuing to invest in the team.</li> <li>We will now continue working with the rest of the football community to address the long-term challenges facing the game.</li> <li>But I can assure you that we will be doing that with great sensitivity to the opinions that you and other fans have expressed in recent days.</li> <li>We will be listening closely to your feedback today, and we'll be taking it away for consideration as we review how we can engage more effectively in future.</li> <li>Thank you again for the passion you show for our club, and for your service to this important Forum.</li> <li>As Joel said last week, our fans are what makes Manchester United so great, and they should always be at the heart of this club.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Combined Rep Feedback</b>  Chas Banks  James Coatsworth  Keith Coutts  Alan Harvey  John Massey  Richard McGagh  Ian Stirling  Kieran Stockton  Mick Thorne</p>	<p>IS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To the senior management and ownership at Manchester United Football Club.</li> <li>We are disgusted, embarrassed and angry at the owner's actions in relation to the planning, formation and announcement of the European Super League.</li> <li>Once again this clearly demonstrates that the club's owners are only interested in maximising their own profits and do not care about or respect the views of Manchester United fans.</li> <li>The complete lack of engagement with fans, our players and manager is a gross mishandling of club affairs and one which we cannot forgive. It was an attack on fans and on clubs across the whole of football and we have simply had enough.</li> <li>Joel Glazer's subsequent apology is not accepted. Actions speak louder than words and he and his family have shown time and again that their sole motivation is personal profit at the expense of our football club.</li> <li>We should not need to explain to anyone involved in the ownership or running of Manchester United Football Club why the European Cup is an integral part of our club's history and how this proposal has betrayed it. Yet we clearly need to.</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From Sir Matt's vision for United to compete in Europe which saw him battle football's authorities to allow English clubs to enter, to the devastation and loss at Munich, the rebuilding of the club and triumph at Wembley in 1968, the impossible dream being achieved in the Nou Camp in '99, through to making it three on that special night in Moscow in 2008, it has played a huge role in making the club what it is today.</li> <li>• Our victories in Europe have been cherished, and the losses painful for generations of fans. We remember the great players and the impact they had: the birth of 'El Beatle' after George Best tore apart Benfica at the Stadium of Light in 1966, Wayne Rooney scoring a hat trick on his debut against Fenerbahçe at Old Trafford in 2004, and we of course remember the Busby Babes' last game together against Red Star Belgrade on 5 February 1958 and shed many a tear for what they would have gone on to achieve.</li> <li>• All of this history has been undermined by an abhorrent plan designed purely to make more money for the self-perceived 'big clubs' and prevent any form of competition that exposes them to the risk of other clubs being successful at their expense, regardless of how poorly the founder clubs play on the pitch or are run by their boards and owners off it.</li> <li>• Fair competition is what makes sport so special, yet it is something Joel Glazer et al decided should be removed in preference of a closed-shop approach. It is arrogant and unfair to exclude so-called 'smaller clubs' – including the three previously named teams - from being able to reach the pinnacle of their sport. Let's also not forget that Leicester City have won a Premier League title more recently than Manchester United have, yet if they repeated it they would be forced to try and qualify for one of the five 'golden tickets' while we could finish 7th (as we have since last winning a title) and still qualify.</li> <li>• Sir Matt warned everyone in 1970 what could happen when he said: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>"I hope we shall never sacrifice our sporting principles on the altar of big business."</i></li> <li><i>"We must prevent a football club ever being run like a supermarket with profit the only real motive."</i></li> <li><i>"The fear is that the big business of soccer will dwarf the sport."</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• How right he was and how ashamed he would be of what our club has tried to do.</li> <li>• Addressing the financial challenges some of the clubs involved face is no justification for this proposal. The clubs themselves are the ones responsible for the increasing transfer fees, agent payments and player salaries, and they should be better run to avoid the huge debts some of those involved in this plan hold. For Manchester United we would remind you that £1 billion has gone out of the club in the last sixteen years to fund the ownership of this club.</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The suggested benefit to fans, according to the vice chair of the European Super League Joel Glazer, of “bringing together the world’s greatest clubs and players to play each other throughout the season” is another which completely misjudges fans’ feeling about European competition.</li> <li>• There has always been a mystique associated with playing European football. Qualifying for a European competition is celebrated. The excitement of drawing a team from a country or city never visited before or of drawing the best team in the other major leagues in Europe is what excites and thrills fans. We have only drawn Real Madrid twice in the last 20 years and we remember those games and what they meant. But we also just as fondly remember the great trips to Romania, Denmark and Ukraine to play CFR Cluj, Aalborg and Dynamo Kiev.</li> <li>• The European Super League would see us play the likes of Real Madrid every season, saturating and diminishing the thrill of such games and eliminating the chances to visit and play the ‘smaller clubs’ named above who have just as much right as their illustrious rivals to compete for the top prize in European Football.</li> <li>• By guaranteeing the places of the founding members each season and removing the possibility of them ever being relegated it would also inevitably lead to meaningless ‘dead rubber’ matches every season. It is poorly thought out and contradicts the very essence of sporting competition.</li> <li>• The club cites their lack of trust and faith in UEFA to make reforms to the current competitions as a reason to make this change. Again this is no excuse to abandon decades of history and sporting principle and replace a broken system with one manufactured purely to widen the gap between the self-proclaimed elite and the rest. Engage fans in the reform you want and work with us to make change happen for the good of the game as a whole.</li> <li>• And let us be clear, our frustration and anger is not solely limited to the proposed European Super League. The proposed reforms of the Champions League are no more than a ESL-lite and we want reform to be made across the whole of football. This includes some of those shouting the loudest but also guilty of ignoring the wishes of fans in favour of profit - for example the FA with their ridiculous cup final allocations, exorbitant pricing and semi-final locations, and SKY and BT Sport for their short notice changes to the fixture list and high subscription costs.</li> <li>• Change is needed and the club must act now.</li> <li>• Following the club’s subsequent withdrawal from this ill-conceived and greed-fuelled idea of a European Super League, Joel Glazer stated:   <i>“Manchester United has a rich heritage and we recognise our responsibility to live up to its great traditions and values.”</i>  <i>“I am personally committed to rebuilding trust with our fans and learning from the message you delivered with such conviction.”</i> </li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have zero trust in the owners of the club, or faith in them to uphold these statements and do not believe they understand or indeed care about the great traditions and values of our club. If we are wrong and they are serious about recognising their responsibilities and wanting to learn from supporters' messages, we look forward to you all proving it by taking immediate and decisive action to protect the future interest of the club.</li> <li>• We, the fan representatives on the Manchester United Fans' Forum and on behalf of Manchester United fans everywhere, request you agree to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Willingly and openly engage and promote the government-initiated fan-led review of football and use this as an opportunity to rebalance the current ownership structure in the favour of supporters and not approach this review defensively to fight for the status quo</li> <li>2. Appoint independent directors to the board whose sole purpose is to protect the interest of the club as a football club, not its shareholders and their focus on profits over results</li> <li>3. Work with the Manchester United Supporters Trust and supporters more broadly to put in place a share scheme that is accessible to all and that has shares with the same voting rights as those held by the Glazer family</li> <li>4. Commit to full consultation with season ticket holders on any significant changes to the future of our club, including the competitions we play in</li> <li>5. Provide a commitment by Joel Glazer that any costs incurred in relation to the creation of, or withdrawal from, the European Super League will be funded solely by the Glazer family and not by the club itself. We note that the Kroenke family have already made this commitment to Arsenal fans.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• We request a written response to the above points within seven days.</li> <li>• Finally, we acknowledge that there are many employees working at Manchester United Football Club who have the best interests of the club at heart. We appreciate that not all of you here today will have had prior knowledge of the proposals before they were launched. However, you do all have the ability to make changes in your areas of responsibility to address supporter concerns, to challenge the owners to do the right things and uphold our values and to listen to the people who are the heart and soul of our football club – the loyal fans.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Alan Harvey</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I had the opportunity to feed into letter and I agree with it.</li> <li>• The fans who turn up are integral to the club, you cannot have a big team like united unless fans turn up.</li> <li>• We are customers as well as fans, but unlike any other brand, we cannot go anywhere else.</li> <li>• As well as making demands, we need a strong team of fans to work with the club to future proof us all.</li> </ul>

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Chas Banks		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I don't want to see the Glazers sell the club to some Arab billionaire. I don't want to be like Manchester City owned by a sovereign wealth fund, I really don't care who owns the club as long as the club embraces working with the fans</li> <li>Tell the owners to trust us; work with us, let's have a fans representative on the board and that's how you'll avoid another farrago like the ESL proposal</li> </ul>
Rick McGagh		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The statement Ian read out on behalf the 9 of us who co-signed the letter covers everything that I want to say today and I look forward to receiving a detailed response from the club in the coming days.</li> <li>I note that Joel Glazer by not attending today has already failed to live up to his promise in his open letter which I quote was "also realise that we need to better communicate with you our fans because you will always be the heart of the club". He had the opportunity to attend today but again has shown disrespect to the fans by failing to do so. This comes as no surprise as we have only heard from him 3 times in 16 years, 2 of which were to launch and then exit from the European Super League as we said in the letter actions speak louder than words.</li> </ul>
Janine Kasmir		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would like it to be recorded that although I didn't put my name to the letter, it's not that I don't agree with many of the things that are said, I think the letter is very well written. One of the reasons I didn't sign the letter was due to it implying employees who had no knowledge of the announcement should take responsibility for this, I think it is wrong for all employees to be held accountable or expected to get involved in something that's incongruent to their employee job descriptions. I also want it known that things need to be done in the best long-term interests of the club not a rushed 7 day ultimatum.</li> <li>Whilst I appreciate that we've been told it was a really poor decision, I think is very important is that we understand how the board, came to that decision so that we can learn from it and ensure it never occurs in the future.</li> <li>We need to know that you understand this was the wrong decision for the club.</li> </ul> <p><b>EW Response</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Thank you, that's a very good question. Since I've been at the club there's been versions of these types of discussions which come up for different reasons, different clubs have different reasons. We may look at it, because of the number of other clubs that are looking at it.</li> <li>In answer your question there were a few things that were perceived were likely to benefit the broader football framework, including cost control, which we felt has not been managed properly, and a new framework from a sustainability perspective which would have increased solidarity by 3 times the rest of football. The biggest issue was the principle of open competition and I had an issue with that too.</li> <li>But there was a feeling that trying to disengage from a governing body and create a better platform for the future was</li> </ul>

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		<p>a little bit like what happened with the Premier League 30 years ago. That met with some negativity, but eventually people understood the rationale behind it. They were giving the FA a different relationship as governing body to that organisation, and I think ultimately that's what everybody expected to happen. We expected a UEFA sanctioned structure, which maybe wouldn't even be the same as what was what was put down, but it was a mistake, we shouldn't have done what we did.</p>
<p><b>Ian Stirling</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I feel we have put our case forward and suggest that rather than each person re-iterating the points, we close the meeting now and give the club a chance to respond.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Keith Coutts</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manchester United should be leading the way in trying to change the way things work between owners and fans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Anthony Stewart</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You will have noted that I didn't add my name to the initial letter, this is for two reasons. My personal views aren't necessarily aligned with the letter and secondly I hadn't received any feedback from Family Stand Season Ticket Holders that I represent.</li> <li>I have subsequently received feedback from a supporter within the Family Stand advising he is aware of Family Stand Season Ticket holders who were very unhappy with the proposal.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mick Thorne</b></p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am a Branch Secretary and as soon as the announcement was made, we received hundreds of comments from our members disagreeing with the decision to join the ESL.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Meeting Close</b></p>	<p>RA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>First, I want to reiterate the club's apology.</li> <li>While the challenges facing football both now and in the future are significant, including for us as a club, this wasn't the right solution to address them.</li> <li>Thank you for the input and the points raised today. All passionately made and we know they come from genuine love and support for the club.</li> <li>The challenge for us as a group, a club, a league and a sport is to find a way forward collectively that address these issues.</li> <li>We are committed to working with the relevant stake holders to find that way forward.</li> <li>That way forward needs to bring success to Manchester United, on the pitch, and in the structures that deliver that.</li> <li>We are all committed to that success now and for the long-term and recognise that needs to be in the right framework of dialogue and communication with fans.</li> <li>I have sat on many of these Fans Forum meetings, I know many of you personally and have spoken to many of you since this situation happened.</li> <li>I appreciate this meeting doesn't suddenly solve issues but it's part of a process. We will keep you informed on next steps and continue the process of dialogue.</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="635 123 1508 185">• I would encourage any of you involved with Sunday's events to make sure they are peaceful and follow Covid guidelines.</li><li data-bbox="635 210 1485 309">• And most of all that they don't disrupt Ole and the players. It's a big game, and a big week, and we all need to pull behind them and focus on supporting him and the team.</li><li data-bbox="635 333 1501 396">• The immediate focus for all of us is ending the season strongly and supporting the team however we can.</li></ul>