

ARSENAL GAYGOONERS

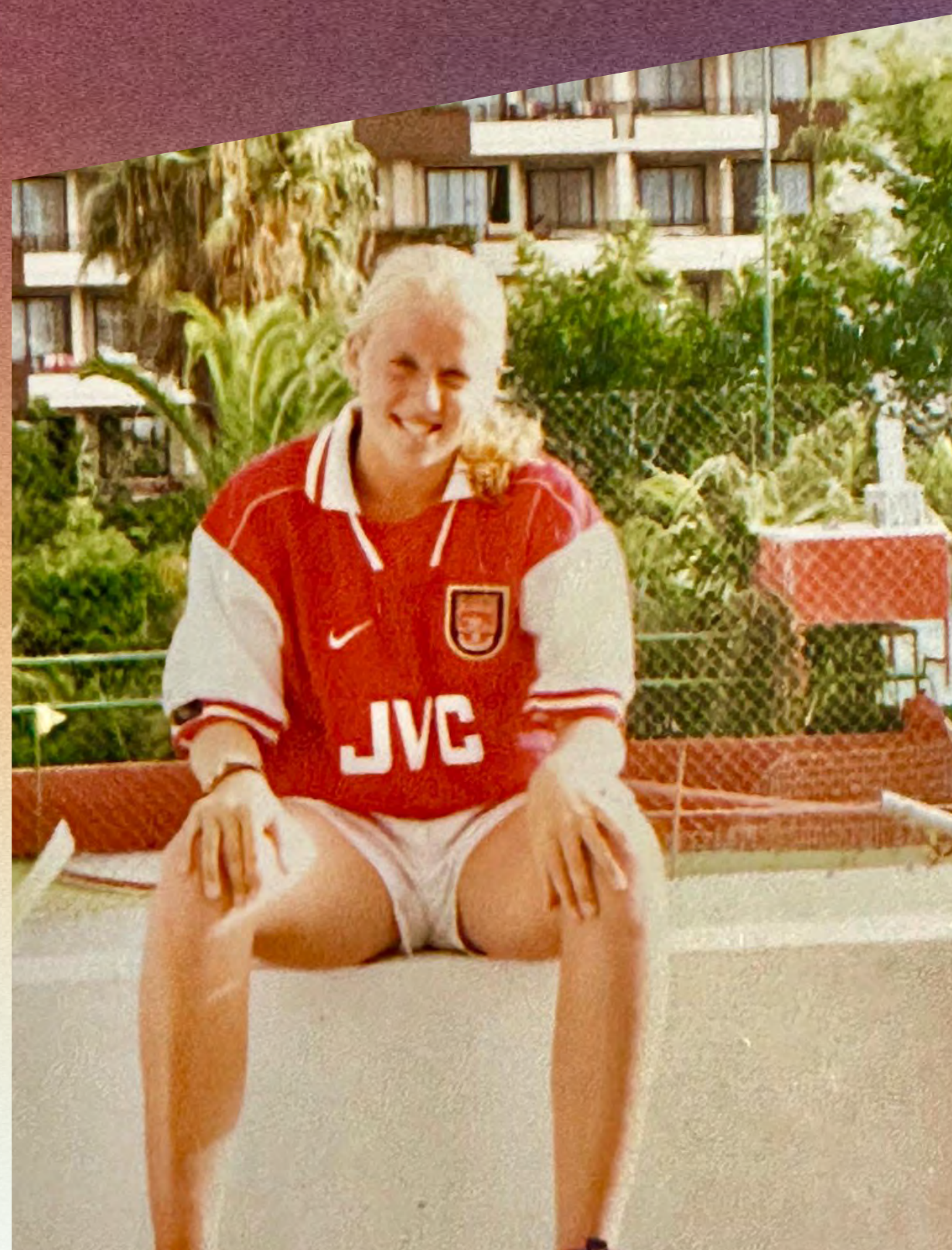
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In collaboration with the Arsenal gaygooners, London Met researchers interviewed 20 LGBTQ+ Arsenal supporters (gaygooners) to better understand how they navigate their identities and sense of belonging within the often heteronormative and hypermasculine environment of football fandom and identify ways of further promoting inclusivity in sports environments. Participants spoke in detail about their experiences and shared images associated with their fandom. Many participants found the project to be positive and enjoyable.



"That was my very first London Pride event and also my very first gaygooners event... I've still got that shirt kicking around, it's signed by pretty much every woman's player we've had since that day. It's one of my most treasured shirts." (Selena Chambers)

"Everybody has said that they really enjoyed the experience and felt it really helped." (Stewart Selby)



"I've got all my shirts, all my shirts from literally childhood to now, all in vacuum bags under my bed. I've got all of my programmes that I used to collect." (Joanna Fox)

"Projects like this are only going to help us towards that ultimate goal of making sure every single LGBTQ+ person feels safe and comfortable at football." (Elliot Guthrie)

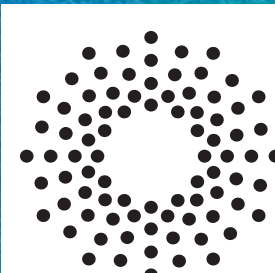


"It's one of my favourite pictures of my life, that there I am, in the stadium, on the pitch, with the captain, Martin Odegaard, and celebrating the gaygooners' tenth anniversary." (Carl Fearn)

"It's been really nice to be able to talk about it because it is such a big part of who i am and like i said at the beginning, to have a voice as a gay arsenal supporter and just have that experience heard is great." (Daniel)

London Metropolitan University's Gender and Sexuality Diversity Research Group: Jenny Harding, Sebastian Cordoba, Mabel Encinas, Dale Rees, Wendy Sloane, Katherine Fischer, Wally Mbassi Elong, Donna Jones.

Arsenal gaygooners: Angus Moorat, Jonathan Green, Stewart Selby, Elliot Guthrie, Lea Baynes, Tara Featherstone, Cherylin Hall, Jonathan Paylor, Kimmy K, Sarah Tyce, Tyler Marshall, Joanna Fox, Abi Broomfield, Selena Chambers, Valerie Flanagan, Arthur, Joshua, Jacob Jefferson, Carl Fearn, Daniel.



LONDON
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PASSION, FAMILY AND BELONGING

Participants described their immense passion for football and devotion to Arsenal. Many associated Arsenal and the gaygooners with a sense of belonging, family, and home. They had vivid memories of being introduced to Arsenal FC by their parents, grandparents, or friends and attending their first match.



“[...] football and how much we love it. So this was during lockdown, and I’m in my wedding dress because we were trying to make light of a difficult time, so I put on my wedding dress in lockdown, and the boys did a penalty shootout against me in my wedding dress.” (Sarah Tyce)



“My love for Arsenal, I can’t even articulate it. It runs so deep in terms of the emotional connection that I have to it. It is like a family. When I talk of Arsenal, my face lights up.” (Joanna Fox)



“You can see the baby in the Arsenal, that’s my daughter who had just been born. I think she was less than two weeks old, so at less than two weeks old, she had an Arsenal membership! I carried her, and I would go to the stadium pregnant, so I would talk to my bump and be like, ‘It’s like coming home’.” (Joanna Fox)

“It’s a family, you know? You’re all gay together and that’s something we have in common, and together you stand strong.... I love being part of the gaygooners ‘cause it makes me feel at home.” (Kimmy K)

“Going to the Emirates for the first time and seeing the gaygooners banner, it was like things were saying this is home. Meadow Park was home ‘cause everyone was comfortable, gaygooners having their banner in the Emirates, it was that family kind of feeling...” (Lea Baynes)

“So to my family, football’s really important, it’s bigger than religion... football is really important. It’s like a comfort blanket to me.” (Abi Bloomfield)

“You stick with your club. Once you fall in love with a club it’s yours for ever” (Arthur)

“My whole family, my dad, my brother, my mum are Arsenal fans... and if I supported any other teams that’d be it, I’d be out the house! [...] I’ve always been Arsenal and I’ve got an Arsenal tattoo as well.” (Tyler Marshall)



“That’s from the 1971 Cup Final... Arsenal won the double that year, so they won the League and they won the FA Cup in the same season... I now have the rosette.” (Daniel)

CHALLENGES AND DISCRIMINATION

Participants who went to football matches in the 1970s and 1980s often heard homophobic slurs and chanting while also being aware of sexism, racism and a quiet hum of menace in stadiums. They kept football fan and gay identities apart as it was just too uncomfortable to bring them together. Describing “a febrile kind of atmosphere” in the 1980s, Daniel said “there was an undercurrent of violence” and “there was no way that I was going to feel comfortable about being a gay man in footballing terms, so I was closeted.”



“You can see us with our pink triangle, so obviously across Westminster Bridge, so that was one of the early demos, anti-Section 28. [...] That sense of community and fighting and solidarity and pride, I take forward into the gaygooners now.” (Jonathan Green)

“But we were going to the football, it was terribly exciting, but it wasn’t a gay thing, it was a football thing. And at the same time, of course I was still going to Gay Pride, going to gay bars, all that stuff, had a gay life, but my football life was very separate, it wasn’t a gay life at all... I’d never really married the two... I couldn’t be myself at football... I wouldn’t have felt comfortable with people around me knowing I was gay at the football... I heard homophobic comments all the time.” (Jonathan Green)

“I would never have felt comfortable or safe to go to a match, definitely as a female; it was a very male environment. I’m talking the seventies/eighties, it was quite an aggressive environment. Seemed to be a lot of fighting and real aggression so it wasn’t really for me.” (Valerie Flanagan)



“It was in the 1980s, and it was not a safe environment in English football at the time. A lot of hooligans, a lot of fighting... it just wasn’t a safe-looking space... The language, the things that were being shouted at the players... obvious homophobia.” (Carl Fearn)



“I would go to football as a football fan, but in those times, it would be late seventies, early eighties, it would have been inconceivable to be able to be open about that. It would have been simply too dangerous.” (Stewart Selby, founder of Arsenal gaygooners)

“I have been within the club once when a fan was being quite offensive and using homophobic slurs, so I reported that to a steward immediately. We were moved seats. I had my youngest son with me, and I think at that time he was probably about eight or ten, so we were given the option of moving seats. The person was spoken to and said if it happened again they would be removed from the stadium... I feel really, really strongly that football is for everybody. I also do not want my children to be exposed to homophobic chanting... I want them to be exposed to positive experiences.” (Sarah Tyce)



“Seven-and-a-half years ago, before I joined the group, would I be walking in front of thousands of people in a parade waving flags in an Arsenal shirt? Couldn’t see myself being that sort of person.” (Elliott Guthrie)

Social and political change (e.g., legislation on equality and broader acceptance of sexual diversity) and policies geared towards inclusion at Arsenal FC have meant that participants rarely hear homophobic language at the Emirates these days. Most feel that they can enjoy football without their gender/sexuality being an issue. Nevertheless, many witness a torrent of online abuse whenever Arsenal posts supportive messages about LGBTQ+ issues and events, and some have experienced abuse and homophobic chanting at away matches. Also, some feel unwelcome as football fans in LGBTQ+ settings.

CHANGES OVER TIME

“Lack of visibility of LGBT fans was huge. They were very invisible. And I think that’s partly why homophobia’s been allowed to snowball over the years, because people think that there are no gay people in football. And I think also within the LGBT community as well, there’s almost a joke that anyone could possibly be a football fan. So it works two ways, that there are two lots of discrimination. Even now, if you wear a football shirt, you’re not allowed into some gay pubs in London. It’s ridiculous.” (Angus Moorat)



“For me, [Pride] was the best day of feeling fully inclusive with Arsenal, with my relationship between my gender identity and my sexuality and my love of football. [...] It’s slightly better than it was 20 years ago. It’s still not great... but I think that’s something that will change as time will go on.” (Abi Broomfield)

BEING OURSELVES AT FOOTBALL

Many participants described the sheer joy they felt when they realised that they didn't have to choose between presenting as LGBTQ+ or an Arsenal fan. Some had heard of Arsenal gaygooners, possibly following their activities online, but felt uncertain and hesitant. When they eventually encountered the group in person, it was both thrilling and transformative.



"I really appreciated walking down London Pride, wearing my Arsenal shirt but with Pride on the back, and it's like the two parts of my identity coming together, and that's why I absolutely love that memento." (Elliot Guthrie)



"I've gone to games with my wife, I've gone to games with friends, I've gone to games at the corporate level, but I have to say when I go with the gaygooners, the whole experience is better. It's better, for me, it's better." (Joanna Fox)



"The group has helped me define myself as a person more than I ever did. I feel like there's a lot of wasted years in my life when I couldn't be myself." (Carl Fearn)



"The friendships I've slowly made with other gaygooners have become some of the most sincerest and genuine of my life. Not just the commonality of our team and sexuality but because they are incredibly good, funny and incredible people." (Jonathan Paylor)



"Being in a community and a group like the gaygooners gives you security, it gives you something to fall back on when the going gets tough. [...] Football used to bring out a demon from within me... but now I think I have much more things in my life to worry about... I think I enjoy my games more feeling this way than I did when I was male." (Cherylin Hall)

"It's just nice to be able to get together and be your true, authentic self and know that you've got each other's backs." (Sarah Tyce)

"Gaygooners has really helped me with my [sexuality]. When at home or at football I was dealing with issues about coming out as a gay man, didn't feel comfortable always putting those two together." (Jacob Jefferson)

"I'm an Arsenal fan just like any other Arsenal fan out there, I just happen to be gay. So I'm a football fan, and I'm gay." (Kimmy K)

ARSENAL GAYGOONERS

Image of former Arsenal gaygooners' chairs: "It was the formalising the actual reality of claiming our space in our club. It's our club as well as everybody else's in the community's club, and we have every right to be there as everybody else. [...] There were a lot of people on the march that a) were surprised to see us there and b) they didn't want us there, because it was football and all that football carried with it!" (Stewart Selby, founder of Arsenal gaygooners)



"That's a gaygooners badge. it's got Arsenal colours, red and white and then of course it's got the rainbow and the trans, it's got the whole more up to date rainbow flag with representing LGBT people who are black and ethnic as well, so I like the fact that it's got everyone on there, and my group." (Valerie Flanagan)



"So for our tenth anniversary... they wanted to do a bit more than usual to celebrate ten years... and in the programme they wanted us to do a bit of a history of gaygooners. [...] I produced this timeline of events... They condensed it down to two [pages] and that's a double spread in the programme." (Angus Moorat)



Arsenal gaygooners was the first British LGBTQ+ football supporters' group and is credited with increasing the visibility of LGBTQ+ fans in football and sports more widely. A small number of LGBTQ+ fans initially met to discuss tackling homophobia amongst the broader population of fans and formed the Arsenal gaygooners in February 2013. Later that year, half a dozen or so members first marched with a banner at London Pride. The length of the march and size of the crowd along the way (sometimes 6 deep) ensured they were highly visible.

In 2016, Arsenal allowed the group to become an official supporters' club and, crucially, purchase 17 tickets for each home match to allocate to LGBTQ+ members and allies, who are seated together.

"The point about having tickets together as opposed to just being standing by yourself when you're watching the match, is that it becomes more of a social experience and it enhances the matchday experience, so you might meet up beforehand, you might have a drink together, you might watch the game together and then you might go down to the pub afterwards, and it's how people start to get to know each other... So it's made them feel more comfortable going to games, it's made it easier for them to form friendships, and that's really what I put the success and growth of the group down to really, beyond having some really exceptional, dedicated people who've been leading us. But that moment about becoming a supporters' club was absolutely crucial." (Angus Moorat)



"So I picked this [programme] because me and a few trans people were invited to that game, to a posh box, so there was about 20 of us, all trans or trans allies and it was about gaygooners saying that yes, we are called gaygooners, but actually we're LGBT and we want to do something for the trans group." (Lea Baynes)



"It's [a picture] with Carl as well who's become a great friend in the group. We worked together on the committee for a few years as well. Always a mentor to me in a way, in the group, in terms of building up my confidence within the committee, to now take over from him as cochair. So I think that picture is especially meaningful." (Jacob Jefferson)

GAYGOONERS

FOSTER A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

Participants described the various ways in which the gaygooners foster and nurture a sense of community and how this is highly prized. Some spoke of developing amazing new friendships, a sense of family and belonging, as well as gaining opportunities to watch matches together. Community is continually built through online interactions and match day experiences. Many fans meet up before the match in a local pub and walk to the game together.



“For me, [joining gaygooners] has changed my experience. It’s allowed me to watch more games, definitely, I’ve gotten to meet quite a number of people.... it’s a family... it makes me feel at home.” (Kimmy K)



“Since joining the gaygooners, it’s obviously opened up a lot more opportunities. I’ve gone to a lot more games than I ever would have expected, been to away games, travelled around, so it’s just mental how I’ve been given opportunities as well as being with social people as well, socialising with everyone.” (Tyler Marshall)



“The friendships I’ve slowly made with other gaygooners have become some of the most sincerest and genuine of my life. Not just the commonality of our team and sexuality but because they are incredibly good, funny and incredible people.” (Jonathan Paylor)

“It’s one of the first places that I’ve really felt like I belong, joining gaygooners and when I actually started getting involved. I really felt like I was at home. It helped me to connect to my club in a way that I never had before and my community.” (Selena Chambers)



Image provided by Tyler Marshall



Image provided by Tyler Marshall

“[gaygooners] is a fantastic group and it means an awful lot to me. I’ve made probably one of my closest friends. [...] when I really needed it most.” (Joshua)

“It’s great fun and that sense of community before a match is for me very important, because of my experience of the eighties and nineties and feeling somewhat not part of ... Arsenal.” (Jonathan Green)

“It’s one of my families, it’s one of my groups and I’m proud to be a member, I’m proud of the fact that we’re the biggest LGBT supporters’ group in the world, the oldest in the UK and obviously a lot of that work was done before I joined or came on the committee, so I’m proud to be trying to carry on the work of those people who started it up.” (Jacob Jefferson)



Image provided by Tyler Marshall

SAFETY IN NUMBERS: MATCHDAYS WITH GAYGOONERS

Many participants reflected on the sheer size of the crowd and volume of noise at Premier League football matches. This can be intimidating for anyone, and especially for those who remember more aggressive times and explicit homophobia and transphobia. Many felt embraced and protected by being together with the Arsenal gaygooners. Several mentioned how the group provided support and solidarity, and how, in challenging moments, they knew they had 'each other's backs'.



"For us to have a group to go with to matches, that we're comfortable and safe with, is amazing really." (Valerie Flanagan)

"I love [my gaygooners scarf], but I haven't worn it out too much because obviously I'd wear it to matches, but I wouldn't wear it out-out because you don't know how someone is gonna react to that. I do love it and I'm glad I bought it. It's just nice to have some memorabilia, something to wear to represent myself. [...] I feel safe when I'm around other LGBT Arsenal supporters. I feel safe around them, 'cause again, we're quite good group size." (Abi Bloomfield)



Describing the gaygooners' collective response to becoming aware of homophobic chanting (at away matches), Elliot Guthrie said, "there may have only been ten of us, but it felt like there were a hundred of us when everyone's got each other's back and everyone's like, 'You know what? We're going to stick up for each other and we're not going to tolerate it.'"

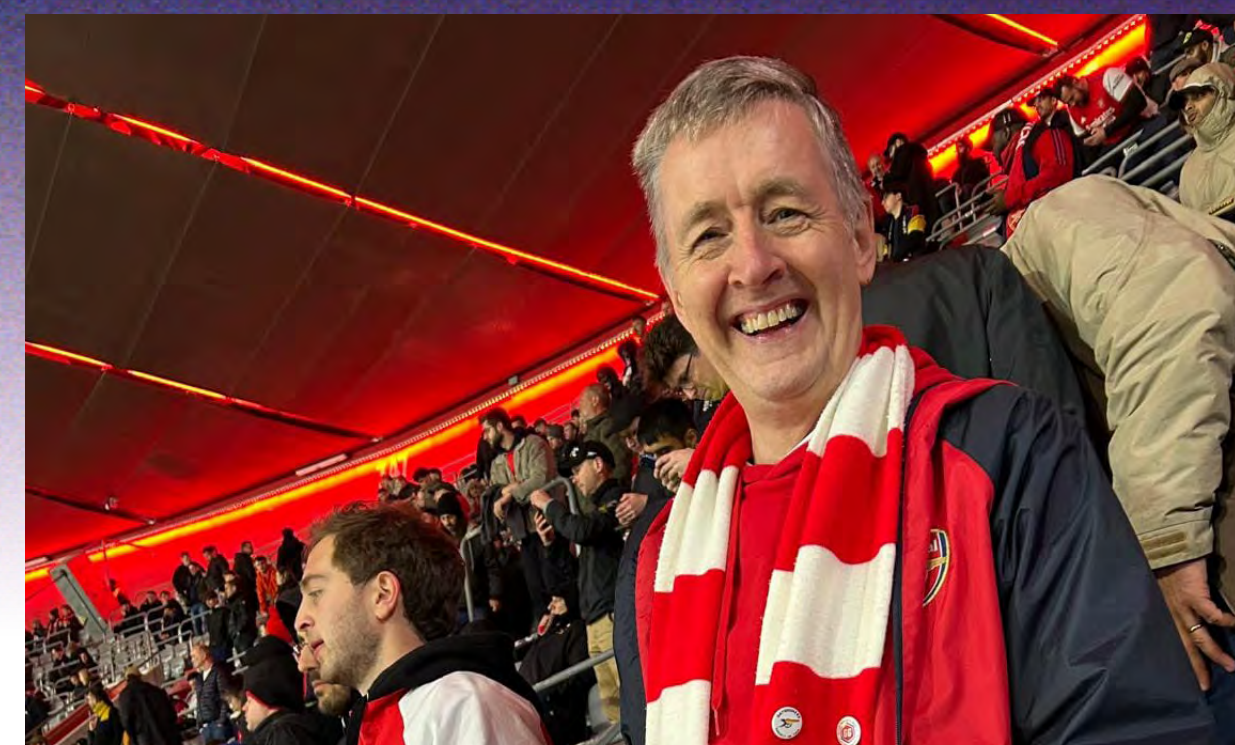


"Arsenal have, you can see in that picture, the Love is Love banner that they have in the stands. They have rainbow pyrotechnics and everything, and it's a really nice... It's a subtle touch. [...] "I don't feel unsafe in my stadium or anything like that, I feel like the people around me and the club have my back. It made me feel almost protected by the club and valued." (Selena Chambers)



"I think with all the best will and interventions in the world, you cannot stop transphobia, you cannot stop being anti-gay – you can only show your support and your love for it, and Arsenal are doing as much as I think they possibly can." (Cheryl Hall)

"I've overheard comments but I've never directly encountered homophobia myself at a football match, but some of our members do, but I think it's just a much nicer environment that we're all able to sit in, or we often will travel up together or travel abroad together and it means it's a protective wall around everyone." (Jacob Jefferson)



"There have been a number of occasions where I've had to deal with homophobic issues at games while the game is being played... when it crosses the line and it starts to err on the homophobia, it's important that we're sat together because there's safety in numbers." (Carl Fearn)

BECOMING VISIBLE AND BEING REPRESENTED AT PRIDE

“The first Pride event attended by the Arsenal gaygooners in 2013. [...] That was our very first public outing if you like. [...] People were really shocked... we noticed that and felt it as being seismic for us, and it was also seismic for the people that were seeing it, because they hadn't seen it before.” (Stewart Selby, founder of Arsenal gaygooners)



Several participants described the exhilaration and the sense of togetherness that came from marching together with Arsenal gaygooners in Pride. This was a pivotal moment for many of them, allowing them to feel visible and represented as both LGBTQ+ individuals and football fans.



“In 2013 I was going to Pride as usual... I'd heard the day before, looking at the Arsenal website, that there was a group, a new group called the gaygooners had been formed... and they were going to be marching at Pride. [...] I had my Arsenal shirt on and I just thought... they're my people. [So,] I leapt the barrier with a single bound and managed to get over, and there was a big cheer because I'd got over the barrier...” (Jonathan Green)



“We were given free shirts with Pride on the back, it was just phenomenal, and then dancing my way around the streets of London as part of the Parade with fellow gaygooners was just absolutely magnificent. It was definitely one of the best days ever, and certainly one of my best Prides.” (Sarah Tyce)



“I'd never actually gone to Pride before, but the first two times I've been with Arsenal, so Arsenal actually hire a bus with massive speakers. We're all there in Arsenal tops, Arsenal flags, we've had a stadium announcer who has also joined us, last year, and that's the bus in the background there in that one, and it's just an unreal day. Being Pride, I don't think I ever would have gone Pride before that because I haven't got a gay group of friends essentially, or anything, to go with, so I went with gaygooners, managed to experience Pride. It was just unreal to see loads of people there celebrating, and just a completely different atmosphere.” (Tyler Marshall)



“[Pride] was such a great day, great vibe, and it was brilliant because there were lots of us! There were more than I anticipated, but the people that you often see sporadically at the pub, they're all there. And we connected with a fellow gaygooner and her wife.” (Joanna Fox)



Image provided by Sarah Tyce

“Parades, demos, walking through cities, walking through crowds, reclaiming streets, it's an important part, I think, of who we are as human beings... as a communal activity, marching, walking, parading, I find joyous! Joyous!” (Jonathan Green)

“Certainly I'm known for putting the flag up at away games... It's not activism, it's visibility. It's saying, 'We're here. We're there. We're going to put up our flag and we're proud to be here, we're proud Arsenal fans.’” (Carl Fearn)



Image provided by Sarah Tyce



“If they didn’t have gaygooners I don’t think I would have come out as trans when I did. [...] they’ve all been there and been absolutely amazing and without them I don’t think I’d be the person I am today.” (Lea Baynes)



“The Emirates is very accessible in the sense that I can get lifts up to where I was sat, so that was very helpful for me. It intersects slightly, and I think if Arsenal weren’t so accommodating, I would struggle. I’ve not really been to any away matches since I’ve got disabled. It adds another barrier to getting to matches, but I know it is still possible, it’s just a lot more planning than say non-disabled fans would have to go through.” (Abi Bloomfield)



“I’ve always felt welcomed. And my experience of going to the games has been heightened.” (Cherylin Hall)

INCLUSIVITY

Participants also discussed inclusivity in relation to disability, gender, race and class. Several participants mentioned that the costs and waiting lists for season tickets excluded many working-class supporters and were pleased that the gaygooners’ ticket allocation had enabled them to attend matches.



“I’ve got my gaygooners scarf... It’s a statement. It’s as important as my scarf for homophobia and racism.” (Stewart Selby, founder of Arsenal gaygooners)



“If we were talking about this 20 years ago, 30 years ago, we’d be talking about race, which was a massive issue. Even still is, to be fair. See what happens after the world cup with the young boys being racially abused because of missing the penalties, so if that is still an issue, no wonder they’re too scared to come out as gay, because if race is still an issue that we’re trying to tackle, how are you going to tackle sexuality?” (Kimmy K)



“Football can be for everybody. Regardless of background, colour, culture, sexuality, it doesn’t matter, football can bring everybody together. [...] My boys regularly play for the gaygooners in the tournament... they will often not play for their own teams because they want to come and play for the gaygooners.” (Sarah Tyce)

Disabled participants considered themselves well supported by Arsenal and said that the stadium is accessible. When Stewart Selby discovered Arsenal’s provision for fans with disabilities, he could start going to games again after a lengthy absence and felt “even closer to the club and its whole network.”

Participants compared men's and women's matches, focusing on differences in the atmosphere, LGBTQ+ visibility and the availability of tickets. They mentioned the number of openly lesbian players in the women's team and the presence of families with children attending the matches. Some felt more comfortable and safer at women's matches.

"For me Arsenal is both men and women, so I started watching I think the women's ... I started following the women maybe about 7 years ago probably." (Kimmy K)

"The women's matches tend to be, I find, a calmer atmosphere." (Valerie Flanagan)



Image provided by Joanna Fox

WOMEN'S MATCHES



"Growing up as an adult being able to go to Meadow Park and actually go into games, that was an incredible experience, and it felt home and comfortable and for me, women's football, the players being so open, when I used to go the players used to bring their families, and it was the first time experience of lesbian couples with children, so it was where I became comfortable with my sexuality." (Lea Baynes)



"Sometimes I take my daughter, and sometimes I take my wife. Mostly I take my daughter [to women's matches] 'cause she prefers the atmosphere – it's friendly, it's softer, she can sense, and I think she reached an age where she can sense the men's game was quite tense and angry." (Joanna Fox)



"With the women's match I don't have that intimidation, it's a lot more friendly, more family orientated." (Abi Bloomfield)



Image provided by Joanna Fox

"Arsenal Women now play more games at the Emirates Stadium, but they still play some at their old venue, which is Borham Wood, Meadow Park, and I've been to two games there, and it's a different atmosphere and the difference between the two is it's much more family orientated, family day out for people, and it's easy to get tickets as well, but the other thing I should say is that the Arsenal Women's Supporters' Club is a very active supporters' club... and through Arsenal Women's Supporters Club, who are brilliant, people have been able to get tickets together, go to matches together a lot more." (Angus Moorat)

ARSENAL GAYGOONERS AND IMPACT



"I don't want the younger generations to have to go through life like I did, being afraid to be themselves... So that gives me great satisfaction knowing that they can happily join our group and feel part of the family." (Carl Fearn)



"In November Arsenal held an internal all-staff meeting... I was the only ordinary fan in front of 300 people. The Chief Exec of Arsenal was there. We were the only group that was invited, just to show the importance. I think the club are really proud of what we do. I feel like I belong, and that's important to me, and I want all the other members to feel that." (Carl Fearn)



"Arsenal have been brilliant in their unwavering support of LGBTQ+ fans, unwavering in their support in terms of the video, their stuff in the programmes, on the websites, Gay History Month, having the five-a-side Rainbow Laces match last week, having a match which is dedicated to Rainbow Laces, we couldn't ask them to do anymore. And I believe that's had a real positive effect .. on matchday." (Jonathan Green)



"Suddenly 60,000 people saw me, a gay man, up on the big screen [for Arsenal's campaign to promote inclusivity and zero tolerance for discrimination, particularly homophobia]. It was quite an experience... that's just one short snap of me doing my hello, I'm gay, don't be homophobic... You don't sometimes realise the effect you have on other people..." (Jonathan Green)



"For me, [the flag] just represented me and what I see with the club with the cannons, obviously we're the Gunners. And so I brought that because, for me, that was the best day [Pride] of feeling fully inclusive with Arsenal, with my relationship between my gender identity and my sexuality and my love of football, love of Arsenal. [...] This flag just represents the club to me, and it was such an excellent day, I couldn't praise it enough. So, I've got my flag of when I waved that around on." (Abi Bloomfield)

Many participants praised the groundbreaking efforts made by Arsenal and gaygooners to support LGBTQ+ fans and to promote inclusivity. They emphasised the positive impact of this on fans' match-day experience, while acknowledging that this is a work in progress.



"[Arsenal] did a Rainbow Laces advert... I showed it at school in a training day, as an illustration of what allyship is, why it's so important and how that made me feel... [...] It just made me think, 'Oh my goodness, this is so far removed from where I started as an Arsenal fan and some of those times.' So those things matter. [...] There's a wider framework to why I feel that my identity as a gay man, my identity as an Arsenal supporter rest comfortably with each other now... they're not in silos anymore." (Daniel)

"I definitely feel like Arsenal are a couple of steps ahead... I honestly do feel like when we've had events there, they really do listen, and that's not just the club ticking boxes. They bring us in, they talk to us, they ask how they can do it better." (Sarah Tyce)

"It's just that welcoming, inclusive feeling that you always get... It's that acceptance. In a world where you don't always feel accepted, especially on social media, having that feeling of acceptance is just amazing." (Lea Baynes)

"I think we're a very inclusive club, I think with all the banners outside the stadium and within the stadium, not just the gaygooners one, but the ones from all around the country celebrating the fans from different areas, different races, different sexualities. It's the feeling I get that anyone is welcome there, that if you're a good person, you're a gooner, the club loves you basically." (Selena Chambers)

"I think [Arsenal] do a lot to make us feel welcome and educate the other fans. There's a lot more women go to football now as well, a lot more, and that helps because ... yeah, just when there's a mixed crowd, there's less testosterone I think." (Tara Featherstone)

"Arsenal put me in touch with the gaygooners. How wonderful, I thought. And to make my life or my introduction much better, Arsenal arranged for eight or nine trans women and trans men to meet some of the more prominent gaygooners [...] I love Arsenal and they keep me going." (Cheryllyn Hall)

GAYGOONERS

A POEM BY JONATHAN PAYLOR

A misty evening in January at Preston North End.
A third round FA cup match and inexplicably for large parts we just couldn't defend.
Our chants of "you've only come to see the Arsenal" started to ring a bit hollow
Until Giroud scored 2 goals, rescuing us for a better tomorrow.

But for me it was special, not just supporting my team, but for my first away game as a gaygooner.
We're gay we support Arsenal and each other. And no matter what the score is, we do it with good humour.
We march at Pride, pride in Arsenal in London and in who we are.
And to some degree to show that being gay and liking football isn't really so bizarre.

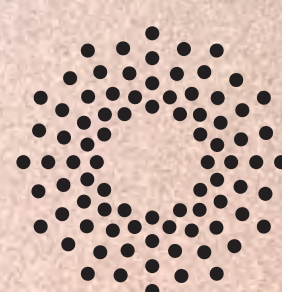
'Why do we need a separate group?' and 'where's the straight pride then?' Is ignorantly what some say.
Not understanding it's those exact attitudes which compels us to show how they've always had it their way.
Many have become good friends and some have become in the category of best,
We even have a bond with those we hardly ever see as we know we're from the same nest.

A trip to Porto, a tour of a wine distillery, a group of gaygooners being shown round by a straight Porto fan.
But it could not have been more fun for all, and why shouldn't it have been we were, to him, simply a different clan.
Perhaps, if it's not so fanciful, if his son or daughter turns out to be gay or, who knows, his sister or his brother,
he'll remember that daft lot from London, football fans like him and smile as he realises there's no such thing as 'other'.

Love is love and without being soppy, that is completely true!
But hatred born of ignorance, fear or both are the reasons why we still do what we do.
So united we stand, and I'm sorry to use that word, together we've all had the honesty and the cahunas
to be the first, and the best LGBTQ+ supporters group.... we are Arsenal's gaygooners!



Image provided by Jonathan Paylor



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