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Arsenal FC Hospitality
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There's always the sneaking suspicion when you meet someone who works at a football club that their day-to-day responsibilities aren't the real reason they signed up. Take Steve Doyle, Arsenal's premium sales manager. His job is to promote the club's corporate hospitality and the "boxed" seats that run around The Emirates Stadium's middle tier. Yet, there's more to it than that.

"Everyone who works here is a football fan," he enthuses. "We're like supporters watching Sky Sports News when the transfer window is on. We all want to know what's going on. We look forward to match days because it's what we work towards. Honestly, it's just a very cool job. Football is a lot of people's passion but when they go into the office they can't talk about it. But we get paid to.

"Somebody could offer me a lot more money to change industry but I wouldn't do it."

Steve is something of a journeyman himself, having worked similar roles for Twickenham, the ATP tennis World Tour Finals and London 2012, but Arsenal have the best facilities he's encountered. It's no surprise: when the 60,000-seater, bowl-shaped stadium opened in summer 2006, it wasn't just the first of a new generation of grounds in the UK, but a complete revolution in how stadiums worldwide were thought out. Rather than simply cram in as many seats as possible, "supporter experience" became the mantra.

Inside, for instance, there are three restaurants – members'-only club WM for fine dining, and The Foundry and Highbury for à la carte – and a 1,400sq m Victorian-style pub called The Royal Oak, complete with a brass-top bar and a traditional bell to call time. Around 5,000 tickets are sold seasonally, with another 300 on a game-by-game basis. Perks include the chance to meet club legends such as Ray Parlour, Martin Keown and Lee Dixon; a champagne reception and getting a photo taken with a player before kick off.

"But it's not the prawn sandwich brigade," insists Doyle. "Two thirds of our tickets are sold directly to fans and the rest to businesses – and they're usually Arsenal fans." Most of those are die-hard supporters, he says, who care about the club. But it's the little things that make a difference. You're warm, you get a pint quicker and there's a programme included.

Steve's been at Arsenal for two years, and his favourite moment was the visit of Barcelona. The club served tapas in the restaurants and their bars had a Spanish theme. People queued up early because they knew they knew they were going to see Messi and Neymar. "When it's a big one, or when there's something riding on it, the place is rammed. Nothing beats a big game buzz. You get a feel for it and everyone gets excited."

But Barcelona, Bayern or Manchester United don't visit every week. What Steve enjoys most, he says, is the people watching. "It might be called 'corporate hospitality' but it's one of the great levellers you've ever seen. On matchday if you're a fan of the club, you're a fan of the club. You get the CEOs of businesses chatting to everyday fans who are there for a special occasion. It's one of those environments where you can just switch off from your troubles.

"It's not escapism but it takes you to another place. And then you go back to your normal life."

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