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Issue 16 - December 2011
News from
League Football Education

Timeline

Inside: Sporting Chance | Hitting the Headlines | If U Care Share

League
Football
Education



Making their Mark

Current and ex-Apprentices hitting the headlines



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE

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0845 074 0561
Simon Williams, LFE Alumni Liaison Officer

Goal of the Month

Where goals are concerned, Goal of the Month has been spoilt for choice this season.

The standard has stepped up a level from last year with more and more clubs now submitting their finest goals each month.

In November, LFE received a record number of 27 entries for the October Goal of the Month competition.



August

Bristol City's Elan Gordon claimed 45 per cent of the vote to beat off three Hull City nominations with his fantastic strike against Stoke City on 20 August.



September

Over 1400 GOTM voters opted for Portsmouth's Ashley Harris and his spectacular overhead kick that beat the stranded MK Dons 'keeper on 17 September.



October

Southend United hit-man, Jack Payne's left-footed effort against Dagenham & Redbridge on 22 October saw off the challenge of Crystal Palace's Kyle Da Silva and Portsmouth's George Colson.

LFE Nets Award Double!



League Football Education has won first prize in the Leonardo Film category of the Ecorys and British Council 'Your Story' Competition after submitting a short film depicting this summer's pre-season tour. The film highlighted the experiences of Apprentices & Club Staff from Scunthorpe United, Walsall, Watford and Wycombe Wanderers whilst in Holland.

LFE also picked up a Bronze Award in the 2011 E-Learning Awards for its Functional Skills materials 'Fit for the Future'. The learning resources were produced in conjunction with Sportiv8, Kineo and Navitas Sports Consultancy and featured current Strictly Come Dancing Star Robbie Savage, PFA Chairman Clarke Carlisle and Lee Hills and Sean Scannell (both Crystal Palace).

A hat-trick of awards was in sight when LFE Communications Manager Steve Sutcliffe was shortlisted for an NCTJ Award for Excellence in Sports Journalism but his collection of LFE related features was pipped at the post by Tim Groves of Planet Rugby.



You Said: We Did

Apprentices & Clubs say ASE is Outstanding.

ASE has been given a huge endorsement by Apprentices and Football Clubs in LFE's most recent Self-Assessment Report Questionnaire. 232 Second Year Apprentices, 24 Clubs and 20 Education Providers took part in the survey which was overseen by LFE's Quality Manager Clive Cheetham. The results were fantastic with 88 per cent of the Apprentice sample and 92 per cent of Clubs grading the programme as 'Outstanding' at meeting their needs.

The same percentage of Apprentices also highlighted the support and guidance they receive as 'Outstanding' while 95 per cent of Education Providers felt that LFE's leadership and management of the programme was 'Outstanding'.

To see a full summary of this report and results from The ASE, Sporting Chance and NVQ Standardisation Questionnaire's please visit:

www.lfe.org.uk/apprentice-info/you-said-we-did



To watch the GOTM competitions from this season please visit: www.lfe.org.uk/goal-of-the-month or watch LFE TV on our homepage.



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Top of the Table

At the time of writing Brighton & Hove Albion had won 7 out of their 9 South East Conference games to top the division. In a double delight for the Seagulls, Shamir Goodwin topped the Youth Alliance goal scoring charts with 11 goals.

Meanwhile Crawley Town have made an encouraging start to their debut Youth Alliance season sitting in 4th spot on 17 points.

Elsewhere, South West Conference leaders Bristol Rovers are still yet to be beaten whilst at the other end of the table Hereford United are still searching for their first point of the season.

Up in the North East Hull City boast an outstanding goal difference of +19 securing their number one spot above Darlington who remain in second place.

November started with a bang for Burnley. The Clarets brushing aside local rivals Preston North End, 6-1 before following that up with a battling 2-1 win against Bury to see them in to top spot in the North West.

Group A in the Academy League sees Fulham attempting to repeat last term's success. They look comfortable at the top with a game in hand over Arsenal and Crystal Palace who are in second and third place respectively.

September's GOTM contender Dominic Samuel has fired in eight goals for Reading who find just Coventry City above them in the Academy League Group B.

Group C has just one Football League club within its ranks, Crewe Alexandra and they claimed their third win of the season in a 4-2 thriller away at West Bromwich Albion on 12 November.

Third-placed Derby County fell one goal short of a miraculous comeback against Group D leaders Newcastle United, who nearly threw away a 4-0 lead. The Rams clawed back three goals but were denied a fourth in injury time when the Magpies' stopper instinctively flung himself in the way of Mason Bennett's goal bound effort from six yards.

Media Units

Facing the media is a difficult task for anyone in the public eye and can make or break a players image!

However football clubs now have the opportunity to prepare Apprentices for life as a professional footballer by delivering a course of media units, produced by LFE to enhance the existing Apprenticeship programme.

Units in; 'Understanding the role of the media', 'The footballer's role within the sports media', 'Preparing for an interview', 'Conducting an interview' and 'Being interviewed', aim to provide players with an awareness of the media and its role in football.

The units which can be delivered in-house or by club's pairing with external providers map across in to the existing education framework as well as offering exit and progression opportunities and pathways.

Gaining transferable skills is central to this work e.g. responding to a post-match interview requires the same presentation skills that may be required for a job interview with a potential employer outside of football.

The media units will be available for all clubs to download and use from the VLE on 1 December but should you require any further information about these materials please contact

- Gavin Willacy (gwillacy@lfe.org.uk)
- Steve Sutcliffe (ssutcliffe@lfe.org.uk)

Spend IT Wisely

After opening for business in October, club applications for the LFE Development fund are coming in thick and fast and clubs seem to have concentrated their submissions on one main area, improving IT equipment and facilities.

As more and more support structures for clubs and Apprentices move online and learning becomes increasingly blended it is essential that club's are well equipped in this area to ensure the continued success of the ASE programme.

The funding of course can be used to fill any gaps in resources or equipment to improve the Apprenticeship programme and in the past sports science equipment, team bonding days and even transportation have been popular choices for clubs to splash the cash.

That offering extends further this season with opportunities provided by the likes of Corporate Battlefields and Media Training Organisations.

Corporate Battlefields offer clubs the chance to take Apprentices to the sites of World War Battles for a different kind of team building event. For more information about this type of day visit:

www.corporatebattlefields.com

Meanwhile in conjunction with LFE's production of media training units that link to the NVQ, BTEC and Key Skills qualifications a number of highly respected media training organisations have approached LFE to offer clubs and apprentices bespoke training days.

The likes of Staffordshire University, FC Business, Sport Business, Pergall Media, Smith & Smith PR and The Press Association are all keen to engage with clubs and young players in this area. This training would be designed to fit key criteria that LFE has identified; namely that it is integrated within the existing ASE Framework and adds value to it. It provides players with an awareness of the media and its role to prepare them for life as a professional and it offers exit and progression opportunities and support for those leaving the game at the end of their Apprenticeship.

If you need any further help or advice in relation to the Development Fund or have any ideas on how the scheme could be developed in future years please do not hesitate to contact Alan Sykes at:

asykes@lfe.org.uk

The deadline for the Development Fund for the 2011-12 season is 31 May 2012.



Getting a Sporting Chance

The first part of the Sporting Chance bandwagon has come to a halt. It took in Twenty football clubs in just 12 days but the message remained the same in every session.

"Footballers around the globe need to learn about these issues," said Chesterfield Apprentice Jack Waddle.

A sentiment echoed by his counterparts across the Football League, from Watford to West Ham and Cardiff City to Crystal Palace all were unanimous in their appreciation of what an afternoon with The Sporting Chance Clinic meant.

That of course is an interactive workshop that challenges players to look at destructive behavioural patterns, be more aware of their lifestyle choices and to think about the pitfalls that go hand in hand with every-day life as a footballer.

"It's an important exercise as far as I'm concerned," said Dave Bentley Chesterfield's Youth Supremo.

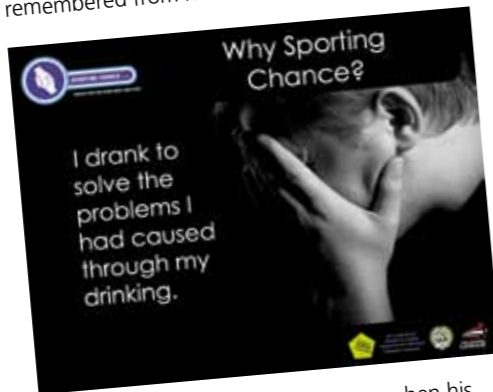
"To have Chris (Mordue) and Darren (Wrack) here talking to our young players is really good. The stuff they relayed to the lads about what was going on in their minds when they were having problems was captivating."



"It helped them understand the sort of pressures that addictions can cause especially the impact that these things can have on families and friends not to mention careers."

LFE and Sporting Chance first started this work in 2009 and while the composition of what a session includes has evolved one familiar element that hasn't is the 'Player's Story' which involves a current or ex professional, who has suffered with addiction, reliving his experiences to those in the room.

One such former player is Darren Wrack, a talented midfielder who will be best remembered from his time at Walsall. Wrack



eventually went to Sporting Chance when his gambling problems spiralled beyond his control. He is now eager to turn that negative in to a positive by helping others learn from his mistakes.

"The types of issues that face young footballers can be difficult to deal with alone. The most important thing is being able to make the right choices and asking for help when you need it," said Wrack.

"Things start off small and escalate, it's important that you can understand the warning signs before they get too far.

"I had a decent playing career but do I think it could have been better? Yes of course.



"There were times when I was playing when all I could think about were issues that my addiction had caused – so how can you play to the best of your ability in those circumstances?"

Wrack's candid admissions, as well as those from course leader Mordue may have shocked some of the Apprentices listening to them but all were keen to take advice on board.

"It was really interesting to hear Darren speak so openly about what had happened to him and the strain it placed on his relationships with other people," said Cardiff City's Rhys Hartley. Watford's Tom Hoban, added: "It shows how easy it is to slip into problems.

"The most interesting part was when Chris was telling us his life-story at the start.

"It just shows how bad things can get. You wouldn't expect him to have any of those problems from looking at him. It just shows that you can't really tell what's going on from the outside."

What the programme does offer is information on addiction, the effects of alcohol, drugs and gambling on mind, body and performance and contacts for support, should problems arise. Let's hope none of the class of 2012 will need the latter.

A Problem Shared

Nottingham Forest is one of thirteen clubs to have participated in workshops run by If U Care Share this Autumn.



LFE developed a partnership with the organisation fronted by husband and wife team Dean and Shirley Smith earlier this year, after they had successfully delivered seminars at Darlington and Hartlepool Utd.

The aim to draw upon personal experiences to act as a support mechanism for young players to help them deal with negative emotions and feelings of despair and distress. And while the time taken to run these sessions comes in at 90 minutes, a length of time that most players are familiar with - feedback has indicated that the topics covered have a lasting impact that goes beyond the final whistle.

"It's a very beneficial presentation looking at the emotions that young people go through," said Reds midfielder, Ryan Markey.

"It's relevant to most people, we all have stages in life when we feel down and this is about trying to deal with it in the best way possible."

Ryan Tinsley concurred with his team-mate adding.

"You only need to look at the stuff about Beckham and the German goalkeeper Robert Enke that we covered today to realise that things can get on top of you and affect your frame of mind".

"The experiences that Dean and Shirley shared with us were really powerful and made me realise how lucky I am. It's great to know that support is on hand though if anyone needs it".

Any help given by If U Care Share is of course confidential but they believe 'talking' can and does make a difference and in some instances save lives.

"We have our own personal experience of losing a loved one through these types of issues," said Dean Smith.

"Everyone hits a time in their lives when they can feel really down. Sometimes we can pinpoint the reason why, i.e. exams, relationships, pressure. There may be times we just feel down and there may be no reason for feeling this way. It's ok to not feel ok."

"It is so important that if you feel this way and you can't understand why, that you talk to someone and it's about club's and players recognising the types of emotional strain that can all of a sudden develop."

"We're not saying we have every answer to every problem but 'Sharing' your problems can make a difference," added Smith.



Mark Wright

Love him or loathe him it seems you can't keep a good Essex lad down. Whether it's his complicated love life, Twitter banter with Joey Barton or more recently his bid to become King of the Jungle in ITV's I'm A Celebrity...Get Me Out Of Here, Mark Wright is never far from the headlines.

With his popularity growing offers have been flooding in to the 24-year-old former Southend Utd Apprentices who made his name in The Only Way is Essex.

"When I was asked if I wanted to do the jungle, I really wanted to take the opportunity. I have been offered lots of different things so we'll just have to see what happens afterwards but I'm really excited about my future," said Wright.

Kane Ferdinand

The Ferdinand family's association with West Ham United could enter a fourth chapter if you believe what you read in the papers.

Les, Rio and Anton have all graced Upton Park over the years and now Southend Utd's Kane, another member of the Ferdinand clan is reportedly interesting the Hammers.

Raised in Dagenham, the Republic of Ireland youth international has been a driving force in the Shrimpers midfield this season, helping the club to the top of League Two.

Jordan Rhodes

With six goals in as many outings for Scotland's U21's and 13 goals in 11 starts for Huddersfield Town, Jordan Rhodes has started the season in blistering form.

A key component of the Terriers team that has gone over 40 League One games unbeaten Manager Lee Clark recently laughed off speculation that his prized forward could be the subject of a £2million bid by one of the Premier League's big boys.

"There's absolutely nothing in it - £2m wouldn't even buy his socks," said Clark.

Johnny Williams

Apprentice of the Month in September, Crystal Palace midfielder Johnny Williams has been one of the stars of the club's impressive start to the Championship season.

Recently handed a long-term deal which will see him remain at Selhurst Park until the summer of 2015, the energetic midfielder is tipped to have a big future in the game. He will have to overcome some adversity though after breaking his leg playing for Wales U21s in Armenia last month.

"It was sad news but you will see Jonny Williams' character coming through and he will be back in a Palace shirt," said Eagles boss Dougie Freedman.

"I think this young man will cope with it very well and probably come back better physically as well as mentally."

HEADLINE ACTS

Since the last edition of Touchline a number of current and former Apprentices been hitting the media headlines. Touchline looks at those who have been attracting the newspaper column inches and ruling the television and radio airwaves.

Billy Sharp

A special mention in this section is reserved for Billy Sharp. In November the Doncaster Rovers forward made himself available for a League encounter against Middlesbrough just days after the death of his newborn son Luey Jacob Sharp. The former Sheffield Utd Apprentice led a moving tribute to his boy prior to the match before hitting a wonder strike in the 14th minute, which he dedicated to his son.

In a series of Tweets after the game he said; "My goal tonight was the most important goal of my career dedicated to my brave boy Luey Jacob Sharp I love u son sleep tight.thatsforyouson,"

"To captain the side tonight was an honour and a pleasure, the minute applause - I was crying, meant so much to me thanks to both sets of fans."

Josh Carmichael

First Year Apprentice Josh Carmichael is living the dream on the South Coast after making his AFC Bournemouth debut earlier this season while still aged 16.

Carmichael was thrust into League One action at Exeter City as a first half substitute and has since gone on to sign a professional deal. The Scotland schoolboy international will now be aiming for more of the same as the season progresses after impressing Cherries boss Lee Bradbury.

"Josh got his chance and grabbed it with both hands. I was very pleased with him, said Bradbury.

"He is composed on the ball and has got a lot of good attributes".

James Ward-Prowse

A creative midfielder James Ward Prose is expected to be the next big thing to come out of Southampton's Academy after making his debut for the club in the League Cup earlier this season while still only 16 years-old.

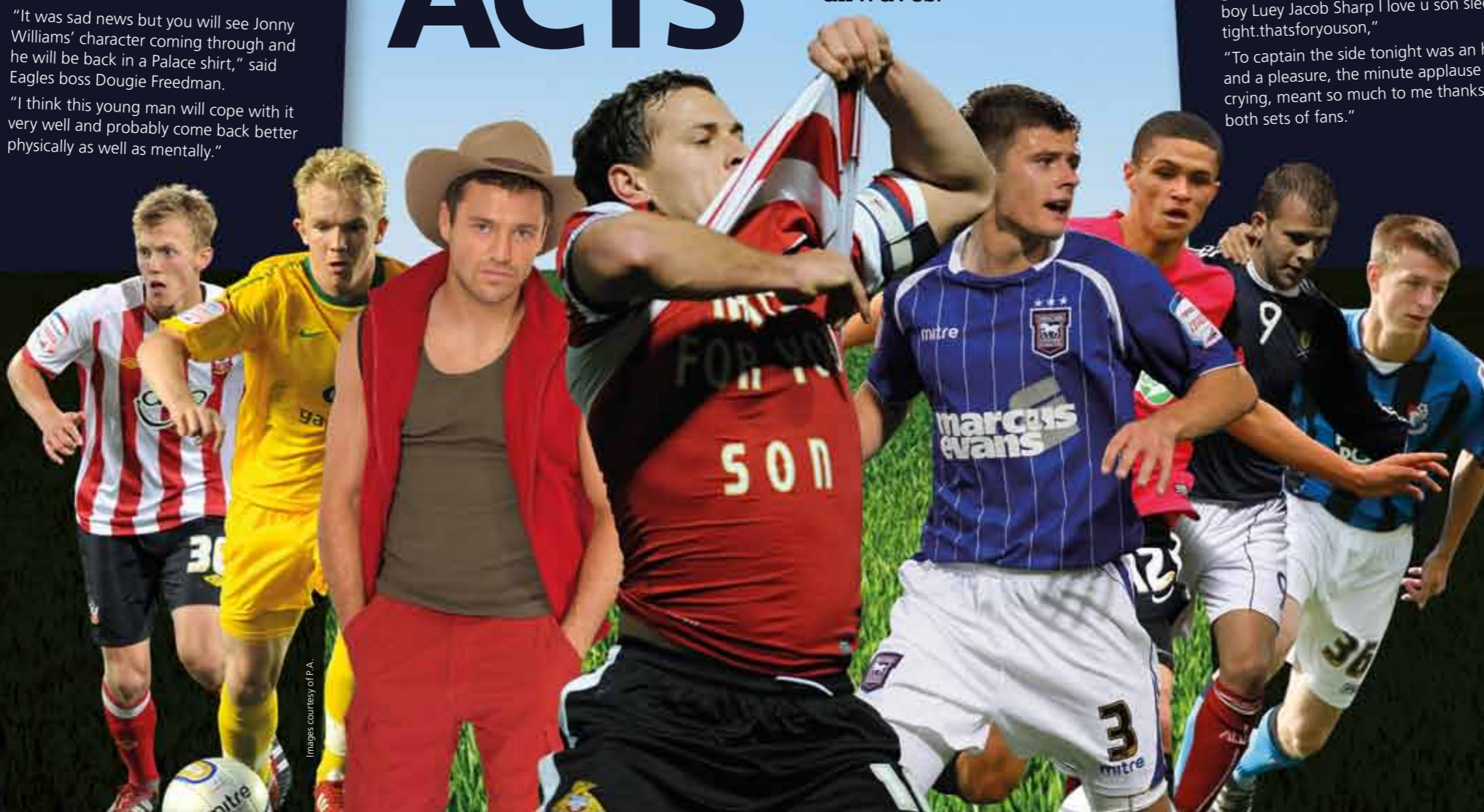
In recent times the Saints have produced players like Gareth Bale, Theo Walcott and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and if initial feedback is anything to go by England U17 international Ward-Prowse could soon be keeping them company as a Premier League player.

"He has got a maturity about him that is beyond his years and passes the ball ever so well," said Manager, Nigel Adkins.

Aaron Cresswell

"When we signed him, everybody was talking about (Michael) Chopra and others, but Cressy might turn out to be our top signing". That was the view of Ipswich Town boss Paul Jewell shortly before he tied Aaron Cresswell down to a new improved contract last month.

The former Tranmere youth product has been a revelation since joining the Tractor Boys in the summer and if Jewell's men, can, as expected put a good run together after Christmas we could be looking at a Premier League star next term.



Images courtesy of P.A.

Preston Performs

Youth Team gets a thumbs up from Phil Brown



When the 2011-12 season kicked-off in August Preston North End faced the immediate reality of life outside the Championship for the first time in 11 years.

A 2 - 4 home reverse at the hands of Colchester Utd on the opening day a reminder that life in League One was not going to be easy.

The recent fortunes of Leeds United, Charlton Athletic, Southampton and both Sheffield United and Wednesday is evidence enough that life below the Championship can take a little time to readjust to.

But despite the potential for relegation to demoralise even the most ardent North End fan one shining light at Deepdale has been a flourishing youth programme and a steadfast policy of giving young players a chance.

This season Bailey Wright, Sean Clucas, and Daniel Devine have all featured at first-team level after signing pro terms at the end of their Apprenticeships in June.

Whilst fellow new professionals Dominic Comrie, Scott Leather and Michael McLellan will be looking to make an impact at some point during the rest of the season.

At the outset of the season Boss Phil Brown pledged to give youth a chance and he appears to be sticking to his word.

Jamie Proctor and Connor McLaughlin have become integral members of Brown's first-team squad racking up close to 50 appearances between them in total. More recently George Miller made his second appearance for the club in October's Johnstone's Paint Trophy clash at Morecambe.

Two years ago the trio would have been found at PNE's Springfields training ground playing for the U18's in the Youth Alliance under Director of Youth Dean Ramsdale.

Adam Barton and Danny Mayor, both ASE graduates, have made giant leaps forward in the last twelve months. Both are rumoured to have been targeted by Premier League

clubs and Dean Ramsdale believes that this in itself is testimony to the quality of players the club is bringing through its ranks:

"Jamie Hoyland (Youth Team Manager) and myself have implemented a strategy to produce players for the first-team. In the last two years we've had twelve Apprentices sign professional terms which in itself is a great achievement and reflects the work we do in the youth department," said Ramsdale.

"There's a good reputation attached to the Apprenticeship programme we run here and Phil Brown has bought into it which gives the young lads an extra motivation because they know that there are opportunities if they work hard and perform."



"Brandon Zibaka, Doyle Middleton and Luke Clark are all still part of the youth regime and are having a taste of the first-team environment already. It's important that the rest of the U18 squad follow suit and continue to push on in the hunt for that same progression."

After making first-team bow back in September Zibaka became North End's youngest ever player beating current youth team-mate Middleton's record of 16 years and 122 days by 6 days.

"It's unbelievable to get the opportunity so early on in my Apprenticeship," said Zibaka.

"After the game my mates in the youth team all texted me, including Jamie Hoyland and Dean Ramsdale, so I'm really happy. It just shows how together we are in the youth team," the 16 year-old added.

While North End boss Brown has currently got a job on his hands to catapult the club back up to the top of the league table, he has been pleased by the work going on

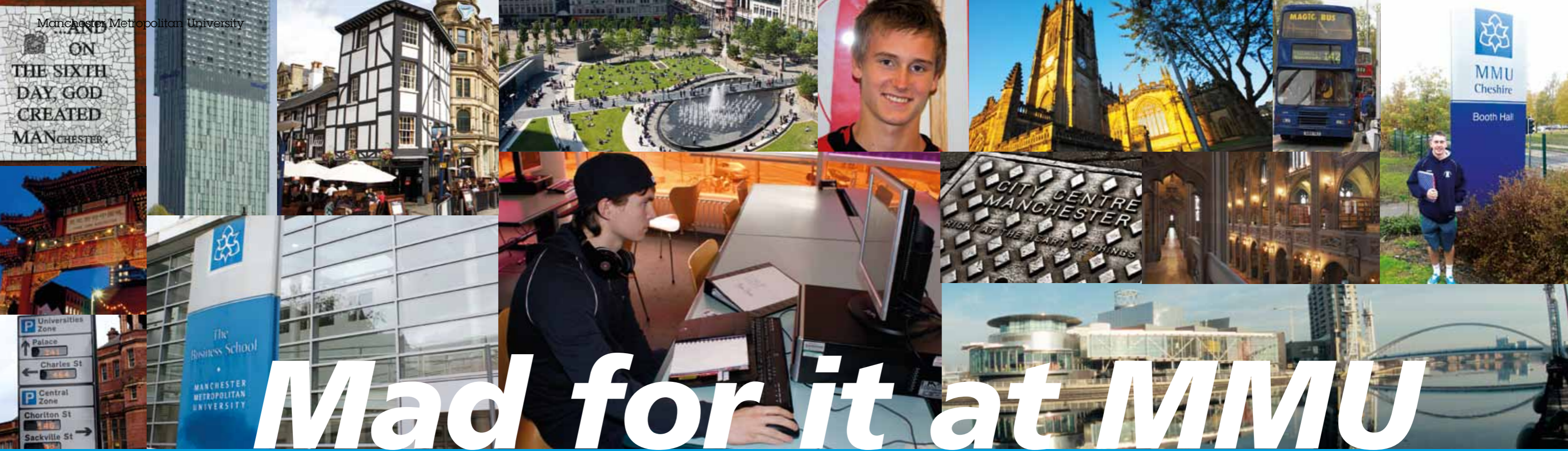
at youth level and the fact that the club's young players never let him down when called upon.

"I have a great rapport with the youth department and speak regularly with them about which players are ready to be moved up," said Brown.

"I select players on merit so if they are playing well enough they'll get a chance it's as simple as that."

"There are some bright futures at the Club and it is all about giving them the opportunity so it's important that the young lads strive to be a part of my team."





Mad for it at MMU

Manchester is fast emerging as one of Europe's top cities. Recent developments like the BBC's move to Media City has helped to cement this view. It is also the place that has spawned some of the best British bands of all time, like Joy Division, New Order, The Smiths, Oasis and the recently reformed Stone Roses. It boasts English football's top two football clubs and is known for its rich and diverse communities.

On top of that with close to 100,000 students Manchester is the student capital of Europe.

That's why three youngsters who were Apprentices last season have just embarked on undergraduate courses at Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU).

Ben Dyson formerly of Stockport County, Daniel Hancock ex Rotherham Utd and Jordan Kay from Nottingham Forest all started degree programmes in September. The aim to come out with qualifications and experience that will hold up in an increasingly competitive graduate job market.

A recent survey highlighted the finance sector as one of the most popular areas for graduate job applications and Dyson who is studying for a BA (Hons) in Business Management is keen to try something completely different after his experience of football:

"I was injured quite a lot when I was at Stockport so I had already started to think what life might be like away from football," said Dyson.

"I think that with the difficulties that Stockport faced last year it would have been foolish for any player there to not consider what else was out there.

"It was an easy decision to come to MMU. The University has just spent £300,000 on a graduate incubator to help those looking to set-up their own businesses and plans for a new £75m Business School are well underway.

"Manchester is now the second largest financial and professional services centre in the UK after London so with the functional and analytical skills that I should develop on the course I'd like to think I'll be well prepared for the future."

While Dyson is hoping to plot a course into the Business world ex Rotherham Utd

goalkeeper Daniel Hancock has opted to navigate towards pursuing a career as a PE Teacher on the university's Cheshire campus.

"The course has started well," said Hancock, who like Dyson is taking a sabbatical from playing any football this year.

"I'm on a Sport & Exercise Science degree so we've done some VO2 max testing as well as working through units on physiology, anatomy and bio-mechanics.

"I had an idea in my mind that I would like to work in teaching and I thought this fitted with my existing skill set from football. MMU seemed a natural choice after reading about it on LFE's website and I was lucky enough to be given a place here."

Like Dyson and Hancock, Jordan Kay who was a right-back at Nottingham Forest is getting used to the idea of having a new vision for his future off the pitch.

He is enrolled on a BA (Hons) in Sports Marketing Management which seems tailor-made to give him an insight in to the ever expanding commercial aspects of sport.

"I've not 100 per cent pinned down exactly what I want to do after I graduate but I would still like to work in Sport," said Kay.

"I wasn't that interested in the coaching pathway so if I'm not going to be a player anymore this is the next best thing," he added.

Last year MMU was officially the most popular University in the UK. It attracted more applications for its courses through

UCAS than any other institution but despite the obvious competition to just get in, Phil Cook, the University's Sport and Marketing Manager, believes that ex Apprentices are well placed to benefit from Higher Education.

"A degree remains a good investment and is one of the best pathways to achieving a good job and rewarding career.

"The youngsters who come to us from football have a good work ethic already instilled in them and can compete academically with the students who have come from a mainstream Further Education background."

making a difference

Walsall is one of six football clubs to have taken part in pioneering diversity training workshops run by Kick It Out this season.

The project which started in earnest last April, at Sheffield Utd and Southampton has already received government backing in the form of a commendation by No 10, Downing Street Senior Broadcast Adviser Michael Salter. He was impressed by what he saw on a short film made by LFE to highlight the work that had started with Apprentice players.

As a result this initiative was widened this year to include 15 football clubs and approximately 270 Apprentices.

The workshops, which are designed to challenge stereotypes and the attitudes of young players have also taken place at Darlington, Gillingham, Ipswich Town, MK Dons and Stockport County. They have been met with a positive response no more so than at the Banks' Stadium.

Walsall Apprentice Arron Williams, said; "One thing that really stuck in my mind is how we might say things meant as banter but could really offend some people".

For his team-mate Mal Singh-Benning the day was particularly poignant; "I've twice suffered racism whilst playing football and I wasn't able to concentrate for the rest of the game. Things like that shouldn't be happening in this day and age. "The sessions will undoubtedly help to educate everyone involved in them and it is important that people learn how they can make a difference."

The workshop which is designed to be interactive is all the more engaging as it is led by Kick It Out's Earl Barrett, who has first-hand experience of being on the receiving end of racist taunts from his days as a player.

And while he admits that football has come a long way since he started out as a player the former England international who counts Manchester City, Oldham Athletic, Aston Villa, and Everton amongst his former clubs is pleased to front this work and continue Football's momentum in promoting social inclusion.



"We speak about discrimination, the language people use and certain barriers that still exist within the industry," said Barrett

"Football is a fantastic sport and its there for everybody, no matter what colour, creed, race or gender they might be.

"We can all do more - right across the board. I think its important people know that everyone involved in Kick it Out is working flat out to make people understand the benefits of equality and how we can all make a difference."



PFA OPENS NEW DOORS

Based in the historic city of York seven former footballers are aiming to write new chapters in their futures thanks to a partnership between The Professional Footballers Association (PFA) and York St John University (YSJ).

The PFA currently funds five places at YSJ each year for ex players wishing to study for a degree in Physiotherapy. In addition, Director of Education, Pat Lally and the University's Jill Wickham and Judy Purton have been able to help other former players gain admission to the course via the NHS bursary route.

Current undergraduates include Matt Fenney and Ryan Newton, both formerly of Doncaster Rovers, Lee Booth once of Leeds Utd and former Nottingham Forest man Andy Haskins.

And Fenney, credits his time on the treatment table at the Keepmoat Stadium as the inspiration behind his move into Higher Education;

"I was injured for 9 months when I was at Doncaster and during that time I became interested in anatomy, treatment and rehabilitation," he said.

"As a result when I was released I had an idea that this might be for me. When The PFA contacted me to say they might be able to get me on the course here, it was a no brainer."

Now a third year student at YSJ, Fenney is over the disappointment that past injuries caused him and is enjoying studying in what he describes as a 'beautiful old city'.

With Roman ruins strewn across the cobbled streets, the city is steeped in tradition

and its skyline is dominated by the impressive York Minster Cathedral. Renowned as a place of Christian worship, each November, The Minster transforms itself to host the University's graduation ceremonies. In attendance this year, were Liam Bartle (Bradford City) and Mark Devonshire (Barnsley), both celebrating upper second class honours degrees while Gary Butcher (Scunthorpe Utd) collected his lower second class degree.

With a new challenge on the horizon the ambition is to follow in the footsteps of other former players who have already made the metamorphosis from Footballer to Physiotherapist. They include the likes of Paul Teather, Nicky Reid, Gregg Blundell and Matt Radcliffe.

"I worked at Nottingham Forest in the summer with their Academy players to gain experience," said Devonshire.

"I've just got a position as the physiotherapist at Ilkeston Town so it's a great chance for me to work in this profession on a day-to-day basis."

Fellow graduate Bartle, is also on the career ladder after landing a job specialising in Musculoskeletal Physiotherapy at a private hospital.

"It's what I wanted to do," he said. "With my sporting background it works nicely and gives me the chance to get plenty of experience".

Like, Bartle, Butcher has also found employment in the private sector and he shares another thing in common with his peers, an affinity to The PFA.

"The PFA have been fantastic to me," he said.

"I don't know of any other union who can provide the support they do. Pat Lally and his team are magnificent.

"The funding they offer is the main reason that the three of us have got through the degree. Without the PFA this wouldn't have been possible - we all owe them a huge debt of gratitude."

For Lally seeing three young men make successes of their studies and move on after football encapsulates what his department is about:

"It's a tremendous achievement for the lads to come away with these degrees," said Lally.

"These results and others shows what we in the department have known for many years - footballers are more than capable of holding their own academically.

"The course at YSJ is flourishing. The staff and facilities are second to none and we are hopeful that our partnership can be extended to other subject areas in the future."



Image courtesy of Peter Byrne

ANALYSING AGER'S PERFORMANCE

Former Apprentice Charlie Ager spent two years at Crewe Alexandra keeping his eye on the ball, tracking his opponents and maintaining his shape in midfield.

This is a skill set that he is using to his advantage on the career ladder as a Performance Analyst.

Ager joined Alex as a 6 year-old primary school pupil and progressed all the way through the club's schoolboy sides to join the club as a full-time Apprentice in 2007. That was where his journey as a footballer ended and a new passage in his life began.

Twelve years after joining the Railwaymen he received the news that his time was up from then Manager Dario Gradi.

Rather than looking to bounce back through non-league the then 18-year-old decided to enter the world of academia by enrolling on a BSc (Hons) in Sport and Exercise Science at Liverpool John Moores University.

While the course focuses on subject areas that include physiology, psychology and biomechanics, Ager was keen to embrace one particular opportunity that came his way, namely the chance to work as a Performance Analysis intern at the Club he supported as a boy, Everton Football Club.

"I haven't played football at any level since because I just want to concentrate on my University work and my role at Everton so I can put more energy into my long-term career," he explained to LFE.

Ager is accountable for the pre-match, live match and post-match analysis at the Toffees from U9's up to Reserve Team level and it is a role he relishes. He continued;

"I work with the players and coaches to provide them with detailed feedback, that I create using software such as Prozone and Sportscode after filming training and matches".

Now striving to extend his knowledge and CV, the Liverpoolian is in the final year of his University degree and has already achieved Prozone Level 1, 2 and 3 qualifications.

Studying has become an expensive business which is why Ager turned to the PFA who have supported his tuition fees through the educational grant system.

"We are always pleased to offer our help to current or ex members of the Association," said PFA Director of Education, Pat Lally.

"We tell any player past or present just pick up the phone we will help you."

With Ager about to enrol on the LFE coordinated Level 4 Performance Analysis in Sport course, that assistance may be required once again but Ager believes he is working towards a tangible new career.

"Performance analysis has now been accepted as a must at professional football clubs at all age groups because it has been proven to make an impact on developing players and on-pitch results.

"The demand for qualified Performance Analysts is growing and especially with the new Elite Player Performance Plans it could be a requirement, so I am really excited about my future working in this role," he continued.

With his University graduation little over 8 months away, Ager has been concentrating on his route into a full-time job as Performance Analyst and with job interviews lined up at two Premier League clubs the analysis of his future looks bright.

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George Bowyer made his debut as a substitute for Rochdale as a first-year Apprentice in the final game of the 2007-08 season.

Unfortunately injury robbed him of the chance of adding to that tally in the play-offs and of having more than a passing interest when the team-sheet went up for the end of season League Two showpiece, Rochdale versus his home town club Stockport County at Wembley.

Rochdale lost out in that game, and while he didn't know it at the time, so did Bowyer. His chance had gone.

Despite being in and around Dale's first-team squad the following year he was destined to never play another minute of League football. With Manager Keith Hill eager to build a promotion winning side the time for bleeding untried youngsters had passed and Bowyer got the bullet at the end of the 2008-09 season.

Hill achieved the unthinkable dream 12 months later leading Rochdale out of English football's bottom tier for the first time in 36 years. Meanwhile two years after his departure from Spotland, Bowyer, who is working as an Administrator and playing semi professional football at Bamber Bridge could be forgiven for thinking about what might have been.

Thankfully if only's don't feature in this midfielder cum right-back's terminology.

"On leaving Rochdale there was a massive void but you just have to move on and do it quickly," said Bowyer.

"In my case that was working for Stockport's Football in the Community programme while playing local non-league football.

"You feel you have to carry on playing after putting in all those years of trying to become a professional.

"Non-League football is a totally different scenario though to what you're used to. In the first instance you notice that standards are below what you've aspired to before. There's a more laid back approach to things and you train once or twice a week in the evenings after work. There's an adjustment you have to make if you want to do well."

In three seasons as a non league player Bowyer has done well albeit at three different clubs. At his first, Ramsbottom Utd he earned the fans player of the season award before moving back down the M66 to Woodley. His impressive form for the Steelmen soon attracted the interest of Bamber Bridge and he moved on to the QED stadium to become one of three contracted players at Brig.

Away from the pitch Bowyer has made huge strides professionally after securing a full-time position working for The Professional Footballers Association. Initially brought in as temporary maternity cover to work on the organisations Kitbag contract he recently discovered that his role was to become permanent and is understandably delighted.

"The main area of my work has been dealing with Kitbag and Nike orders, sourcing kits, boots, medals and trophies for players and clubs. It was obviously different to what I was used to but I soon picked things up.

"I'd been here 8 months when I was told that I was going to be offered a full-time post and I was ecstatic because it's a great place to work.

"The people here are fantastic and I've already been asked to think about how I would like to develop professionally. Whether that's doing a degree or other training I'm not really sure yet but I know I will be looked after and encouraged."

The Bowyers Done Good