

Careers advice that delivers for the whole season

Whether you're an apprentice, tutor or part of a football club then U-Explore has the right move for you. Using rich, interactive media, U-Explore takes you behind the scenes of industry, helping to guide you down your career path.

For log on details please visit www.lfe.org.uk/progression/careers/u-explore

www.u-explore.com

Issue 17 - April 2012
News from
League Football Education

Words of Wisdom

Inside: Create Your Legacy

Club Focus : Barnet | Feature : Matt Holland

League
Football
Education

Matt's Message

Words of Wisdom to Apprentices Across the Nation



LFE was established by
The Football League
and the Professional
Footballers Association



Skills
Funding
Agency

Department for Business
Innovation & Skills



"It means the world to me and brings confidence and desire to achieve more in the game."

Gael Bigirimana



Gael Bigirimana



Nick Powell



Jordan Cousins



Football League Awards

Coventry City's Gael Bigirimana, Charlton Athletic's Jordan Cousins and Crewe Alexandra's Nick Powell were crowned as 'Apprentice of the Year' for their respective divisions at last month's Football League Awards.

Bigirimana took the Championship title ahead of Jonathan Williams (Crystal Palace) and Jordan Obita (Reading).

The midfielder who made his first-team debut in August has become a cult figure for fans at the Ricoh Arena and has made over 20 appearances for the Sky Blues. Off the pitch he is on track

to achieve his educational targets, having undertaken additional sessions because of his first team commitments.

Bigirimana said: "It means the world to me and brings confidence and desire to achieve more in the game.

"I need to thank the Academy staff at Coventry and my team-mates for making me the player that I am today."

Cousins pipped Matt Crooks (Huddersfield Town) and Doyle Middleton (Preston North End) to the League One award. In League Two Crewe Alexandra's hot property Nick Powell fended off the challenge of Miles Storey (Swindon Town) and Daniel Banister (Northampton Town).

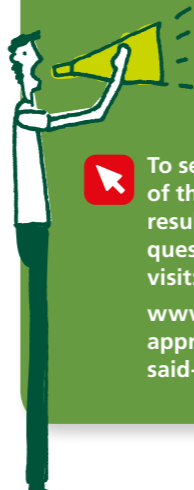
You Said: We Did

Feedback from the Sporting Chance visits to Clubs and NVQ Standardisation Meetings has hailed both as 'Outstanding'.

The lifestyle awareness and educational programme delivered by Sporting Chance, which is now in its third full year, took in 37 clubs covering almost 600 young players.

Apprentices up and down the land gave the sessions a big thumbs-up, commenting on the poignancy and powerful nature of the 90 minute workshop before grading it as 'Outstanding' across all areas.

The NVQ Standardisation Meetings were similarly well received with the majority of scores to questions sitting in the 'Good' or 'Outstanding' category.



To see a full summary of these reports and results from previous questionnaires please visit:
www.lfe.org.uk/apprentice-info/you-said-we-did



Burnley's Youth Cup Challenge

Burnley's FA Youth Cup dreams were shattered at the penultimate hurdle as they fell to a 3-1 semi-final defeat to Lancashire rivals Blackburn Rovers.

Youth Team Coach Terry Pashley had hoped to emulate the success of the club's famous youth cup winning side of 1968 but despite their best efforts to overcome a 1-0 first leg deficit, the Clarets slid to a 2-1 home reverse in front of over 10,000 spectators.

A remarkable journey saw Burnley dispose of Boston United, Ipswich Town, West Bromwich Albion and Fulham scoring 16 goals along the way and giving Pashley's men a lot to reflect on.

Midfield man Steven Hewitt, tweeted; "I would like to thank all of the fans that came out & supported us!! You were great!! Never stopped singing!! #greatsupport"

Irish forward Shay McCartan, added: "Thanks for all the support everyone, the fans were brilliant, although we got beat it's an experience I will never forget."

Blackburn will now face Chelsea or last year's winners Manchester United in the final of youth football's most prestigious competition. Chelsea will take a 2-1 advantage to Stamford Bridge on 13 April after winning the first-leg at Old Trafford last month.



In happier times Burnley celebrate at Fulham





Got a story? Want to share news with other LFE partners? email: ssutcliffe@lfe.org.uk



Youth Alliance & Academy Round up

With the end of the season closing in Hull City have opened up a six point lead over second placed Hartlepool United in the North East Conference.

In the South West Conference it's a much tighter affair with Exeter City, Swindon Town and Plymouth Argyle all on 33 points.

Elsewhere, Preston North End are heading up the North West Conference league. However, local rivals Burnley trail just two points behind them with two games in hand.

Meanwhile in the South East, Barnet, Brighton & Hove Albion, Southend United, QPR and Millwall are all vying for first place. With just three points separating the top five there could be a dramatic climax to the season.

In Academy League A Southampton and West Ham United still have a way to go to reach Arsenal who have a four point lead.

Leicester City, Reading and Coventry City are currently heading up Academy League B, while Crewe Alexandra's U18's have had it tough in League C.

Finally Leeds United will have their work cut out to chase down a Newcastle Utd side with a six point advantage in League D.

Bradley Dack (Gillingham) is holding the leading goal scorer title so far with 16 goals in the Youth Alliance and Dominic Samuel (Reading) is still top of the Academy League scorers with 17 goals.

YOUTH ALLIANCE					
	Team	P	W	GD	PTS
YA NW	1 Preston North End	20	15	29	47
	2 Burnley	18	15	23	45
	3 Walsall	19	13	36	44
YA NE	1 Hull City	19	15	32	46
	2 Hartlepool United	20	12	20	40
	3 Darlington	20	12	8	39
YA SW	1 Exeter City	17	9	27	33
	2 Swindon Town	17	10	16	33
	3 Plymouth Argyle	16	10	15	33
YA SE	1 Southend United	23	12	18	41
	2 Barnet	21	13	22	40
	3 Brighton & Hove Albion	19	12	25	39
ACADEMY LEAGUE					
	Team	P	W	GD	PTS
ACAD A	1 Arsenal	26	15	17	48
	2 Southampton	25	12	23	44
	3 West Ham United	26	13	10	43
ACAD B	1 Leicester City	24	15	22	50
	2 Reading	23	14	30	48
	3 Coventry City	23	14	18	47
ACAD C	1 Manchester City	24	16	23	51
	2 Blackburn Rovers	24	14	13	46
	3 Liverpool	24	13	15	45
ACAD D	1 Newcastle United	22	14	20	46
	2 Leeds United	22	12	17	40
	3 Derby County	25	11	12	38

(All information correct at time of writing.)

Leonardo Update

Pre-season preparations for Cheltenham Town, Derby County and Oldham Athletic will include a trip to Holland courtesy of LFE.

Apprentices will get the chance to sample a different football philosophy in the two week tour which should broaden personal and professional horizons.

As well as playing friendlies against continental opposition, some of Holland's top coaches will lend their nous to training sessions at state-of-the-art facilities.



Mainland Europe is already a temporary home for seven former Apprentices on LFE's player placement programme. Thomas Lang (Torquay United), Jack Davies (Lincoln City), James Brown (Gillingham), Connor Roberts (Tranmere Rovers) and Dan Bolwell (Brighton & Hove Albion) are enjoying a 19 week taste of Spanish football at Xerez CD and Racing Club Portuense.

Across in Sweden, Jamie Hopcutt (ex-York City) has been offered a professional deal after impressing in a similar arrangement at Ostersund FK. He heads to Scandinavia on a full-time basis later this month.

Dan wins the Mike Johnson Award

The winner of this year's Mike Johnson Memorial Award is former Darlington Apprentice Dan Burn.

Burn who made the switch to Fulham last summer on a three-year deal made 14 first-team appearances for 'Darlo' during two-years there as an Apprentice. During that time he excelled educationally particularly on his NVQ. His receipt of the Award, to acknowledge the best Apprentice NVQ portfolio, coincided with Darlington's well publicised financial problems coming to a head. And the youngster, who is now living in a trendy area of West London, was so dismayed by the plight of his former club that he made an undisclosed donation to the 'Darlo Uncovered Fighting Fund'.

"It's been horrible to see what's happened at Darlo," said Burn. "Obviously I've got a lot of friends there so I've kept in touch with what's been happening. I felt it was right to pass on this money knowing that it will go towards helping some of those players."





Coaching Success at Charlton

On a cold Wednesday morning at their New Eltham training ground, Charlton Athletic's Apprentices spent a day helping each other get through the Final Assessment of their Level 2 Coaching Certificate.

Having spent the last few months coaching at the Club's Academy and learning from PFA Coach Phil Church, the challenge was to now show that they too had acquired the skills to lead a variety of different sessions.

Once first-team veteran Jason Euell had been put through his paces taking charge of a finishing practice (which he passed) it was over to centre-back Harry Osbourne to lead the group through a defensive drill focussed on delaying and jockeying attackers.

Assessor Mark Newcombe, who also coaches at Crystal Palace's Academy, was looking for Harry and the rest of the Charlton lads to stop their sessions and give information as well as demonstrations when needed, to highlight what they wanted from their team-mates.

"It's a challenge for the boys to coach their peers and it can be a problem," admitted Newcombe.

"We know the lads know the game but they need to bring the information out. They have to paint a picture so players know what's required. At this age, shyness is a major challenge."

Newcombe was happy with Osbourne's efforts and passed him. Midfielder Bradley Jordan was up next and as he got started, Osbourne spoke about his success.

"It went okay - better than I thought it would. The hardest thing is controlling the lads. It's easier coaching the young kids in the Academy as they're more enthusiastic and listen more."

Charlton Education and Welfare Officer, Joe Francis, has overseen the boys' placements this term and sees the fruits of their labour.

"This year we've got the lads paired up with an Academy coach each so that they can work with the younger age groups at night. They've done six sessions with the kids and loved it. George Howard is working with goalkeepers in the Academy and is now going to do his Goalkeeping badges."

PFA Regional Coach, Phil Church, who worked at West Ham Utd before taking up his role at the players union, added:

"Clubs do the coaching award in different degrees but the ones that schedule sessions with their academies or centres of excellence get the most out of it."

"About 90 per cent of the Apprentices pass first time – those that fail tend to fail because they haven't gained enough coaching experience. They haven't done the hours."

With several former Apprentices now working as coaches, Francis sees the benefits of the system;

"Four of the last seven lads we released are now coaching for a living. Alex Stavrinou is playing at Ebbsfleet but coaching in the daytime, Ben Davisson is coaching on Friday nights at a Coerver centre at Tunbridge, and Sam Long has his own coaching business."



"The lads were brilliant, they took in all the information and were genuinely interested in what they heard. They were a credit to their Club, its supporters and the League.

Phil Stant
The Football League

County lads pay respects

Notts County's youth-team have been to Northern France on a team bonding outing that carried real significance courtesy of League Football Education's Development Fund.

The four day trip saw County's Head of Youth, Mick Leonard lead his charges through the Somme alongside Phil Stant of The Football League Trust who acted as a tour-guide.

The expedition marked a return for Leonard and Stant, to the scene of the Footballers' Battalions monument which was unveiled two years ago by The Football League Chairman Greg Clarke, as a permanent memorial to the men of the 17th and 23rd Middlesex Regiments who lost their lives during the First World War.

Based in the historic town of Albert at the heart of the Somme battlefields, the Magpies youth squad took in the site of former trenches, local museums and the point where nearly 250 men of the Devonshire Regiment were cut down in less than five minutes.

"The boys behaved impeccably throughout," said Leonard, who made over 250 appearances in County colours between 1979 and 1989. "Not many of them will have been to places where battles would have taken place and it all puts everything into perspective."



"We are back to business now but the guys are all revitalised. It's been nice to get away from football for a short while and it has done everyone good."

The visit to the scene of so much destruction was particularly poignant to the Apprentices present who prior to the trip were

devastated by the loss of their Education Officer Jim King. King sadly passed away a month before the County lads crossed the channel and just one-day after he had taken the whole youth-team to the cinema to watch 'War Horse' in preparation for their expedition.

"Jim was a great guy so we felt it was only right to pay our respects to him while we were away," said youth-team skipper Jake Wholey.

"As a group of players we all appreciate everything he did for us. He always thought about others first and we're all still feeling a little lost without him.

"He was respected in equal measure on either side of the Trent after working at Forest for so long and we all hope we can make him proud by what we do as footballers and in life."



Planning for the Future

TWO VENUES, 1000 ATTENDEES, OVER 40 EXHIBITORS, A DOZEN OLYMPIANS AND AN ENGLISHMAN, AN IRISHMAN AND A WELSHMAN - THAT WAS CREATE YOUR LEGACY 2012.



"Employers love the determination of sports people. Make the most of the skills you already have - like communicating with teammates, respecting others and good timekeeping. All those are things you'll need in the rest of your life. Pick your strengths and decide what to use them for." Dame Kelly Holmes



CREATE YOUR LEGACY



www.createyourlegacy.co.uk
 Create-Your-Legacy



"There's so many people here that can help players whether they stay in football or not and have a positive impact on their futures."
 Matt Holland

Dame Kelly Holmes and several other British Olympians were among the 11 world-class British sports people who personally challenged young elite athletes to start planning for life after sport at Create Your Legacy last month.

Speaking at the careers event held by League Football Education (LFE) in conjunction with The Dame Kelly Holmes (DKH) Legacy Trust, Dame Kelly told football apprentices and other young sports stars attending: "Fundamentally, we want you to be the best you can be, but, on the side, you have to think 'What if?' Don't ever, ever give up on your dream - it took me 20 years to realise mine. And give it the best you can, so you don't have to live with regrets later."

Advising them on what to do when they leave full-time sport, Dame Kelly added: "You have to look inside yourself and decide what you want to do, what it is that you want.

"I originally went in to the Army and was a Physical Training Instructor - that was my first dream job and I'm glad I went for it. I then went back to running and my goal was always to win an Olympic gold medal so I've been lucky because I fulfilled both my dreams.

"I'm now working on a full-time basis so I've had to re-adjust my sights and the next thing for me is to become a successful business woman so I've already set my own goals around that. It's important that anyone coming away from sport does the same. If you've been an elite sportsperson you have an advantage."

Her views were endorsed by Swimmer Ross Davenport who is taking part in this summer's Olympic Games in the 200m freestyle relay.

The 27-year-old told a packed audience that while he can't wait to swim on home soil at London 2012,

in what will be his third games - the reality is that he will have move into employment just weeks after the competition ends.

"I'm really lucky to be swimming at the games in July but I'm not like a Premier League footballer who can take plenty of time out to think what's going to be next," said Davenport.

"I'm going to be faced with the real dilemma that I need to be in a job come September. Financially I can't afford not to be but I've already set some wheels in motion - there's still the chance I could swim next year but I've also got a plan b in mind just in case I don't do that.

"The one certainty that faces every athlete in all sports is that you can't go on forever, so whether you've been released by a club, retired through injury or come to the end of your career the most important thing is to plan for your future life."



"It's a fantastic event, when I was a young player coming through the ranks at West Ham something like this wasn't around," Matt Holland



FOOTBALLING TRIO HAIL CREATE YOUR LEGACY

Footballing trio Brian Deane, Kevin Ratcliffe and Matt Holland have hailed Create Your Legacy after they each gave up a day to speak at the annual careers events held in Manchester and Reading.

"It's a fantastic event, when I was a young player coming through the ranks at West Ham something like this wasn't around," said Former Ipswich Town and Charlton Athletic star Matt Holland. "It's very important because there are players here that will go on to have a career, but there's a lot who will fall by the wayside."

Former Everton & Wales Captain Ratcliffe was also quick to pick up on the number of opportunities available via the exhibitors on show. "It was great to see so many lads chatting to exhibitors.

"Some might feel a little nervous about doing it especially when they're in a group or with team-mates in case they get a bit of stick or get ribbed about it but it's important to go and have those conversations about things that interest you.

"At the end of the day by the time you're 25 or 26 you'll be the one that's benefitting from it and they won't."

Ex Sheffield Utd and Leeds Utd forward Brian Deane added; "If I'd have known more about what was out there it would have definitely helped me when I was reaching the end of my career. You can spend a year or two drifting without a real plan so this sort of day is wholly underrated because whilst it might not be glamorous or headline stuff to many it's essential really."



No regrets for Holland

Have 'No regrets', is Matt Holland's message to Apprentice players up and down the country who have hopes of establishing themselves in the professional game.

The former Ipswich Town and Charlton Athletic star who was capped by the Republic of Ireland on 49 occasions spoke exclusively to Touchline last month and gave his views on what it takes to get to the top, what to do if it doesn't quite work out and his new life as a media pundit.

Known as a whole-hearted box to box midfielder in the same mould as his hero Bryan Robson, Holland's career in football initially didn't go as planned. Rejected by Arsenal as a schoolboy for being too small, Bury born Holland began his career at West Ham United but in his five years at Upton Park he didn't register a single appearance for the club.

In fact it wasn't until he left the Boleyn Ground for Dean Court, Bournemouth, in 1995, that his career started to move on an upward spiral.

Named the Cherries Player of the Year in 1996, Holland was soon attracting the attention of bigger clubs and Ipswich Town swooped for his services in 1997.

Speaking about his development, he was quick to single out one key factor in particular that he feels got him through the tough times and laid the foundations for his 17 year career - 'Commitment'.

"Have the right attitude and be the best you can possibly be every single day in training or whatever else you do," said Holland. "One of my former team-mates at West Ham who's still a good friend, used to go out in the week and not always give everything he had. He now looks back and thinks about what might have been. The key to success in any walk of life is being committed."

"Have no regrets. Be on time to work and put 100 per cent into everything you do. There's no point later in life thinking back about something you could've done better that might have made a difference."

That mentality certainly served the effervescent Holland well. Named as captain at Portman Road he led the Tractor Boys into the top flight in 2000 and helped them into European competition after a top five finish in the Premier League the following year.

In 2003 he was on the move again, this time to South London and Charlton where he became a firm fans favourite in a seven year stint that ended with his retirement in 2009.

"I've lived the dream," continued Holland, "I wanted to be a professional footballer and I was fortunate enough to do that. I've experienced highs and lows but you have to have determination and bounce back from any set back and always do your best."

The one contradiction in his thinking might be the 2002 World Cup where the joy of scoring a screamer in Ireland's opener against Cameroon quickly turned to despair in the second round when he was one of three Irish players to miss in a penalty shoot-out defeat to Spain.

While that drama was played out in front of the world on television, Holland has become accustomed to the spotlight in recent years, presenting and summarising on a variety of Football shows including BBC Late Kick Off (East), Match of the Day and Final Score.

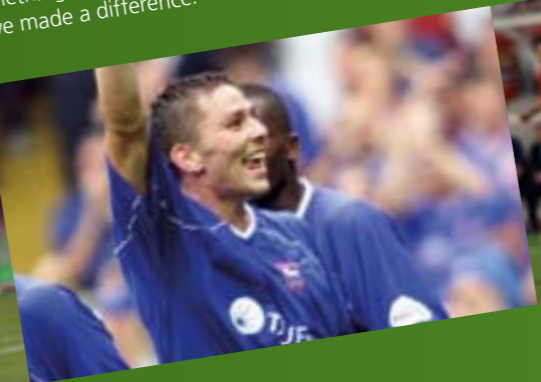
"In my late 20s I started doing commentaries and more and more media work, I got my coaching badges and I wanted to leave as many doors open as possible in terms of what I might fall into after playing," said Holland.

"I'm one of the lucky ones because I've had a long career when the average is something like 7 - 8 years but I was conscious that as time passed by I needed to think about what was next."

"Football was my passion and I'm still involved in it through the media work by going along to games or working on shows and I love doing that. I think it's very important that to enjoy what you're doing because if you don't it's probably not for you."



PROFILE : MATT HOLLAND





Barnet Buzzing at Hive

When the clocks went back in November, Barnet Under-18s were struggling through another season in the Football League Youth Alliance. In four years in the competition they had been seen as the basement-dwellers, if not the whipping boys of the South East Division, fighting to avoid the wooden spoon and rarely winning more than a handful of games all season. This season looked like more of the same. And then winter came – and everything changed.

On 10 December last year, Barnet thrashed Wycombe, 6-1. A week later they did a similar job on Brentford, winning 5-1. Their first game back after Christmas saw them beat Dagenham & Redbridge 4-2. A week later they put another four past Peterborough.

And on 4 February, when most of England was covered in ice and snow, Barnet were the only club in the division able to stage a game; they hammered Wimbledon 7-1 on the 3G pitch at The Hive.

The goals kept flowing; four against Luton, three against high-flying Gillingham and then a narrow 2-1 win over title-chasing Southend. Jeremy Steele's side had hit an extraordinary 35 goals in eight league games, conceding just seven along the way!

The major difference has been the strikeforce of first year apprentices George Sykes and Jamal Lowe – who scored 10 and 11 goals respectively in that eight game blast – with second-year playmaker Luke Gambin chipping in five of his own.

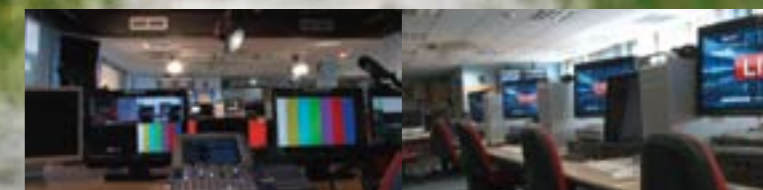
The giant Sykes – a Peter Crouch-like figure from Essex – and local lad Lowe both played quite a few games for the Under-18s last year and that experience seems to have given them a major leg-up. Second-year scholar Gambin, a highly-skilful, short and stocky forward from Merton, has unpicked defences with his left-foot to trigger Sykes' and Lowe's goal glut.

Coach Steele, who previously worked with Chelsea, Wimbledon and Portsmouth, is repeating the formula from last year and giving opportunities to several players who have been offered apprenticeships for next season, such as former Tottenham Under-16 player Tanasheh Abrahams and England Schoolboys international Tom Fouhy, while his second years learn about senior football.

Left-back Elliott Johnson trains every day with the first team and awaits his league debut, striker Kieran Weekes and centre-back Callum Adebiji have been on loan to Ryman League side Ware – Adebiji returning to play left-back for the Bees, and midfielder Neil Johnson has enjoyed an extended spell with Enfield Town at their new stadium. Jordan Fincher is recovering from a long-term injury at Chesham United.

The astonishing run came to an end on 10 March when Millwall beat Barnet 3-1 but the Bees immediately buzzed again, clocking up two more wins as we went to press to go second in the table.

Coach Steele is giving opportunities to several players, such as former Tottenham Under-16 player Tanasheh Abrahams and England Schoolboys international Tom Fouhy



Media Awareness successfully piloted

Barnet have also been leading the way in another area as their apprentices have piloted the Media Awareness unit for LFE. They have worked through five tasks over the last few weeks, learning about how the media works, a footballer's role in the media, what can be expected of you as a player when dealing with the press and public, and training on their interview techniques.

The Bees have worked with NVQ Assessor Dan Manzi, Regional Officer Gavin Willacy, and club media officer Adam Goldsmith to prepare themselves to interview first team players in April. "The media unit has been a great benefit for the lads as it teaches them all about the press and helps them understand the different demands on professional players from newspapers, TV, radio and websites," explained Manzi. "We are also trying to give them a flavour of what it is like the other side of the microphone, showing them how to interview each other. If that leads to one of the lads pursuing a career in sports journalism at some stage then that would be great."



PLAY & TRAIN IN THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY



Oakland University Assistant Coach Andy Wagstaff explains why studying in the USA is now an attractive proposition for released Apprentices.

"It's the lifestyle and the opportunity to live overseas," says a straight to the point Wagstaff when recently asked why so many players now seem keen to pursue a scholarship at an American University.

As someone who has been through the trials and tribulations of being an Apprentice player Wagstaff has been there and bought the tee-shirt. Discarded by Bury as an 18-year-old, the affable Lancastrian is living proof that as one door closes another opens. After leaving Gigg Lane, Wagstaff went on trial at a host of Football League clubs before accepting a scholarship at Oakland and he hasn't looked back.

In his four years as a student-athlete Wagstaff led the Golden Grizzlies to a national semi-final, made an appearance in the NCAA Championship game and was named in the All-Midwest Regional team.



FEATURE : USA SCHOLARSHIP

After graduating with a degree in Psychology in 1994 he went on to play professionally for the Detroit Neon, Detroit Rockers and Michigan Bucks before more recently turning his hand to coaching.

With the number of former Apprentice players in the States on the up again thanks in part to a relaxation of NCAA rules, Wagstaff, a recent guest at Create Your Legacy (CYL) was inundated by players keen to know more about life in America. "I was really overwhelmed at CYL. My aim was to try and help each and every lad I spoke to in terms of what they need to do next if they're serious about getting over to the States."

"The important thing for many of them will be to be responsive. When I say that I mean if a player doesn't get a pro deal here he can't afford to sit and wallow for too long – he'll miss the boat. Start making contact with Head Coaches at Universities, register for and take the SAT test and get hold of match footage so that you have something to show coaches."

With this type of first-hand knowledge of the system it's little wonder that Wagstaff proved a hit with Apprentices at CYL.

"It probably helps that I'm English and I know the system over here having been through it – the dream died for me when Bury let me go but it's not the end of the world. You don't have to be in England to play football. I ended

up going over to the US about 20 years ago on a scholarship – I've played pro over there and the world doesn't end just because you're not playing in England. The lifestyle, facilities and growing popularity of football or soccer as it's called in the US means everything is geared up to provide the perfect contingency for released Apprentices."

The last two years has seen over 30 players leave Football League clubs to cross the Atlantic and embark on a new journey and according to LFE's Alumni Liaison Officer Simon Williams that trend looks set to continue:

"The word has spread and more and more players have enquired about the USA even earlier this season. This gives them the time to plan, prepare and find a scholarship before the summer so I expect to see a continued growth in this area, especially with the cost of study in the UK increasing."



Assessment Trials

The next chance for players to showcase their talents in front of USA University Head Coaches will be at LFE's Assessment Trials next month:

- 3 May 2012 North Hyde FC
- 8 May 2012 South Staines Town FC
- 9 May 2012 Midlands Walsall FC
- 10 May 2012 Midlands Loughborough University



In collaboration with The PFA and The Football League

Gez is making headlines

Gez Mulholland is determined to write some new headlines for himself after starting a Sports Journalism degree at Staffordshire University.



The former West Bromwich Albion defender who has been capped at youth level by Northern Ireland left the Hawthorns last summer at the end of his two-year Apprenticeship. While some youngsters ponder what to do after full-time football, Mulholland had, during his time as a Baggie, started to develop a keen interest in the media side of the game.

"I was in the press box on match-days helping out the club's media department from time to time and I started to realise that this might be for me," said Mulholland.

"While I was at Albion I got to know Mitch Pryce, a respected senior football producer who also heads up the Sports Journalism course at Staffs. After speaking to him I decided to apply for the course and was lucky enough to be accepted.

"I think it helps that I've obviously been at a club as I have industry experience that is probably way ahead of other people my age that said I don't think the University would've treated my application as seriously if I hadn't been able to demonstrate that I was hard working and had passed my BTEC with a triple distinction," added Mulholland.

"Gez is a model student and takes a professional attitude to his work," enthused Course Leader, Pryce.

"Coming from a football background has been a help to him but he is now committed to learning new skills that should equip him for a career in the media," he added.

While his journey from Halfords Lane to College Road, Stoke-on-Trent may be little over forty miles, Mulholland does admit to missing life at the Hawthorns even if he feels well settled at the University.

"You miss football because it's been part of your life and daily routine for a period of time," said the budding Journalist.

"That said it hasn't exactly been hard to slip into the student lifestyle and it's helped that I had the period from the end of the season in May to starting here in September to adjust myself to what was coming."

"The course here is going well and you can't help but learn from people like Mitch (Pryce) and Pete Brookes who have been there and done it. Those guys command respect and it's easy to learn from them."



With his studies moving in the right direction the 19 year-old full-back's next task it to start enjoying his football again after enduring an injury hit campaign – his first in non-league:

"I broke my arm in my first game for Sutton Coldfield Town so the season hasn't panned out as I would've planned. I've been on loan at Kidsgrove Athletic so I've been able to get some games and it's just a case of playing catch-up and building my match fitness now."



Check out the LFE team online

Keep up to date with all the action from League Football Education. From the latest news and results on twitter and facebook, goal clips on YouTube to all the information you need at www.lfe.org.uk.



LFEonline



LFEonline



www.lfe.org.uk



LFEonlineTV

© 2012 League Football Education www.lfe.org.uk Designed by ICG www.icgonline.co.uk

Duffy earns his stripes



“The facilities, the way you’re treated, the sponsorships and the travel arrangements to matches etc all mimic what it’s like to be a pro in England but you’ve got to know it’s for you.”

Luke Duffy was welcomed to Doncaster Rovers by Head of Youth Paul Wilson in the summer of 2006 as a fresh faced 16-year-old who had joined the club straight from school.

Little did he know that some six years later he would be acting in a similar capacity as the Assistant Coach at Lenoir-Rhyne University. In between of course his own football ambitions have been modified as much by fate as by design. A centre-back by trade his 5ft 10 stature did him little favours with the Rovers management - with few defenders these days falling below the seemingly compulsory 6ft height mark. In addition with no reserve team football on offer (because the club didn’t have one) there was little chance for the then 18-year-old to show that his talents could transfer from youth to senior football. “I think my height and my style of play probably went against me a bit,” said Duffy.

“Both Dave Penney and Sean O’Driscoll were probably looking for someone a bit more robust in League One whereas I tended to cover in behind a lot more and let my taller defensive partner go and win headers.” “Having no Reserve Team meant there was nowhere to go and I think that Managers tend to look at the gulf between youth and first-team football and make a judgement on if they can afford to take a chance on someone – maybe with a striker there’s a lot less to lose but as a defender there’s an obvious reluctance.” The Wakefield lad wasn’t that surprised when he was shown the exit door and quickly re-focused his energies after a chat with LFE Regional Officer Paul Bartlett.

He continued; “I told Paul that I wanted to go to the States and he was able to, through his contacts, arrange for someone from Lees McRae to come and watch me play. The rest’s history - I’ve now got a degree in Sports Science and am enrolled to start a Masters Degree in the fall at the same time I start at Lenoir-Rhyne. Both will serve me well if I ever decide to come back to the UK and try to get into PE Teaching. “If you’d told me 6 years ago that I’d be where I am now I wouldn’t have believed you.” Since moving to the States things have gone better than belief for Duffy. A string of personal and team accolades was a feature of his time at Lees McRae and he helped semi-pro outfit West Virginia Chaos to their

most successful season ever last year. He’s also been ramping up his coaching experience with Premier UK Soccer which counts former Manchester Utd and Blackburn Rovers man John Curtis amongst its staff. However while his American dream has gone to plan he offers a word of warning to anyone who thinks that going out to the States is a ‘jolly-up’. “There are some good players here and the Universities have big enough budgets to be able to recruit players



from all over the world so if you come over here and act the superstar because you’ve been at a club it won’t wash. “The facilities, the way you’re treated, the sponsorships and the travel arrangements to matches etc all mimic what it’s like to be a pro in England but you’ve got to know it’s for you. “I had the added advantage of being at an NCAA Division Two College that had three or four other English players which helped enormously. Without that I’m not so sure I would’ve stuck it out because there’s a big difference in culture and attitude between your 18-year-old English lad and American lads of the same age.”