

Timeline

Inside: GOTM | CYL Gallery | Ollie Marland | Carel Tiofack



A Lasting Legacy

Assessment Trials 2013

This year's Assessment Trials will be taking place in May at four venues across the country. Showcasing the talents of 250 players in front of scouts from the UK and abroad, the trials are open to apprentice players and first-year professionals.

Venues and Dates

- Thursday 2 May 2013 Rochdale AFC
- Tuesday 7 May 2013 Staines Town FC
- Wednesday 8 May 2013 St George's Park, Burton-upon-Trent
- Thursday 9 May 2013 St George's Park, Burton-upon-Trent



GOAL OF THE MONTH



LFE's Goal of the Month competition has proved as popular as ever with the public. So far this season 50,000 votes have been registered against the 57 goals featured.

However, there is still one last chance to vote and crucially it is to determine the Goal of the Season Award from the existing monthly winners. So don't delay, visit www.lfe.org.uk/goal-of-the-month and give one of your peers the ultimate accolade by registering your vote.

www.lfe.org.uk LFEonlineTV

Youth Alliance & Premier U18 Leagues

At the time of going to print the under 18 leagues had entered the final furlong of a long season.

In the North West Youth Alliance Wrexham top the table and look to have an unassailable lead over Preston North End with only two fixtures remaining.

Doncaster Rovers top the North East League but with Hull City only trailing by a point and crucially holding a game in hand, will Rovers be able to hold on to their lead and finish the season as champions?

In the South West Oxford United top the table but Bristol Rovers have the chance to leapfrog the U's if they can win an all important game in hand.

Meanwhile Leyton Orient lead the way in the South East, five points clear of second placed Luton Town and they look certain to take the title this season.

In the Premier U18 Leagues the three national groups entered Phase Two after the Christmas break when the groups were re-jigged.

The new Elite Group scooped up the top three clubs from National Group 1 and the top two clubs from National Group 2 and National Group 3, plus the best 3rd placed club from either National Group 2 or National Group 3.

Group 1 was formed from the remaining 3rd placed club from National Group 2 or National Group 3, plus the 4th and 5th placed clubs from National Group 1, National Group 2 and National Group 3. Group 2 is formed of the 6th and 7th placed

clubs from National Group 1, National Group 2 and National Group 3, plus the 8th placed club from National Group 1.

If you're not confused by now it boils down to five clubs reaching the final stages in May to decide the eventual champions of the Barclays U18 Premier League.

The five involved will be the top three clubs from the Elite Group and the winners of Group 1 and Group 2, who will face a play-off to determine who reaches the last four. It is then a straight knock-out.

In the U18 PDL League Two North, Leeds United look set to top the table with an 11 point lead over second placed Nottingham Forest. In the South, London rivals, QPR and Charlton are battling to finish top of the pile.



Fantasy Football Update



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

Bury's Tom Pratt is edging ahead in the race to win LFE's Fantasy Football Competition, a resource designed to help Apprentices complete their Level 3 NVQ Diploma.

At the time of writing, Pratt has made the most of his £10m budget and leads Hull City's Education Officer Matt Murphy and Rotherham's Connor Johnson by 6 points.

Peterborough's Matt Carter sits 20 points back. And with only a handful of games left in the Championship season, Pratt must feel he is closing in on the top prize of £250 though sixth placed Joe Cracknell will be keen not to relinquish his crown. To keep track of the competition visit:

www.fantasy-football-league.co.uk

	Manager	Team Name	Goals	Assists	Pts
1	Tom Pratt	Prickett's Rocket	91	45	533
2	Matt Murphy	FC Murph	96	41	527
3	Connor Johnson	Ivory Toast	95	46	527
4	Matt Carter	The Hammers	91	51	513
5	Reece Lucas	Lucas 11	81	55	511
6	Joe Cracknell	Dream Team!	91	45	507
7	Jake McCarthy	Ivory Toast	86	48	504
8	Dan Andrew	Soldier	92	46	502
9	Matthew Tebbutt	Reigate Rovers	81	52	499
10	Liam Triggs	The	102	43	493

Development Fund Update

Clubs have until 31st May 2013 to submit all paperwork relating to Development Fund claims to LFE's HQ in Preston.

To date 26 clubs have made successful claims for funding. However, 50 clubs still need to submit paperwork before the final deadline in order to fully complete the claim process.

Examples of equipment purchased include: video analysis software, video cameras and equipment, heart rate monitors, smart board, iPads, laptops, laptop charging trolley / storage case, portable projector, defibrillator, first aid kit and spinal board, athletic development programme and team building activities.

For more information and to download a claim form please visit:

www.lfe.org.uk/about/development-fund



Troy Townsend, the father of Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Andros has picked up where Earl Barrett left off delivering Kick It Out's diversity training session to apprentice players.



Townsend has visited Millwall, Bristol Rovers, Bristol City, Luton Town, Leyton Orient and Notts County already this season while Coventry City are another club set to benefit from the training before the end of this term.

"It's about raising understanding and awareness around the issues as well as making all the lads realise that they are

role models to someone whether they think they are or not," said Townsend.

"The sessions provoke debate and the lads have generally shown themselves to be a knowledgeable bunch."





Barnet's George Sykes was the deserving winner of LFE Apprentice of the Year for League Two at the Football League Awards this year.



GEORGE SYKES

At 6ft 5in tall, Sykes is easily-recognised in the PDL Under-18 League South, but it is a combination of his goal-scoring prowess and link play that has made him so invaluable for the Bees this season.

Sykes, who hails from North Weald in Essex, joined Barnet when he was 15 and played regularly in the Under-18s when he was in his final year at Bishops Stortford High School.

Last season he became the Football League Youth Alliance top goal-scorer as he combined with Jamal Lowe and Luke Gambin to form a lethal attack that took perennial strugglers Barnet to within a whisker of winning the FLYA South-East Division title. All three have since made their Football League debuts, with George making three substitute appearances as Touchline went to press, after first making the bench against

Championship opposition in the form of Birmingham City in the Capital One Cup.

Now in his third season of playing within a professional environment, Sykes has enjoyed a number of different experiences - leading the line for Barnet as they have struggled to compete in the Category Two competition and gaining further know-how playing for the Under-21s against the likes of Millwall, Brighton, Swansea and Cardiff.

He also trained with Scotland Under-19s last autumn and earned a two-year professional contract with Edgar Davids' squad last November. The challenge now is to become a regular first-teamer next season at Barnet's new stadium at The Hive training ground.

Alongside his impressive football career, the youngster has completed his NVQ and passed his FA Coaching Certificate. He has

also achieved a BTEC Diploma with double distinctions and while the season officially comes to an end on Saturday 27 April, Sykes will still be working hard with the support of the staff at Stanmore College to complete an additional 6 units in order to gain the Extended Diploma with a hat-trick of distinctions.

"George is a fantastic example to all young players, that ability coupled with hard work means that you can achieve great things," said James Thorne, Barnet's Academy Manager.

"He is a credit to himself, his family, the club and the academy. George continues to progress as a result of all of his hard work on and off the training pitch and fully deserves all the successes that come his way."



Hartlepool United may have slipped to League One relegation but Luke James' career is definitely on the up.



LUKE JAMES

The 18-year-old forward may only have been in the full-time game for approaching two years but he has already developed quite a CV which includes the distinction of being the Pool's youngest ever first-team player. That honour came in December 2011, a month after he'd been handed his first professional deal and just five into his apprenticeship.

He created history again just four weeks later scoring a spectacular 25-yard volley against Rochdale to become the club's youngest ever goal scorer - an effort which was also voted as the Fan's Goal of the Season.

A contract extension followed in the summer as did the rumours of Premier League interest most notably from the team he supports, Sunderland and their North East rivals, Newcastle United, though understandably

James is keen not to let any outside influences affect his game.

"It has to be ignored," he told Touchline.

"It's a bit like once you step over the white line and go on the pitch, all the focus then is on the game and not the crowd.

"It can be a little more difficult off the pitch but if something happens then it happens, there's no reason to worry or change what I'm doing."

The six-foot tall starlet has amassed over 40 appearances (mainly from the bench) for the Victoria Park club and was named as the outstanding apprentice in League One at the recent Football League Awards 2013.

"I didn't expect to win it," said James.

"It felt strange being at an awards ceremony but when I heard my name called out as the winner it was a great feeling. My aim now is to help keep Hartlepool in League One and it's every player's dream to play in the Premier League but personally I want to nail down a starting place in the first team and take it game by game."

Ashington born James still has a long way to go before he reaches the heights of two of the town's most famous sons, Sir Bobby Charlton and Jackie Milburn but for now he's moving in the right direction.



IF YOU ASK ANY GROUP OF YOUNG FOOTBALLERS WHAT THEY DREAM OF WHEN ENTERING THE FULL-TIME GAME AS 16-YEAR-OLDS – A PLETHORA OF VISIONS ARE OFFERED UP.

Some already have designs on the material wealth a top flight career affords. Others alarmingly seek stardom purely as a by-product of the nation's obsession with celebrity status. Refreshingly though, many hark back to their own childhood memories – recalling moments of panache, skill and verve – the successes of idols that they hope to emulate one day soon. One theme is central. Each and every aspirant player craves the chance to perform at the pinnacle of the game and for the majority of the 1200 or so apprentice players registered at Football League clubs that means only one thing – becoming a full England international.



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On Wednesday 20 March around 1,000 academy players at 70 football clubs gained a fleeting glimpse of what this entails as they travelled to The Football Association's state-of-the-art training facility at St. George's Park, Burton.

However, while Roy Hodgson put his squad through their paces on the adjacent pitches, ahead of World Cup qualifying fixtures against San Marino and Montenegro, young players who had travelled from as far north as Carlisle and from the southern tip of the football fraternity in Plymouth were quietly ushered into the national football centre, to an event hosted by League Football Education and The Dame Kelly Holmes Legacy Trust.

Crucially to spend a day being challenged to think about their future careers. Another common theme in a game that is as precarious as glorious.

Momentary glimpses of their heroes Steven Gerrard, Joe Hart and Wayne Rooney abetted their enthusiasm but in a fiercely competitive industry around 60 per cent of youth-team players will be released as 18-year-olds.

The first cull is already underway with many of those approaching the end of their apprenticeships finding out if they will need to make alternative arrangements from July onwards. Even then close to half of those who do win a full-time contract will not be playing at a professional level by the age of 21.

A startling statistic maybe but the 'Create Your Legacy' careers day highlighted that there is plenty of life after football. Over 60 exhibitors including employers like the BMW group and Armed forces, as well as a dozen universities showed that players can find new pathways once they have left the cocooned environment of a football club.

"Footballers live in a bubble," said former Aston Villa and England defender Ugo Ehiogu who spent his afternoon mentoring dozens of youngsters.

"It's nice for the lads to see the senior boys (England) training outside but in here it's more realistic. The statistics speak for themselves."

"When I finished after 20 years, I didn't know how to put a CV together or what to do at an interview but The Professional Footballers' Association helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses and I realised that I had plenty of transferable skills. Leadership, problem solving, communication and working as part of a team are all pretty common to footballers but the hardest thing about today is making them understand that they need to prepare for the future.

"Even when I was playing for England I was thinking what happens if I get an injury and have to retire – I made sure I had other options and a Plan B," added Ehiogu who now runs a record label.

Current Bolton Wanderers manager and patron of personal training company, Focus Fitness, Dougie Freedman echoed Ehiogu's sentiments:

"In my late twenties I started to think about what life might be like when I finished playing. I looked at coaching and went away and got experience and qualifications. I coached youth-teams every Sunday morning and then I would be back at work as a player every Monday morning.

"I always had a vision that I wanted to coach and strongly believed that it didn't matter how well I was doing as a player – I needed to plan ahead."

With over 40 managerial casualties already this season, the former Scotland striker admitted that he had already started to lay foundations for life after management although a more pressing concern at the time were scheduled meetings to discuss the future of Bolton's under 18 players.

"We write to each player and outline the reasons why we're keeping them or why we're letting them go," said Freedman.

"We then invite each player in to discuss the contents of that letter and while the process isn't difficult, actually getting the words out to tell them they've not quite made the grade is very hard to do."

A tricky job at a difficult time of year but as Create Your Legacy showed as one door closes another opens.

CYL IN NUMBERS:

1000:

PLAYERS attended the event; mainly from Football but Rugby Union was represented in the form of youngsters from Wasps & London Irish.



Accrington Stanley's Jack Willison, James Doig and Kieran Wolland with The PFA's Oshor Williams

60:



EXHIBITORS

including the likes of the BMW Group and Armed Forces as well as a dozen universities.



Nottingham Forest's Elliott Ackroyd gives Staffordshire University's Sports Therapy course the thumbs up!



Middlesbrough's apprentices had the drive to speak to BMW



Exhibitors have their hands full talking to players



Blackburn trio Jordan Preston, Tom Brown and Brice Wassi chat to an exhibitor



Youngsters from London Irish enjoyed this one



A posse of Bradford players learn about coaching in the community



Bristol Rovers' apprentices look into kids coaching



The University of Bath interested several of the Shrewsbury players

16: MENTORS



including former Aston Villa and England defender Ugo Ehiogu, Olympic swimming medallist Nick Gillingham and ex Great Britain Prop Paul Broadbent.

Ex South African Rugby Union star Thinus Delpont points the way forward

500:

The number of miles covered by Plymouth Argyle's youth-team to get to and from CYL.



After a 500 mile round trip the Pilgrims made sure they took plenty from the day

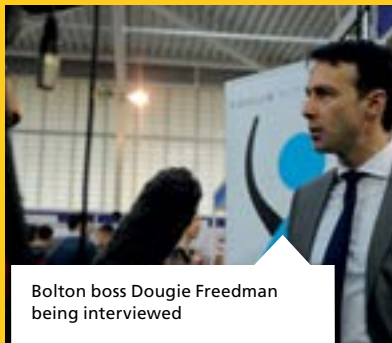


38:

MEDIA

outlets covered the day ranging from national broadcasters like Sky Sports and Talksport to local papers like the Lancashire Telegraph, Manchester Evening News and Nottingham Evening Post.

Trainees have eye on future



Bolton boss Dougie Freedman being interviewed

5: GUEST SPEAKERS....

well if you include presenter Matt Holland. Dame Kelly Holmes, Dougie Freedman, Tom Rees and Sarah Hunter were the main protagonists.



LFE's John Barton addresses players from Burnley & Hull



Ugo Ehiogu tells his workshop it's good to have a 'Plan B'

Ollie Marland

MUSIC FACTS

How many teenagers have the chance to become a professional footballer or a pop star? Until a few weeks ago that was the dilemma facing Port Vale's Ollie Marland

The 18-year-old centre-forward who is nearing the end of his two-year apprenticeship at Vale Park, hit the headlines last summer appearing in front of 15,000 people at Stoke 2012 Live, on the same bill as Labrinth, Rizzle Kicks, The Saturdays and The Loveable Rogues.

That's meant that over the last 12 months Ollie has attracted more media attention for his singing than his striking prowess – even though he has continued to bang in the goals for the Valiant's youth and reserve teams.

In the process he has gained thousands of fans, is being asked to perform more and more gigs and has even been approached to do X-Factor. A far cry from his first performance just 3 years ago when he admits he wasn't even sure how good he was.

"I'd never really sung other than at home to myself but in the last year at school a pal of mine asked me to do a gig with him," Ollie told Touchline.

"I was a bit unsure but I gave it a go and loved it. After I'd done that I put videos on YouTube and did a few gigs to raise money for Vale's youth department. All the lads came along and thought it was cool which was great.

"It all snowballed after I'd won the Signal 1 competition and sang in front of all those people at the Stoke 2012 weekend. I asked people to follow me on Twitter and check me out and most people did and it went from there."

Far from getting stage fright Ollie took the days in his stride even if he did get butterflies from meeting some of the other headline acts.

"At first it was like, I'm standing next to Labrinth and other ridiculous people but I got chatting to him and The Loveable Rogues and we've kept in touch since."

While Ollie's first love is football, he was recently informed that Vale will not be offering him a professional deal for next season, news which while disappointing has taken an equally hard decision out of his hands.

"The Gaffer told me it was a close one (decision) but the fact that they have released me has helped me out because if they'd offered me a contract I wouldn't have known what to do. I've wanted to be a footballer since I could kick a ball. I'm glad it's been out of my hands in some respects."

With a Twitter following of over 40,000 and several management and record labels expressing a desire to sign him, Ollie's exit route from football appears laid out before him and he knows what he wants to do next.

"I do want music as my career but if it fails I'd love to come back to football and give it another crack," continued Ollie.

"I'm going to have a chat with the gaffer and see if he'll let me do pre-season with Vale. I'm still in at the club at the moment keeping my fitness up because all our games are over and they've been great with me and really accommodating to my situation.

"In terms of the music though the interest I'm getting is brilliant," he added.

FACTFILE:

Lives:

Supports:

Favourite Player:

Favourite Artists: Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran, Justin Timberlake, Labrinth & Olly Murs

Twitter:

Website:

Bradeley, Stoke-On-Trent
Manchester United
David Beckham

Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran,
Justin Timberlake, Labrinth
& Olly Murs
@OllieMarland
www.olliemarland.com

"I'm at a stage now where I'll probably need management if I'm going to progress. Even Labrinth has given me the number of his manager and has been offering me his advice.

"It's mad everywhere I go I get noticed even outside of Stoke. I've been to Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, London and people come over and say hello or ask for pictures but it's what you need as a young performer and singer – it's the thing that gets you album and single sales so it's pretty cool."

While juggling his football and musical commitments Ollie has still found time to complete his educational programme despite an underlying feeling that his talents lie away from the classroom.

"I'm probably not the most naturally academic kid you'll meet," admits Ollie. "But I tried my hardest to make sure I passed everything. When I'm on the pitch or on stage I'm in my element and if I'm honest I just feel blessed doing this as a job (football) because it is something not many people can say they've done. How many people get to go from football to music?"



Former Ipswich Town forward Carel Tiofack is hoping to reign in Spain after earning a professional deal with Cadiz B.

The Cameroon born player who has represented the Republic of Ireland at youth level originally moved to Spain in August as part of LFE's player placement programme.

Released by the Tractor Boys last June, Tiofack initially joined lower league side CF Federico Mayo and just four months later, Cadiz B the reserve side of former La Liga outfit Cadiz, came calling with the offer of a one year deal.

While Tiofack has few regrets about his departure from Portman Road he does feel that his progression this term has been helped by playing regular football in his favoured position, something he insists did not happen while in England.

"When I was released by Ipswich Sammy Morgan (Academy Manager) and Russell Osman (U18s Coach) told me it was because my performances on a Saturday had not been good enough. I agree they weren't but I hardly ever played in my preferred position," said Tiofack.

"I played out on the left one week, on the right the next and I found it tough to get any rhythm to my game.

When I signed for Ipswich it was as a forward which is where I played for Ireland so I'm not sure why I didn't get a run of games as a forward or playing just off a main striker."

Discarded by Town, Tiofack admits he is feeling the benefits of moving abroad.

"At Federico Mayo I was really made to feel welcome. I went over there with 3 other lads and we moved in to a beautiful apartment, the President of the Club came and greeted us and everyone down to the laundry staff made us feel wanted.

"I wasn't in the team to start with but I worked hard and earned my place and before I knew it Cadiz were in for me. That's where I'm at now and I just want to continue to develop and play as well as I can."

Tiofack's club form has also led to a recall at International level something that came as a welcome surprise.

"I was immensely proud to be involved with Ireland again," added Tiofack after a recent 5-day training camp with the Boys in Green.

"We had a friendly against Gibraltar and I think I did well. The coach (Paul Doolin) seemed pleased with me so it's just a waiting game now to see if I've done enough to be involved in this summer's European Championships."

LFE APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR CHAMPIONSHIP

Chasing a career in football requires character, determination and sacrifices – something Nottingham Forest's Dimitar Evtimov is under no illusions about.



DIMITAR EVTIMOV

Moving to a different country is a big decision for a 17 year-old to make but it was the choice that Evtimov elected to make, swapping Etropole, a small town in western Bulgaria close to the northern slopes of the Balkan Mountains for the East Midlands.

"I moved to England on my own and I only spoke basic English," Evtimov told Touchline.

"It was scary at first but everyone has helped me settle in and I speak fluently now. I'm even tweeting in English!"

Forest signed the 6'4" goalkeeper from Chavdar Etropole in the summer of 2011 and sent him out on loan to non-league outfits Gainsborough Trinity and Ilkeston as part of his acclimatisation to English football.

"You have to beat the odds to become a professional so to leave Bulgaria to try and

do it was a big risk for me but so far so good, continued Evtimov who is now the club's number two goalie. As well as sitting on the substitute's bench 23 times for Billy Davies' side this season, the 19 year-old has featured for Bulgaria at Under 19 and 21 levels.

Hoping to replicate the success of another Bulgarian called 'Dimitar' won't be easy but while 'Berbatov' continues to rattle in the goals for Fulham, Evtimov is keen to show he can keep them out at the other end.

His progress at the City Ground may have temporarily ground to a halt with Karl Darlow's form one reason why he is still waiting for his debut but a more than adequate consolation did come via the recent Football League Awards where the youngster

was named as the LFE Apprentice of the Year in the Championship.

"I was very happy to win especially because I'm from a foreign country I think it takes a lot to succeed abroad and my effort has been recognised by the judges."

That recognition also took into account the Bulgarian's service to his club that goes beyond the pitch regularly supporting the community department and visiting local schools.

"I like to go into schools and speak with children who look up to me. It's important I make the most of being a role model because it means children listen to me which lets me pass on my knowledge and experiences to them."



MEDIA TRAINING WITH ALDERSHOT TOWN

Lights, Camera, Action for Aldershot Town's apprentices as Farnborough College of Technology use the BTEC 'Athletes Lifestyle' module as the cue for media training.

With The Shots players all studying the BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Sports Performance, Farnborough's Mark Treagust, a Lecturer in Sport Science decided to grasp a recent opportunity to put the players in the media spotlight as part of the education programme.

"It was good because it was cross college activity and we took all 17 of the apprentices down to interact with our Level 3 Media Students in the Television Studio on campus," said Treagust.

"We've got Level 3 Journalism and Media Production students at the College, so they effectively worked as the production crew and presenters while the lads took on the role of being studio guests."

"On the first day all the Aldershot lads went in individually and were faced with meeting a 25 strong production team within a professional

TV setting, so it was a pretty daunting but good experience for them to go in front of the lights and cameras.

"The lads then had different scenarios put to them which they responded to as though it had happened to them. So for example one situation we used was of a player being pictured coming out of a nightclub the night before a game looking drunk, which then appeared in the paper. Questions followed on whether this had affected the player's performance and whether it was appropriate behaviour for a professional athlete etc.

"Other topic areas covered related to racism, homophobia, violence on the pitch, infidelity and other negative behaviour off the pitch, alcoholism and drug misuse."

The training didn't end their though as the Aldershot players were then brought back for round two and a chance to watch and critique their interviews in a video playback session.

"The lads handled it with a lot of maturity and they took it very seriously," Treagust continued.

"A couple of the lads actually realised during the feedback that they would have a got themselves in more trouble if the responses

they'd given in the interviews were in real life, so there was a real understanding of how to improve interview skills and why the way they present themselves and behave is so important."

Second year apprentice Reece Beckles-Richards certainly felt that he had benefitted from the work, "This opened my eyes to how the media can play a part in someone's career and why it's important to speak properly, with confidence and to think about what you say in any situation."

The value of the days was also endorsed by LFE Regional Officer Ian Smithson, who said:

"It really was top notch and added a new dimension to the delivery of the 'Athlete's Lifestyle' unit while giving the players and college students some actual experience.

"Drew Sherman (Head of Youth) and Bob Green (Secretary) came down to support it and sat in the gallery throughout – though the apprentices didn't know that at the time. It's been a massive success and Mark (Treagust) and I are keen to roll this out to future cohorts of Aldershot apprentices."

SPORTING CHANCE

Gambling put me on the rack but now I'm a safe bet says Darren who is one of several ex professional players working with the Sporting Chance Clinic.

For many of today's young players the name Darren Wrack holds no special significance. Still only 36, a quick glance at Wikipedia will tell you that Wrack spent most of his career flitting between the Championship and League One.

But statistics alone don't paint the real picture of a talented midfielder who started out at Derby in the early 90s. Time at Grimsby and Shrewsbury followed but it was a hugely productive decade at Walsall that Wrack is best known for.

Named in the PFA Team of the Year for the old second division (now League One) in 1998-99 alongside the likes of Maik Taylor, Steve Finnan and Chris Coleman – Wrack twice helped Walsall into the second tier of English football in his 10-year stint at the club. Good on the ball and with an eye for goal the Saddlers midfielder was often linked with moves to bigger clubs.

However while things appeared to be going well on the pitch, off it Wrack was experiencing huge problems due to a gambling addiction.

"I gambled away around £750,000 during my career. Everything I ever earned went on horses, greyhounds and football during afternoons in the bookies," said Wrack.

"There were times when I didn't have any food in the fridge because I was always chasing the next big win and it got to the

stage where I had to ask Walsall to look after my money for me so that the bills were paid."

"They tried, but I was never ready to admit to my addictions until I went to Sporting Chance Clinic and Gamblers Anonymous."

At one stage things got so bad for Wrack that he even considered taking his own life:

"It's true I was at the bottom of the barrel a few years ago and I told my missus that I wanted to go to the bridge down the road and jump off," he continued.

"I couldn't see a way out, I was forever pacing up and down the flat and it was the worst feeling in the world - absolutely rock bottom. Fortunately, she told me to get the thought out of my mind and not to be so stupid."

Wrack, who feels he abused the 'privilege' of being a professional footballer, has not placed a bet for over 5 years and has spoken candidly during sessions he has taken part in with apprentice players up and down the land. It is his hope that his revelations and those from others like him will help today's young players.

"It's about trying to raise awareness with apprentices really," he continued.

"In my time there was nothing like this so if the lads take onboard what we're saying it's a worthwhile visit.

"In this day and age there are so many paths that kids can choose to go down. I'm trying to pass on my experience so that they don't make the wrong choices but if there are lads out there who are struggling, the message is that help is at hand if you come out and share your problems.

"I think there's a tendency to underestimate how much of a problem, an addiction like gambling is because it's done behind closed doors but work Sporting Chance is doing with LFE stands young players in good stead for the future."



Social media is a fantastic information tool writes LFE communications manager Steven Sutcliffe...



...but it does have its pitfalls.



According to a recent survey people in Britain spend an estimated 62 million hours each day on Facebook and Twitter. At last count the UK had around 33 million Facebook users and close to 26 million Twitter users so I suppose that statistic should not come as a shock.

Nor is it a surprise to see so many apprentices using various platforms from Facebook to YouTube. Our last communications feedback forums showed 100 per cent of our apprentice sample had Facebook accounts while 90 per cent were avid tweeters.

The convergence of technology and in particular ever improving mobile communication networks has produced a networked generation who have constant connectivity to a networked world.

The impact of social media is unprecedented and addictive just ask Dougie Freedman about Marvin Sordell! From big businesses to government agencies, colleges to universities and celebrities to sports stars, everyone it seems is on the social media bandwagon.

It is of course used in different ways by different organisations and people. Some

businesses including football clubs use it to interact with customers and sell products while Journalists use it to research and place stories into the public domain and more and more footballers are following suit. Using it not only to engage with fans but in effect sell themselves as people. Certainly those with huge followings and a positive profile hold extra collateral when negotiating contracts and sponsorship deals.

Cristiano Ronaldo is as irreplaceable in the Real Madrid team as his 17 million worldwide Twitter followers make him to Nike. He rarely expresses opinions that could be misconstrued, refrains from using abusive language and instead focuses on positive aspects of his work. The perfect number 7? Maybe.

So what are the positives and negatives for young players?

Direct communication with fans offers the platform to engage and encourage them to be more involved with the club than they are already by inviting them down to watch the Under-18s or Under-21s.

There's also the chance for players to talk about their own career experiences with people who are genuinely interested.

Insight on the Apprenticeship as well as updates on the community or charitable activities that are taken part in boosts a club's image as well as highlighting the good work of the individual and leaves a positive footprint that any future employers, sponsors or fans will see.

So what could possibly go wrong? Well plenty – if you don't act responsibly.

Since ex Liverpool striker Ryan Babel became the first player to be fined (a not inconsiderable £10,000) for a Twitter post in 2011 - dozens of players have been reprimanded. From revealing team-tactics to making inappropriate comments - the high profile nature of football means that the media and public are more eager than ever to scrutinise social media posts.

Some make it easier than ever to do that, treating the likes of Twitter as a replacement sms text service and effectively publishing

So with so many current and ex apprentices now on Twitter LFE thought we'd pick out the best of your most recent tweets.



private information in to the public domain. Posts on social networking sites can be considered public comment and if they are improper, threatening, abusive, indecent, or bring the game into disrepute, expect to end up being banned, fined or even sacked!

Clause 5.3.4 of the scholarship agreement says as much asking players to never 'knowingly or recklessly write or say anything which is likely to bring the Club or the game of football into disrepute, while at the same time allowing players to contribute to the media in a responsible manner.'

This is worth remembering because players can be misreported, misinterpreted and leave themselves open to criticism. Equally how likely would a potential sponsor or future employer be to invest in someone if they trawled through an account full of expletives and negative remarks?

So the lesson is... tweet social media and others with respect and you'll be more likely to benefit in the long run.



Check out the LFE team online

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