

Touchline



No. 28 / JANUARY 2016

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BORO'S EURO DELIGHT

P8

THE DEBUTANTS P6 MAT STEVENS P12 MY FUTURE TODAY P16 NEW ZEALAND & AUSTRALIA P18

the 11

Eleven outstanding apprentices impressed our Regional Officers to stand out in October as LFE celebrated their footballing and academic success.

Nominations are made on four occasions during the season by LFE's team of Regional Officers. All winners receive a certificate, a cheque for £50 and the distinction of an appearance on LFE's website.



- Henry Lander** AFC Bournemouth
- David Popa** Birmingham City
- Matty Foulds** Bury
- Karlan Ahearne-Grant** Charlton Athletic
- Callum Ainley** Crewe Alexandra
- Adam Male** Hartlepool United
- Michael Clark** Leyton Orient
- Clive Smith** Preston North End
- Shea Gordon** Sheffield United
- Matthew Penney** Sheffield Wednesday
- Daren Askew** Tranmere Rovers

GOAL OF THE MONTH

Mansfield Town's Teddy Bloor scooped the prize in October's goal bonanza with a fantastic free-kick against Burton Albion. Bloor earned 54% of the public vote to surpass competition from eight fellow apprentices from five clubs.

Over 6000 votes have been cast so far this season, with Brighton & Hove Albion's most prolific contender Jordan Maguire-Drew (August) and Wigan Athletic striker Chris Sang (September) topping the monthly polls.

WATCH THE GOALS AND CAST YOUR VOTE

📺 lfe.org.uk/goal-of-the-month ▶ LFETV

USA Scholarships



Since 2010 more than 170 LFE apprentices have crossed the Atlantic Ocean to join a USA university.

Last year 34 more successfully gained a place to pursue their education overseas with the help of Pass4Soccer, LFE's chosen partner in this area.



Coaches at universities in America are already searching for new members of their squads for the next academic year so why not find out more from LFE's Guide to American Scholarships at:

www.lfe.org.uk/downloads/apprentice-brochures or call Simon Williams on 0845 074 0561

Welcome to Touchline, brought to you by League Football Education



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



LFE is supported by:



FA Youth Cup

The story so far

BY JACK WYLIE

This year's competition has been littered with shock results. Burton Albion (on penalties) and Shrewsbury Town both suffered at the hands of Ilkeston whose exploits have been rewarded by receiving a home tie against Newcastle United.

Meanwhile Metropolitan Police FC stunned Yeovil Town on penalties to book a third round meeting with Burnley.

A handful of Football League clubs suffered shock first round exits. Gillingham, the only team this term not to lose to Luton were surprisingly beaten 2-1 by Ebbsfleet United, while Dagenham and Redbridge fell to Peterborough.

Mansfield though avoided a similar fate knocking out Dereham Town, the conquerors of Peterborough, 4-3 to set up a fixture with Sunderland.

Middlesbrough will be hoping to avoid any embarrassment when they travel to the lowest ranked team left in the competition, Worthing FC. The Isthmian League Division One South side have smashed 29 goals in six games ahead of their meeting with The Championship giants.

Elsewhere, Millwall have scored 11 goals in two rounds, the same tally they've managed in 12 league games thus far and now face a tasty tie against Charlton Athletic, who lead the Professional Development League South division.

As The FA Youth Cup reaches the 3rd round stage clubs from The Championship and Premier League enter the fray. At the time of writing here's what's happened so far...

Portsmouth scraped past Bristol Rovers on penalties and have the daunting prospect of hosting big spending Manchester City. Huddersfield and Rotherham face equally tough assignments against holders Chelsea and Tottenham respectively.

Over at Carlisle, director and co-owner Steven Pattison was forced to act as a stand-in official in their 1-0 FA Youth Cup 2nd round win over Doncaster Rovers.

Carl Taylor's penalty gave Carlisle victory 10 minutes into extra-time - though Rovers thought they had levelled two minutes from time only to see Pattison's raised flag rule the goal out for offside.

Back at Brunton Park for the 3rd round, the Cumbrians fell to a 2-1 defeat at the hands of Preston. Arron Bradbury had levelled matters after Jack Burgoyne's early goal but Josh Earl grabbed an extra-time winner for North End.



The FA Youth Cup is the most prestigious of prizes at under-18 level

Erasmus+ Player Placements

BY ELAINE BRAND

14 ex apprentices, who jetted over to Sweden in July via LFE's Erasmus+ player placement programme, have now completed the season playing for Ange, BK Sport, Gottne and Ytterhogdals.

Thanks to European Union funding via the Erasmus+ scheme, LFE are able to send up to 30 ex-apprentices to Sweden on 13 week placements each year. And the experience is definitely seen as a positive one for all those who take up the opportunity.

Shola Oladipo played in every game of the second half of the season for Gottne who managed to avoid relegation after a victory in their final game. "It's been weird staying here having spent most of my life in London," says Oladipo. "It's very different from where I live in Brixton - I haven't heard a police siren for three months! It's been great I've got to know all the lads, and because we've had a couple of Serbians and two Kenyans here too, it's been interesting mixing with them."

Tevin Shakespeare netted plenty of times for Ange, who finished third narrowly missing out on promotion, and plans to go back to Sweden next season. Ytterhogdals just missed out on the play-offs after a really positive start to the season and all five of the ex-apprentices who spent time with the sixth tier club have also been asked back next year.

Harry Hagon, Lewis Clarke, Jordan Harper and Joshua Barr-Rostron, who spent the season with BK Sport, did well for the club but couldn't save them from being relegated after a string of defeats. "I got a few goals but we were up against it in every game and the club as a whole seemed to realise we were in a division too high," admitted striker Jordan. "It's been fantastic though. We've seen a whole new lifestyle and it's something we'll never forget."



"It's been fantastic. We've seen a whole new lifestyle and it's something we'll never forget."

Who went where?

ANGE IF

Sev Bokciu (Charlton Athletic)
Omar Carey (Wigan Athletic)
Kieran Duncan (Notts County)
Tevin Shakespeare (Walsall)

BK SPORT

Josh Barr-Rostron (Lincoln City)
Lewis Clark (Dagenham & Redbridge)
Harry Hagon (Preston North End)
Jordan Harper (Lincoln City)

GOTTNE IF

Shola Oladipo (Leyton Orient)

YTTERHOGDALS IK

Muctaru Conte (Oxford United)
Liam Hardey (York City)
Joe Massey (Chesterfield)
Nathan Plews (Middlesbrough)
Jake Richards (Coventry City)

Education Support Fund

BY ELAINE BRAND



DON'T MISS OUT! THE DEADLINE FOR ESF SUBMISSIONS IS



League Football Education's chief executive Alan Sykes is eager for clubs to get the ball rolling by making applications for the Education Support Fund (ESF) for the 2015-16 season.

LFE has contacted all clubs with details of the fund and how to make claims.

ESF grants provide significant funding to clubs each season to support and develop the education of apprentice players. Historically used to purchase a wide variety of items from lab sessions, speed

testing and iPads to team-building days, filming towers and cooking classes, Sykes is keen to ensure that clubs seize the opportunity.

"Clubs are welcome to send in applications now," said Sykes. "I'd encourage them to do this sooner rather than later to try and avoid a scenario where a club misses out on the extra funds because they've made a late submission."

Club's wishing to use the fund should let LFE know their intentions by 29 February 2016. For further details please visit: www.lfe.org.uk/about/education-support-fund

Any queries should be directed to Alan Sykes on **01772 326 870** or email: asykes@lfe.org.uk

Assessment Trials 2016

The Assessment Trials offer released players another chance to stay in the game by showcasing their talents in front of scouts from professional clubs, non-league and universities in the UK and abroad.

The 2016 LFE Assessment Trials will kick off on Thursday 5 May in the North, followed by trials in the South on 10 May, and the Midlands on 11-12 May.



4
VENUES

214
PLAYERS

12
GAMES

248
SCOUTS

1837
OFFICIAL REGISTRATIONS
OF INTEREST

Academy Leagues Round-Up BY JACK WYLIE



Youth Alliance

North East Division

The North East section is wide open with just five points separating the top nine teams. Bradford, reigning champions for two successive years, had been the early pacesetters until a four-game losing streak saw them plummet down the table.

The Bantams suffered a heavy 6-1 home defeat to Notts County, who have soared to the summit after winning six out of six games across October and November, scoring 23 goals.

Lincoln City have also enjoyed an Autumn revival with 6 straight wins to sit fourth, level on points with Scunthorpe and a point behind County and second-placed Mansfield.

North West Division

Tranmere's early season form has tailed off. They lost four consecutive matches, with defeats to the top three teams Walsall, Bury and Wigan and now sit fourth.

Walsall lead the way and begin December with a top of the table clash when they host second-placed Bury. The Shakers have extended their unbeaten run to eight games and are the leading scorers in the division, with George Miller and Nathan Turner hitting a rich vein of form as Ryan Kidd's side attempt to successfully defend their title.

Wigan are another side on the rise, boasting the best defensive record in the league. The Latics have secured clean sheets in all seven of their league wins so far, including four in their last five games.

South East Division

Luton Town are the runaway leaders in the South East, remaining unbeaten after 15 games with 13 wins and two draws. The Hatters have been in formidable form at both ends, scoring a league-high 49 goals, while conceding a league-low eight by claiming eight clean sheets.

Paul Driver's side possess 11 different scorers so far this campaign, notably Freddie Hinds (9), George Murray (7) and Tyreeq Bakinson, Kavan Cotter and James Verney sharing six apiece.

Gillingham are the only team to stop the leaders, sealing 1-1 stalemates in both home and away fixtures, but are 17 points off the pace in fifth.

Closest challengers Southend suffered two defeats in three games in November to fall five points adrift having played a game more.

South West Division

Plymouth Argyle have enjoyed a healthy run of form this Autumn, winning eight and drawing one to set the pace in the South West.

Champions AFC Bournemouth failed to record a victory in either of their two games in November to slump to third, six points off the top.

There has been an upturn in fortunes for Swindon Town over the last two months, remaining unbeaten with four wins from five, having lost six of their opening eight games to begin the season.

Meanwhile, Portsmouth are in free-fall since leading the pack mid-way through September. Pompey have now lost their last seven games, including shipping 14 goals in their last four.

U18 Professional Development League

U18 Professional Development League North

Eight wins in nine fixtures has given Nottingham Forest some daylight between themselves and the rest of the division. But Crewe remain in the hunt six points behind with two games in hand.

Alex were 2-1 winners at Forest in October, but dropped points against Bolton (2-2) and last year's winners Huddersfield (4-4) to allow Forest to reclaim the advantage.

U18 Professional Development League South

Charlton Athletic are leading the way once again. Goals from Ademola Lookman (10) and Terrique Anderson (8) have helped the Addicks build a four-point gap ahead of the chasing pack after a five-game unbeaten streak that included a 7-1 trouncing of last season's runners-up Brentford, who are sixth.

Watford had the chance to close the deficit in a table-topping encounter at the end of November, but could only claim a 1-1 draw.

Ipswich Town had been in contention having beaten the leaders in October, but followed that result with a run of four consecutive defeats to fall to fifth.

U18 Premier League

U18 Premier League North

While Everton are in pole position after winning seven on the trot between the start of October and mid-November, Wolves ended that run in emphatic fashion.

Wanderers smashed eight past the Blues on Merseyside with Niall Ennis starring as Romanian winger Nicu Carnat grabbed a hat-trick.

Second placed Manchester City also had a difficult month, winning just one of their last five games. Blackburn sit in a comfortable fourth spot, 5 points behind Liverpool in third but 5 ahead of Sunderland in fifth.

U18 Premier League South

The goals have been flying in for leaders Chelsea, already bagging 50 in just 15 games. The Blues hit seven against Norwich (7-0) and Southampton (7-2) before scoring five against third-placed Leicester (5-0).

Reading remain hot on the heels of the champions with four straight wins, but were beaten 2-0 by Chelsea in October.



GLAMOUR TIE AWAITS MIDDLESBROUGH ON EURO STAGE

It has been an historic season for Middlesbrough's young players and it may get even better yet as they head into the last 16 of the UEFA Youth League where a one-off tie against glamour opponents awaits.

At the time of writing, Barcelona, Real Madrid, Paris Saint-Germain, Dynamo Kiev and Porto are all potential adversaries for a Boro squad (packed with former and current apprentices) who will have home advantage when the mid December draw confirms the opposition for February's last 16 tie.

Craig Liddle's team started their quest for European glory back in September when they took on French opponents Stade de Reims.

And in the champagne capital of France Boro appeared to have lost their fizz conceding a penalty within three minutes of their European bow and at one point in the evening they trailed 5-1.

A Callum Cooke double though, put a different complexion on things and they travelled back to the Riverside looking to overturn a 5-3 deficit.

Just as their first team did against Basel and Steaua nine years ago, Middlesbrough's youth team players put on a grandstand finish to progress. Things looked bleak after 75 minutes with the score still at 0-0 but goals from Cooke, Junior Mondal and Harry Chapman set-up an enticing second round clash with Torino.

"The big deal we made before the game was not to panic and chuck everything at them early doors," said Liddle who remained one of the coolest men on Teeside as Boro searched for a first goal.



"We were confident if we got the first goal we would go and get the second, because there's a lot of pace in the side going forward."

That pace proved too hot for Torino to handle in the second round with Mondal, Harry Coulson and a moment of magic from Harry Chapman securing a 3-0 win over the Italians at the Riverside.

Chapman who was celebrating his 18th birthday was given special praise from Liddle after skipping past several defenders and then curling in from a tight angle:

"When he gets into those situations I haven't seen anybody better at this age. To jink and twist his way into the situation he got himself in and finish was just outrageous," Liddle said.

Over in Turin, Boro saw the job through with a 3-3 draw at the Stadio Olimpico in a testing environment.

"The lads showed great character and fight in what was a real hostile environment, they fought and scrapped for everything and stood their ground," Liddle said.

"We knew what to expect," Liddle continued, "the crowd were vociferous, hostile, and the team were frustrated when they couldn't get in to the game. Then they did with two quick goals. We pulled one back quickly and that was important only for them to score again in a crazy passage of the game."

"All praise to them, all of them in the squad, even those who weren't playing. There is a real togetherness with this squad and everyone played their part. To be tested at this age in a hostile environment and to produce the way they did, they deserve great credit."

"This competition can go on the back burner for a little while now, we have a lot of domestic football to play, but when the draw comes it would be nice for the lads to get an early Christmas present with a real big team to play next," he added.

The big guns may await but few will relish the prospect of facing Boro on home turf.



"The lads showed great character and fight in what was a real hostile environment, they fought and scrapped for everything and stood their ground"

The Debutants

BY GAVIN WILLACY



 **Khalid Mohammed, Jack Ruddy and Matthew Foulds**
Bury

3 Midfielder Khalid Mohammed (Bury) came on for the final few minutes of the defeat at high-flying Shrewsbury in late October. He was followed in mid-November by another youth team debutant as Scottish goalkeeper **4** Jack Ruddy made his first start in the top of the table clash at Gillingham, going down to a 3-1 defeat. Jack had been on the bench numerous times as cover for regular No.1 Austrian youngster Daniel Bachmann, with

veteran Paddy Kenny also in the mix. Defender **5** Matty Foulds had already made his debut, playing the second half of the Capital One Cup defeat to Premier League Leicester and then played the whole of the JPT win at Accrington. Foulds, a second year apprentice from Bradford, has since agreed a January move to Everton and has already started training with the Merseyside club.

 **Ollie Watkins**
Exeter City

1 Ollie came on for his league debut late in the defeat at Barnet at the end of October, then was again a second half substitute during the FA Cup win at Didcot Town a week later - as seen on BBC One. That was enough to convince manager Paul Tisdale to throw him in at the deep end and give the second year apprentice from Newton Abbott a full league debut in the massive Devon derby a week later, which Exeter surprisingly won 2-1 at high-flying Plymouth. Watkins impressed, playing the whole game, keeping veteran former Premier League and Ireland striker Clinton Morrison on the substitutes bench.

 **Ademola Lookman**
Charlton Athletic

2 Eighteen months ago, Ademola was playing schools football. In December he scored for Charlton at Championship leaders Brighton! His debut came in Charlton's defeat at MK Dons in November. In doing so, just days after his 18th birthday, he became the tenth past or present Charlton apprentice to play for the first team this season. He then played the closing stages of the win over Sheffield Wednesday. Interim manager Karel Fraeye and Ademola's Under-21 coach Jason Euell were impressed enough to give the tricky winger from Camberwell, who has won LFE's Goal of the Month competition, his first league start in the win at Birmingham City.

 **Kai Mackenzie-Lyle**
Barnet

6 Goalkeeper Kai found himself making his league debut in unusual and daunting circumstances. With veteran keeper Graham Stack injured, Kai was goalkeeping cover for Jamie Stephens this autumn. When Stephens was sent off after 66 minutes of the game at Portsmouth, the giants of League Two, 17-year-old MacKenzie-Lyle was forced into action. He couldn't prevent a 3-1 defeat but retained his place on the bench throughout November. Kai, from Edmonton, attended Enfield Grammar School - which produced the likes of Hull midfielder Jake Livermore and Millwall striker Steve Morison - and joins half a dozen lads from Barnet's academy in Martin Allen's first team squad.

 **Myles Judd**
Leyton Orient

7 Right-back Myles is a local lad, coming from Chigwell where the Os train every day. An exciting first year talent, Myles made his first team debut only a few weeks into his apprenticeship when he was introduced for the last few minutes of their Johnstone's Paint Trophy defeat at Luton Town. First year professional Freddy Moncur also made his debut in that game, the central midfielder following his brother, George, who plays for Colchester, and Dad John, who played for West Ham and Spurs, into the record books. Moncur also played in the FA Cup thrashing of Staines in November.



You might think that anyone who scores 50 goals in a season is playing in their number one sport. In Mathew Stevens' case you would be wrong.

"I definitely miss it," says 17-year-old Stevens. "I did it seriously for about five years, training three or four times a week at my Grandad's gym, Pinewood Starr in Crowthorne. I still go there on my day off and do some skipping, some bag work and on the pads which is very good for my fitness. If nothing happens in football I would definitely go back to boxing. I'm not saying I'd be as good as I was but I did win five national titles so I should be able to get back to a decent level."

Boxing runs in the family. His grandfather Les 'Is More' Stevens lost on points to the legendary John Conteh in 1974 shortly before Conteh won the world title; his uncle was national amateur champion; his father boxes. It is all part of the traveller tradition that Stevens is proud to be a part of, the highlight being fellow traveller Tyson Fury being crowned world heavyweight champion.

"Obviously he is one of our own and so everyone was cheering him on," explains Mathew. "People didn't take him seriously before but they will now. It's massive for us. In the traveller community, most boys box. It's part of the culture. We've got Billy Joe Saunders and Andy Lees coming through too. It's a big traveller thing."

Stevens made his first team debut last season and has been offered a professional contract with Barnet. The goals continue to pour in for the 18-year-old from Camberley in Berkshire, who studies at Stanmore College, and a career in the ring may have to wait for this fox in the box.

The Barnet FC apprentice, who smashed the club's goalscoring records last season with an incredible 57 league and cup goals, was actually national boxing champion five years running and captain of England! After 16 fights and 16 wins, including 11 stoppages, 'Thunder' Stevens gave it all up to try to make it as a professional footballer instead.

"I stopped when I was 15 and playing for Reading because I had to make the decision whether I wanted to be a footballer or a boxer," explains Stevens, who took up boxing at 8 and had his first fight as soon as he was old enough, aged 11.

"My last fight was as England captain in the Three Nations against Scotland and Wales. I was Under-15 Class 2 so I was 63 kilos at the time but had to box a weight above at 66 kilos, which is probably welterweight in men's terms, Floyd Mayweather-type of weight. I had to box the English Champion, Billy Flanagan, in the weight above, in the semi-final. I won on points, 21-9, and then in the final I stopped the Welsh boy, Joe Joyce."

Footballers who have turned to ringcraft

Should Stevens ever decide to make the switch back to boxing he will be following the route taken by several other former players.

Curtis Woodhouse

Former England Under-21 midfielder, Woodhouse made his name at Sheffield United before making a £1 million move to Birmingham City. He fell out of love with football though and became the British light-welterweight champion in 2014.

Matty Mainwaring

An apprentice at Preston between 2006-08, Mainwaring turned professional with Stockport but hung up his boots in 2014, aged only 24 to work under Matthew Hatton a one-time world title challenger and the brother of ex World champion Ricky Hatton.

Leon McKenzie

McKenzie edged closer to a shot at the British super-middleweight title in October after stopping the previously undefeated John McCallum at York, but he made over 300 appearances for the likes of Crystal Palace, Peterborough, Norwich and Coventry City.

Paul Derrick

Derrick spent two years trying to make the grade as an apprentice at Rochdale before turning his hand back to boxing. He now boxes near his Stockport base for the Macclesfield Boxing club.

THUNDER STRUCK!

Boxer Mat now lethal in the box

BY GAVIN WILLACY

BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE

Lewis

Not many current apprentices will feature twice, live on the BBC or be able to celebrate an act of FA Cup giant killing with some of the finest players to have ever graced The Premier League.

It has been a whirlwind time though for 17-year-old Lewis Hardcastle since he left parent club Blackburn Rovers to join Salford City on a youth loan.

Hardcastle, who hails from Atherton near Wigan, joined the Ammies who are famously fronted by former Manchester United stars Ryan Giggs, Paul Scholes, Nicky Butt, and Gary and Phil Neville at the end of September.

And the tenacious midfielder was rewarded with a standing ovation from a capacity Moor Lane crowd that included (Gary) Neville, Scholes and Butt as Salford dumped Notts County out of the FA Cup in November live on the Beeb.

His fine form has also helped the Class of 92 (with Peter Lim) owned team to third in the Evo Stik Premier League with Eric Kinder, Rovers Academy supremo delighted that the midfielder he sent out as a boy is showing signs of coming back as a man.

Lewis turning out for his parent club, Blackburn Rovers

Hardcastle

"He's been at our academy since he was 6-years-old and it was the right time for him to go out and experience real football, adult men's football," Kinder said.

"We have a policy of sending some of our youngsters out on-loan and we only do it when we think it is going to benefit all parties. We don't put them out willy-nilly. There has to be a valid reason for any player to go out on loan.

"In Lewis' case we felt he needed to grow-up a little bit. He's been sheltered in the academy for long enough so Salford was a good pitch for where he was at in his development as a player."

"We know the owners and we have a relationship with the management team there. So we've been getting feedback on him from some world-class players and the joint managers - we knew that he'd be looked after but that they would be strong with him and honest in their assessments."

Hardcastle who is scheduled to return to Blackburn on Christmas Eve may not turn 18 until next summer but Kinder believes the experience will hold him in good stead over the coming months.

"We're seeing a massive difference through the week," Kinder said of the player who still trains with Rovers before joining up with his Salford team-mates for their Thursday evening training session.

"We're delighted for him and Salford. He trains with us and still attends college before heading over there on a Thursday.

"We knew he could handle this and be ok in men's football, we just felt that he was a typical teenage player who needed to experience another type of football," Kinder continued.

"There are some good players in non-league and it was about exposing him to a different type of challenge in a very competitive environment.

"We've been delighted with what we've seen from him. We go and watch him every game and he's loved it there. He wasn't sure at first because he was dropping down from being involved in the Under-21s against the likes of Arsenal to facing the likes of Blyth in the Evo Stik Premier League.

"He comes in here with a big beaming smile and the other lads are all asking about what's going on at Salford.

While the non-league game is littered with scores of former apprentices, Kinder expects Hardcastle's long term future to be at Ewood Park.

"Let's be clear we see Lewis as a professional player and not a non-league player," Kinder added.

"We generally allow our players out for a month before recalling them and we've already gone beyond that in this case but he will definitely return to us on Christmas Eve and we want to see him go back into the Under-21s, look at his progression and see him sign a professional deal here."

"We're delighted for him and Salford... There are some good players in non-league and it was about exposing him to a different type of challenge in a very competitive environment."

Right: Lewis in action on loan at Salford City



My Future Today

BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE



My Future Today (MFT) has kicked-off for the 2015-16 season.

The initiative, which was introduced last year to replace League Football Education's (LFE) national careers event, got underway in November with players from Hull City and Grimsby Town.

Tranmere was the next stop with Wrexham and Shrewsbury players joining the Rovers Under-18s before Crewe and Port Vale got involved 24 hours later.

MFT is designed to help 16-18-year-old players discover their own psychometric and personality profiles, understand employability skills and raise awareness around dual careers and opportunities away from football.

The programme which is supported by AFTA Thought, The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust and Liverpool John Moores University, will take place at 14 regional venues and involve over 600 apprentice footballers from 36 football clubs this season.

LFE Project Manager Dan Jolley, said: "These events are focussed on personal development and providing an opportunity for apprentices to think about their own personality, skills and interests.

"It is a holistic approach to support them in becoming rounded individuals. In turn that delivers on and off the pitch benefits. We want them to understand their own identity and realise that they are more than just young footballers.

"The presence of ex-professionals and other former elite athletes reinforces that message and we ensure that everyone leaves with a raised awareness of the support networks and opportunities that are open to them."

"It is excellent and caters for all players' learning abilities. It is a great way of getting the message across in a relative way."

Mick Ede Port Vale Under-18 manager



"This will help me find new ways to improve myself and find things out about myself."

Jordan Wilson
Shrewsbury Town



"The day helped us gain knowledge and relaxed us about the upcoming situation of the professional contract meeting. This allows us to remain calm as no matter what happens, it's not the end."

Taylor Attrell Port Vale

"There's life after football and it's important to focus on other things, not just football so that I can develop other routes in the future."

Tom Williams Tranmere Rovers



"This gives us a better understanding of how important it is to plan out your future and to enhance our people skills to become more sociable and confident around others."

Cameron Hough Grimsby Town



Chris McCready Tackles MFT

Former Crewe Alexandra, Tranmere and Morecambe defender Chris McCready retired from football a couple of years ago, now a lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University, he has thrown himself into supporting the MFT programme.

Here he tells LFE about his background and why he is convinced that all players can benefit from challenging themselves to think about their holistic development and a dual career.

"I had some great memories and made some good friends but my time at Crewe was really challenging due to a number of recurring injuries and not really playing consistently," McCready said.

"I managed to get on top of it by embracing sports science (although at the time I didn't know what that was) and started working with a sport psychologist who specialised in injuries. Between us we devised a tailored training programme and I worked with him over the next 10 years which helped me enormously from a professional and personal perspective.

"The thought of developing academically and continuing my education always interested me but initially I convinced myself that I didn't have the time, patience or resources to do anything else other than be a footballer," he continued.

"I turned 26 and seriously started to consider what I might like to study and deep down I knew I was capable of doing more with my time and achieving something else at the same time as playing."

Having enrolled at University, Chris also got married and became a Dad for the first time but he found that he was still able to complete his studies and develop other interests.

"The decision to study was the best decision I have made as an adult. I was worried about the time studying would take away from my career but it had the opposite effect and I felt that I played my best football whilst studying.

"It allowed me to switch focus and develop myself, not the footballer," he added.

"I'd encourage every young player to find something that interests them away from football and see where it can take them. It helps develop you as a person and a player."

"Being away from family and having to be independent has matured me and helped me grow as a person."

Ryan Tinsley



"I always wanted to travel so when I found out about this league and the great set-up at Rovers it was a no brainer."

Stephen Hoyle



FANTASTIC FOUR MASTER KIWI TEST

BY SIMON WILLIAMS



"I found a new start, new club and a full time job."

Miles John



"I was given a chance to do what I love doing in a country that I'd only heard good things about."

Saul Halpin

It may be home to Rugby Union's World Champions but New Zealand is also providing a life changing opportunity for a number of young footballers.

Napier City Rovers, a club some 12,000 miles from the UK, lifted a Central Premier League title in the summer with four former apprentices joining the celebrations.

Stephen Hoyle (Doncaster Rovers), **Saul Halpin** (Torquay United), **Miles John** (Bristol City) and **Ryan Tinsley** (Nottingham Forest) took a leap of faith to play under fellow Englishman and Head Coach Bill Robertson.



"The players I have so far selected have been technically very good players with excellent attitudes wanting to develop and use the opportunity to further their careers."

Bill Robertson, Head Coach, Napier City Rovers

Coach of the Year, Robertson, reached out to LFE in the hope of landing fresh and hungry players looking for a new challenge.

"The players I have so far selected have been technically very good players with excellent attitudes wanting to develop and use the opportunity to further their careers," Robertson told Touchline.

Tinsley, a Nottingham lad who was unable to make the breakthrough at Forest, is one of Robertson's biggest successes. He picked up the region's Player of the Year and Golden Boot awards in a record breaking season for NCR.

"I had to grow up a lot to come over here as a lonely 19 year old," Tinsley said. "Being away from family and having to be independent has matured me and helped me grow as a person. I will stay here and become a resident. Hopefully I'll have a chance of becoming an All White!" said Tinsley.

Midfield dynamo Hoyle, needed little persuasion to up sticks and head to the Southern Hemisphere, "I always wanted to travel so when I found out about this league and the great set-up at Rovers it was a no brainer. I'm in a beautiful part of the world while continuing to take my football seriously," Hoyle said.

"With the climate here, there is no more getting the orange ball out for snow. Sunshine makes everything more enjoyable. We all have to become independent

fast but with the support network Rovers provided it was easy. I miss my family but I have my own little football family in Napier! We have a tighter knit group here than at any club I have ever played for before," he added.

Players' Player of the Year, Saul Halpin, has also flourished living the life of Kiwi. "I was given a chance to do what I love doing in a country that I'd only heard good things about. Playing under Robbo has improved my confidence. I had suffered a lot of setbacks and hadn't played much back home. Committing to my first job outside of football has helped to build me as a person," Halpin said.

Nothing lasts forever though and John, who has spent the last two seasons at the Bluewater Stadium, claiming the Supporter's Player of the Year last term has elected to return to the South West of England to sign for Conference South side Bath City.

"Things weren't going to plan with football when I was released by Bristol, I didn't have a job and over here I found a new start, new club and a full time job. I will miss the Oceanic weather, it's so much hotter, but the overall experience has changed me for the better. I'm more confident and wiser," John said.

The success of this young English quartet has encouraged Robertson, who is open to recruiting more players from the UK.

"It's an excellent chance (for a young player) to come over here and compete at a high standard in the winter and maybe play in the ASB Premiership in the summer, while living in one of New Zealand's most popular destinations," Robertson said.

"Players who come here also have the chance to deliver on the club's community coaching programme in local schools or work on placement for the club's corporate sponsors so there is some valuable life experience to be gained."



Follow Napier City: [Rovers @NCR_fc](#)
Follow Bill Robertson: [@bill_robertson5](#)

Apprentices Down Under... Australia is also a popular destination for Brits on their travels and unsurprisingly a smattering of former apprentices have made the trip Down Under. From Perth to Darwin and Cairns to Canberra, English players are dotted all over the land - though newly promoted Banyule City, whose home is in the suburbs of Melbourne probably boast one of the highest concentrations with five. Jonjo O'Hara, once of Bradford, led City's promotion charge to the Victoria State 1 League with help from Carel Tiofack (Ipswich), Samuel Osobe (Preston) and Doncaster duo Jack Nodder and Matthew Martin.



Hamish Falconer

Now: Year 2
Criminology
& Sociology
Undergraduate,
University of
Liverpool

Former Club:
Grimsby Town

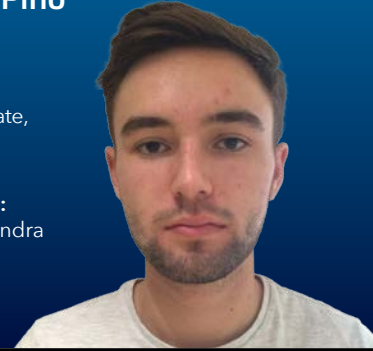


FALCONER

Michael Pino

Now: Year 1
Accounting
& Finance
Undergraduate,
University of
Liverpool

Former Club:
Crewe Alexandra

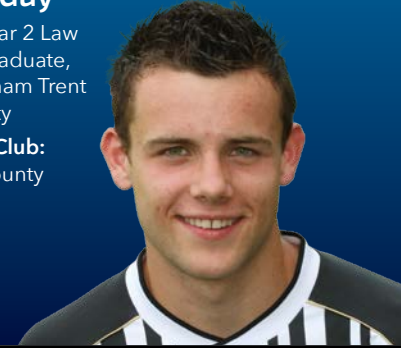


PINO

Tyler Guy

Now: Year 2 Law
Undergraduate,
Nottingham Trent
University

Former Club:
Notts County



GUY



ARE YOU NEXT?

BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE

UNIVERSITY

CHALLENGE

With the January UCAS deadline approaching, Touchline caught up with three former apprentices who are enjoying their foray into Higher Education.

SS: At what point did you think about going to University?

HF: The likes of Oliver Cowing (Education Officer) and Paul Bartlett (LFE) always highlighted Uni as being a good option if we didn't get a professional contract. As you get in to your second year it is make or break to a certain extent but by then I'd made up my mind that I would go to University.

MP: I was out injured with a knee injury for a big chunk of my second year at Crewe. During that time I thought it'd be a good idea to look at University.

TG: I always wanted to be a footballer but didn't want to put all my eggs in one basket. It was something I wanted to do and would've done anyway even if I'd carried on playing.

SS: Why did you go to University instead of doing anything else?

HF: This was always my first option. I have played Squash at a really high level as well and I'd considered looking at that and trying to go pro but that didn't really materialise.

MP: I thought about America.

TG: Football was obviously the main thing but other than that I was always going to go to Uni.

SS: How hard or easy was it to make an application?

HF: It was really straightforward. I can't thank Paul (Bartlett) and the guys at Grimsby, especially Oliver Cowing, enough for their help.

MP: I applied late after the deadline in January so I didn't have to go through clearing but it was a risk. Thankfully I received unconditional offers from everywhere I'd considered and then picked the University of Liverpool.

TG: I went straight through UCAS.

SS: Tell me about why you've chosen the course you are on?

HF: A future in the Police force was always something that was in the back of my mind growing up so it's very compatible with joining the force and getting on an accelerated promotion scheme.

MP: I wanted to do something Business related that I would enjoy and it has good exemptions so you don't have to do exams at the end to become an accountant.

TG: I had a good relationship with the then chief scout at Notts County (Matt Alexander) and we talked about what route I might take after football. I've always been quite academic so thought Law would be a good degree to have and that there will always be work in that field.

SS: What are your long term career aspirations?

HF: I'm actually a special constable in Merseyside police at the minute and have just finished my training so I will be out on the streets soon. It's only a part-time role and it's starting at the bottom but it's a good foot in the door.

MP: I'm a bit vague at the moment in terms of exactly what I want to do but it's in the Business or Finance area.

TG: I would like to work around Sport and am planning to do a Master's degree in Sports Law when I finish my degree.

SS: Do you still play football? If so at what level and how does this fit alongside your studies?

HF: I'm at St. Helens Town (North West Counties League). I played all last season but it's been on and off this year with training to be a Police Officer because that has taken up all my time at weekends.

MP: I'm playing at Droylsden in the Evo Stik First Division. I've played almost every game this year which is great because a lot of lads who get contracts end up on loan at a similar level.

TG: I have played for Carlton Town and the University.

SS: How have you found student life?

HF: Things at a football club can be regimented whereas at University you take more individual responsibility. You know what you should be doing

but there isn't anyone on your back to do it. Student life is great.

MP: I'm actually living at home to save money but it's good. I took a job working in a bar over the summer because I needed to earn money. You get used to training every day and it can be difficult to adjust because you have to apply and motivate yourself to do the work.

TG: It's a good change but it still has a similar structure. The days are long and you have to work hard. In football that would be physically, instead it's now working mentally hard.

SS: Would you encourage other young players to think about studying for a degree and if so why?

HF: Absolutely. If you're an apprentice and doing a BTEC it's a great route into University. I got triple D* grades and got tonnes of UCAS points. I applied to five very respectable institutions and got accepted by all five. People should understand when they are doing the BTEC, it can well and truly open the door to almost any University course.

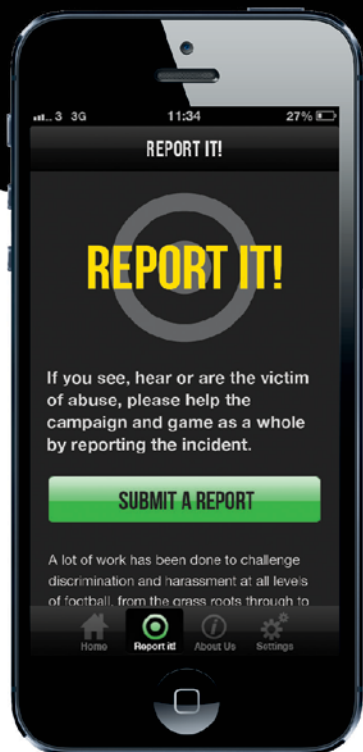
MP: Definitely though I would advise applying by the 15 January deadline and not leaving it until the last minute.

TG: I've loved every minute of it. All the Notts County youth-team players came in recently and it's such an important thing because players can fall out of football and it's really important to plan ahead.

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WHAT THEY'VE BEEN TWEETING

WITH SO MANY CURRENT AND EX APPRENTICES ON TWITTER, WE'VE PICKED OUT SOME OF THE BEST TWEETS WE'VE SEEN RECENTLY

Review time for Charlton starlet Karlan Ahearne-Grant.

Gavin Willacy @gavinwillacy
@KAG18_ doing his @LFEonline progress review at @CAFOfficial Pros progressing with their education @CAFC_TheAcademy



Bury apprentice Raquarn Crosdale, talks up the Shakers U18s.

Raquarn Crosdale @RaquarnCrosdale
Well done lads 🏆 another win, unbeaten in 7 now keep it going and another assist from me 🙌

Jamie Edwards documents his work with the Wolves Under-18 squad

Jamie Edwards @JamieEdwards
Great session yesterday with @OfficialWolves academy yesterday with @LFEonline #notchatonlyconversations



Max Clayton is aiming for a full recovery and more after injuring his hamstring.

Max Clayton @MaxJClayton
A serious injury calls for serious character! Will work harder than ever to become a better player on my return! 🏆



Swindon Town's Tom Smith celebrates after scoring his first professional goal

Tom Beau Smith @TomBeauSmith4
Good 45 minutes for the first team today. Buzzing to score my first professional goal and get the 3 points 🙌 #stfc

Noah Chesmain's debut for Millwall captured by the club's education officer Steve Sallis

Steve Sallis @stevensallis
Days like today make you so proud! @noahchesmain debut! @MFC_Academy @LFEonline #millwall



Mansfield's Teddy Bloor thanks supporters for their votes #GOTM

Teddy Bloor @teddybloor
Happy To Have Won @LFEonline Goal Of The Month Thanks To Everyone That Voted 🙌 @mansfieldtownfc @StagsYouth



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