

Touchline



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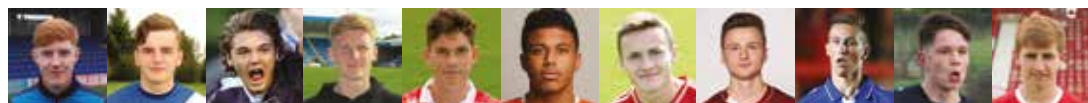
FL AWARDS 2016 PRIZE GUYS

THE DEBUTANTS P6 LIFE SKILLS P12 EURO FOCUS P14 PFA SAFETY NET P18 OSTERSUNDS FK P20

the 11

The latest eleven talented teenagers to make the grade in LFE's February line-up, as voted by our team of Regional Officers, were:

Nominations are made four times each season by LFE's regional officers and the winners all receive a certificate, cheque for £50 and coverage on the LFE website.



- Alfie Egan** AFC Wimbledon
- Ronan Hale** Birmingham City
- Ethan Wassall** Derby County
- Finn O'Mara** Gillingham
- Liam Harris** Lincoln City
- James Justin** Luton Town
- Mitchell Curry** Middlesbrough
- James Hammond** Northampton Town
- Adam May** Portsmouth
- George Hirst** Sheffield Wednesday
- Jake Phillips** Wrexham

GOAL OF THE MONTH

BY ELAINE BRAND

The votes for Goal of the Month have flooded in this season (again). More clubs are submitting quality goals ahead of the shortlisting process and viewing figures remain strong.

Over 11,000 votes have already been cast this season and at the time of writing seven players had received monthly awards.

February's selection featured 10 excellent strikes but Millwall's Mikael Ndjoli beat his fellow apprentices attracting 45 per cent of the vote for his stunning goal against Colchester United.

WATCH THE GOALS AND CAST YOUR VOTE

lfe.org.uk/goal-of-the-month [LFETV](#)

LFE Club Meetings

LFE's annual Club Meetings are set to take place at Oxford, Leicester and Huddersfield.

The events are designed to help clubs share best practice and deliver updates on the apprenticeship in sporting excellence programme. Clubs can send up to four delegates on the day, for registration and more information please visit LFE's website.

	TUESDAY 3 MAY 2016 Oxford United FC
	WEDNESDAY 4 MAY 2016 Leicester City FC
	THURSDAY 5 MAY 2016 Huddersfield Town FC

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:



Education Support Fund

BY ELAINE BRAND



DEADLINE FOR ESF SUBMISSIONS

As the deadline for making a claim from the Education Support Fund draws nearer, LFE chief executive Alan Sykes has warned clubs 'don't miss out!'

Claim forms and supporting documentation must be received at LFE before 31 May for an award to be made. To date just thirty-three per cent of the fund has been distributed and Sykes is eager to ensure clubs do not hesitate over their applications.

"I would urge clubs to make claims as soon as possible and not leave things until the last minute," said Sykes. "Clubs run the risk of being unable to maximise their claim or missing out altogether otherwise."

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

Pass4Soccer

Pass4Soccer, LFE's official partner when it comes to helping players earn soccer scholarships with Colleges and Universities in The USA is once again hosting a trial game for players in May.

The event which will take place on Friday 13 May at Sutton Coldfield Town FC, is open to those who have come through LFE's apprenticeship programme and will be attended by scores of US University soccer coaches keen to recruit players for their squads for next season.

For more information about the opportunity and to register please call Pass4Soccer on **0191 229 5263** or visit www.pass4soccer.com.

Assessment Trials 2016

LFE's annual Assessment Trials offers players the chance to showcase their talents in front of an army of scouts from professional clubs, non-league and from Universities in the UK and abroad.

The events, which are open to those who are coming towards the end of their apprenticeship or the end of a first professional contract (Under 19 year), aim to help players find a route back into the game at an appropriate level.

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT

www.lfe.org.uk/trials2016



THURSDAY 5 MAY 2016
Rochdale AFC, Spotland Stadium



TUESDAY 10 MAY 2016
Woking FC, The Laithwaite Community Stadium



WEDNESDAY 11 MAY 2016
Port Vale FC, Vale Park



THURSDAY 12 MAY 2016
Nuneaton Town FC, GV's Liberty Way Stadium

Academy Leagues Round-Up BY JACK WYLIE

Youth Alliance

North East Division

The North East section is still up for grabs as just eight points separate the top 10 teams. Scunthorpe are currently in the driving seat with a lead of two points after a run of three consecutive wins, while second-placed Mansfield are heading in the opposite direction with just one point from a possible six in April.

Lincoln were the form side in the division during autumn but their challenge has dissipated with three consecutive defeats, including a 2-0 loss against Burton, which keeps Albion in contention.

One team out of the running is Bradford, who were reigning champions for two successive years. The Bantams began the season as the early leaders, but have managed just two victories so far in 2016.

North West Division

It looks like a two-horse race at the top of the North West division in a repeat of the 2014/15 season as last year's top two Bury and Wigan are again battling for silverware.

Will Ryder's Latics have remained at the summit of the division for the majority of the campaign, but a 3-2 defeat to Preston allowed the Shakers, who are eight games unbeaten, to erase the deficit with five games to go.

Athletic are relying on goal difference to stay above Ryan Kidd's side, and the two teams face off for a potential title decider at the end of April in the penultimate fixture of the campaign.

South Division - Merit League 1

Leyton Orient have sprung a surprise by securing a four-point lead at the top of the Merit League One table with just two games remaining. Orient finished third in the South East section, but have won seven of their opening eight games in the new format, conceding just one goal in that time.

Their closest rivals are Portsmouth, who scraped into the League One section by a point after finishing fifth in the South West division. Mikey Harris' side have been prolific in front of goal, producing 12 different scorers with Tommy Scutt claiming a club-high five.

Pompey have been involved in a number of goal extravaganzas, including a 5-5 draw against fourth-placed Wimbledon and a 4-3 win over Bournemouth, who sit third, but were convincingly beaten 4-0 by the O's to lose ground on the leaders.

Both Luton, runaway winners of the South East division, and Plymouth, who topped the South West table, have struggled, languishing in fifth and ninth, respectively.

South Division - Merit League 2

Oxford United have emerged as clear favourites to win the lower division after gaining seven wins from eight games. The U's missed out on reaching the League One level by just a point, but began the new campaign with a 7-0 victory over Newport to banish any negative vibes.

The leaders are joint top scorers with third-placed Swindon and possess the meanest defence, having conceded just seven goals.

MK Dons were the nearest challengers, but were beaten 3-2 to end their title hopes, meaning only Cambridge, who have a game in hand, can prevent Oxford from claiming glory, but they lie a distant eight points adrift with three games left.



U18 Professional Development League

North

Nottingham Forest wrapped up the title with ease, completing their season on 71 points, 15 ahead of Crewe Alexandra and Sheffield United. Forest have the best defensive and goalscoring record in the division, while striker Ben Brereton tops the individual scoring charts alongside Birmingham's Ronan Hale with 26.

Huddersfield, who had been the pacesetters over the previous two seasons, relinquished their control of second place to United when the Blades inflicted a 5-0 drubbing after 21-goal striker Jordan Hallam produced a hat-trick.

South

Watford have ended Charlton's domination of the division by securing the title with a game still to play. Athletic had led the way throughout the campaign, but stumbled over the past month with just one win in five to hand the advantage to the Hornets.

David Horseman's triumphant team are on an impressive streak of 11 clean sheets in a row, as well as being 14 games unbeaten to claim the Development League South crown.

U18 Premier League

Tier One

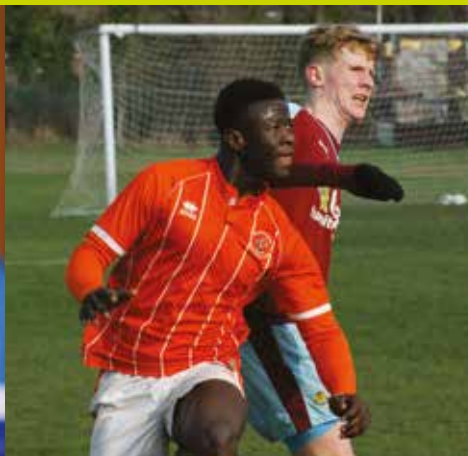
Manchester City won the top of the table battle in a dress rehearsal for the Youth Cup final. Braces from Lukas Nmecha and Brahim Diaz overturned a 3-1 half-time deficit as City triumphed 4-3 against Chelsea. Meanwhile Blackburn face a fixture backlog after their run to the FA Youth Cup semi final.

Tier Two

Middlesbrough have taken command of Tier Two, creating a five-point gap to their nearest rivals. Leading scorer Mitchell Curry has bagged five times in five games since the tier system divide, taking his tally for the season to 18. Meanwhile, Wolves are struggling at the foot of the table after suffering 7-2 and 7-3 losses to Leicester and Tottenham, respectively.

Tier Three

Brighton beat fellow Championship outfit Derby to claim top spot in the bottom tier. Reece Meekums has been in prolific form for Albion, notching six goals, including a hat-trick in the 5-2 win against Norwich. County, who lie third, have also enjoyed success over the Premier League teams, convincingly defeating Newcastle (4-0) and Manchester United (3-0).





Josh Koroma
Leyton Orient

1 A 3-0 defeat in April at Barnet will not be a happy memory for any Orient fan, nor for player-manager Kevin Nolan, who lost his role following the game. But it will always be a very special day for striker Josh Koroma. The 17 year-old from Peckham came on for the last half hour, replacing Nolan, having earned a place after a series of impressive performances for the O's reserve team in the Final Third Development League. "Josh has improved massively since the turn of the year and it's great for him to get a taste of first team action," said coach Danny Webb. "Hopefully it will be the first of many."



Harrison Chapman
Middlesbrough/Barnsley

2 It is no surprise that Harry can't get into a Middlesbrough side going for promotion to the Premier League - he is only 18. But the midfielder from Hartlepool went on loan to League One Barnsley in February and has played almost every game since. He made his debut off the subs bench in the win at Crewe, earned a place in the starting line-up and scored his first goal when the Tykes won at Walsall in March.



George Miller
Bury

3 In the last Touchline we reported on three Bury apprentices making their first team debuts for the Shakers: Khalid Mohammed, Jack Ruddy and Matty Foulds (now at Everton). Well their team-mate George Miller has joined them in the record books, making his League debut in February. The 17-year-old forward from Bolton came on around the hour mark during the defeat at Barnsley.



Hakeem Odoffin
Barnet

4 It has been a whirlwind season for classy centre-back Hakeem. Outstanding for the Barnet youth team, he started to train with Martin Allen's first team. After being on the bench, he made his full debut in the FA Cup against Newport at The Hive in December. Within a few weeks he was being transferred to Championship giants Wolves, a big move away from his local club for the teenager from just down the road in Mill Hill.

BY GAVIN WILLACY

The Debutants



Josh Tymon
Hull City

5 Despite still being a first year apprentice, Josh got his first team call-up aged just 16 for the FA Cup tie at Bury in January and did so well, playing 80 minutes of their comfortable win, that he was given another opportunity on a rather grander stage in the fifth round: away to Arsenal! Defender Josh started against the likes of England stars Theo Walcott and Danny Welbeck and played 55 minutes of their 0-0 draw at the Emirates in front of 60,000 before heading back to the academy.



Matt Hudson
Preston North End

6 When young goalkeeper Matt was called up to North End's first team for their Christmas trip to Leeds United, he could not have dreamed of playing. Yet with regular back-up keeper Chris Kirkland taken ill the day before, Hudson was on the bench as cover for Jordan Pickford, on loan from Sunderland.

Pickford though was sent off in the first half for handball - a decision later rescinded - and Hudson came on for a memorable debut. The only goal he conceded was a bizarre own goal that he could do nothing about.



Noah Chesmain
Millwall

7 Left-back Noah was thrown into the Lions' Den back in November when he was promoted to the first team bench for the first time and came on for his Football League debut for the last few minutes of their win over Bury.

Noah who hails from East Ham has been a stand-out player for the youth team and a regular for Millwall Under-21s all season under his youth team coach from last season, Justin Skinner.



Frankie Musonda
Luton Town

8 Centre-back Frankie has captained Luton youth team to a magnificent season, reaching the FA Youth Cup quarter-final, winning the FL Youth Alliance South East Division with just one defeat, and reaching the FL Youth Alliance Cup Final against Shrewsbury. He was rewarded with a debut as a late substitute in the Hatters' 2-0 win at Mansfield, strangely coming on at left-wing!

Local lad Musonda will miss the climax to the season through injury but has earned a pro contract at Kenilworth Road.

LFE Apprentice of the Year
The Football League Awards

Ademola LOOKMAN



Charlton Athletic

BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE



The emergence of Ademola Lookman at Charlton Athletic has been a bright spot in an otherwise gloomy season at The Valley.

On Sunday 17 April his profile sparked even more as he was named LFE's Championship Apprentice of the Year at The Football League Awards in Manchester.

It has been quite a journey so far for the talented 18-year-old who is regarded as one of the hottest properties in The Football League.

Lookman who hails from Peckham, South London, the same neck of the woods as former England defender Rio Ferdinand, penned a new 4-year deal with The Addicks in February but depending upon which newspaper you read has been tipped to start next season in The Premier League.

Arsenal, Tottenham, Crystal Palace and Manchester United are reported to have taken an interest in the youngster.

It is a far cry from little over 18 months ago when he was still playing Sunday league football for Kennington-based Waterloo FC.

His progression at Charlton's Sparrows Lane complex has been rapid though. His talents were showcased nationally by LFE's Goal of the Month competition - for academy players - before he earned his first team debut in Charlton's defeat at MK Dons in November. Nineteen further appearances and four goals have followed for the youngster who has shown the ability to operate in any of the forward positions.

Ferdinand, capped 81 times by England, had a trophy-laden 12 years at Manchester United and remains a hero for Lookman.

He said: "Rio is definitely an inspiration. He grew up in Peckham and played for United, who are pretty much the biggest club in the world.

"It was a real motivation for me - if he can do it then why can't I?"

"Jamie Vardy had four years playing non-league football - look where he is now. Scoring for England and Leicester are top of the table. Dreams can come true - nothing is impossible."

Aside from his longer term ambitions, Lookman, who is eligible to play for Nigeria through his parents retains a modest, grounded outlook on his success thus far.

"If I looked at the position I was in last year, I didn't think then I would be where I am today," he said.

"I was proud to be nominated for such a prestigious award - and just lost for words. I didn't expect it to happen to me. My season has been okay on a personal level. I've had some good moments - and others where I could have done better.

"It is about keeping my consistency really and raising it to another level - because the higher you go in football the better the quality is. I've got to raise my standards even more. Scoring my first professional goal away at Brighton would be the highlight of my season so far. Hopefully I have a better moment than that to come."

Who would bet against Lookman doing just that and continuing on an upward trajectory?

"I was proud to be nominated for such a prestigious award. I didn't expect it to happen to me."



CHAMPIONSHIP - THE SHORTLIST

David Popa Birmingham City

Romanian Youth International Popa has been a leading light in the Blues Academy throughout the campaign. The forward put on an early season masterclass in LFE's Goal of the Month competition and has also made excellent progress in the classroom.

Currently on loan at Kettering Town to gain some competitive experience, Popa has already penned a two-year professional deal with The Blues.

Matt Hudson Preston North End

Identified as one for the future at an early stage, promising keeper Matt has already signed a professional deal at Deepdale and earned plaudits from Lilywhites manager Simon Grayson for his 'mature and confident' debut at Leeds.

Grayson said: "What a place to make your debut. I have seen many an experienced goalkeeper crumble at Leeds but Matt did fine. He is a good goalkeeper and we have a lot of faith in him."

LEAGUE ONE

LFE Apprentice of the Year The Football League Awards

James Bree



Barnsley appear to have a monopoly on producing high quality young right-backs with James Bree the latest Academy starlet to come to prominence, by collecting the LFE League One Apprentice of the Year prize at The Football League Awards.

Bree appears to be treading the same path as John Stones and Mason Holgate (both Everton) who are also graduates of The Tykes apprenticeship programme.

The youngster has been earmarked as one for the future since making his first team debut while still at School. Bree followed that up by making 14 appearances last term and but for a hamstring injury would have amassed more than the 24 run-outs he has enjoyed this season and perhaps played a more prominent role in the clubs Johnstone's Paint Trophy triumph at Wembley at the start of April.

As it was Bree was an unused substitute so missed out on his "dream" of playing at Wembley, however he still has plenty going for him with Reds boss Paul Heckingbottom hailing the youngster for winning this prestigious award.

"The judging panel were looking at players who are performing for the first team but also showing the right attitude, character and application in other areas and more specifically in their education programme," Heckingbottom said.

"This award is a credit to James and the strides he's made over his apprenticeship."

Bree's emergence has not gone unnoticed away from the confines of Oakwell, several Championship and Premier League clubs are reportedly keeping tabs on the Wakefield-born full back whose current professional deal expires at the end of the 2016-17 season.

Pat Lally, who combines his role as LFE's regional officer for Yorkshire while heading up the Education department at The Professional Footballers' Association, added:

"James has had a marvellous two years on the apprenticeship and thoroughly deserves this award for his commitment to his football and education. He was involved with the first team from an early stage but has shown the same application he does on the pitch, in the classroom throughout."

LEAGUE ONE - THE SHORTLIST

Bright Osayi-Samuel Blackpool

Winger Osayi-Samuel first came to prominence last term when he was promoted to the senior squad by Lee Clark and was included in his match-day squads despite playing for the club's Under-18s on the morning of games.

The 18-year-old has become more of a permanent fixture this term and signed a new two-year deal with the Seaside in August with the option of a further year.

Thomas Smith Swindon Town

The 18-year-old made his debut as a substitute last term, playing 20 minutes of Swindon's 3-0 defeat at Preston. The flame-haired midfielder was introduced from the bench again as Town beat Newport County on penalties in the first round of the Johnstone's Paint Trophy in September. Then four days later he arrowed home a spectacular equaliser to set Swindon on the way to a 3-1 victory at Gresty Road.

LEAGUE TWO

LFE Apprentice of the Year The Football League Awards

Ben Godfrey



League Two Apprentice of the Year, Godfrey started the season in York City's Under-18s but will finish it at Norwich City after the Premier League side completed the signing of the midfielder in the January transfer window.

Godfrey, who celebrated his 18th birthday by penning a three-and-a-half-year contract in East Anglia, had attracted interest from a number of clubs after twice rejecting the offer of a professional contract with the Minstermen.

The Sky Bet League 2 side turned down three bids from the Canaries for Godfrey before finally agreeing an undisclosed six-figure sum believed to be in the region of £150,000 with add-ons that could take the final amount closer to £1m.

It is a meteoric rise for local lad Godfrey, born in York who made his first-team debut for City in their 1-0 win over Yeovil in August and went on to make a further 14 appearances, including eight as a substitute.

With Norwich engulfed in a relegation battle Godfrey has unsurprisingly not been involved in Norwich's first team since arriving at Carrow Road though manager, Alex Neil is pleased to have him on board.

"Ben has played first-team football for York, so that in itself suggests that he is progressing really quickly," Neill said.

"He's a man already and his dad has got history in rugby league, so he is built like a man and is a good athlete.

"We are hoping in the future he will turn into a good player. He is not one for the first team at the moment, it will be a project for us to introduce him to the U20s initially and then gradually bring him into the first team."

Godfrey paid tribute to York for providing him with the opportunity to earn his move.

"It's massive for me to be given this opportunity. York gave me the platform to kick on so I owe a lot to them," he said.

LEAGUE TWO - THE SHORTLIST

Hakeem Odoffin Barnet

It's been a big season for versatile defender Hakeem Odoffin, who has just turned 18. Outstanding in Barnet's Under-18s he was promoted to Martin Allen's first team and made two appearances for the Bees before Wolverhampton Wanderers swooped for his signature in deal that was initially worth £100,000 but will rise with add-ons.

Odoffin headed to Molineux on a two-and-a-half-year deal to join-up with Scott Sellars' Under-21 group.

Frankie Musonda Luton Town

A centre-half by trade Bedford-born Musonda joined the Hatters a decade ago and has already signed a professional deal for next term after making his debut against Mansfield in January.

He then appeared again as a substitute in April against Accrington with youth boss Paul Driver describing him as, "strong and very vocal; he's a leader".

LIFE SKILLS IN NUMBERS

How LFE's Life Skills programme breaks down:



16 Emotional Well Being: If U Care Share visited 16 football clubs during the 2015-16 season.

350 Apprentices received equality training courtesy of a partnership with Kick It Out. During the 2015-16 players discussed challenging topics including discrimination, banter, language, racism and homophobia.



14 Clubs worked with Colin Avery as players learned more about sexual health and respectful relationships.

10 Football clubs have engaged with the 'Staying on the Pitch' programme which aimed to raise the legal awareness for young players on regulatory and criminal offences.



700 Players have benefitted from the lifestyle and education sessions delivered by The Sporting Chance clinic. The workshops cover the effects of alcohol, drugs and gambling.



300 Players have tried to 'train' their brains with Jamie Edwards to hone performance.



630 Apprentices have engaged in social media awareness sessions during the season.



5 Clubs have brought cardiac health to the fore in sessions run by former Millwall apprentice Tobi Alabi.



33 CLUBS
550 PLAYERS
have taken part in LFE's My Future Today events which promote personal development and transferable skills.



173 TOTAL SESSIONS
325 TOTAL HOURS

Euro Focus

BY GAVIN WILLACY



It has been quite a twelve months for Dele Alli (1). This time last year he was helping MK Dons to promotion to The Championship. This summer he will be one of England's great hopes at the European Championships.

In between, Alli, who signed for Tottenham for £5m in January 2015, played a pivotal role as the Dons earned promotion on the final day of the season. That was impressive enough for someone who had just turned 19. However this season he has been a revelation in The Premier League. Who can forget that wonderful volley at Selhurst Park or his outstanding goal against France on his first international start?

He is the perfect exponent of the adage, 'if you're good enough you are old enough'. Last spring Dele won the Football League's Young Player of the Year Award. This April he was short-listed for the PFA Young Player of the Year and would not have looked out of place had he been in contention for the main award.

His rapid progress has even led England manager Roy Hodgson, to draw comparisons between Alli and one of the nation's greatest ever midfielders, 'Captain Marvel', Bryan Robson.

"He could do anything in that midfield position," Hodgson said of Alli's potential.

"I think he can be box-to-box, a No 10, if you like to call it that, or a No 6. He could be any of them because he has genuine all-round ability. He can challenge, he can run, he can fight for the ball, he can see a pass, he can score a goal.

"You mention Bryan Robson - that's the player I would like to think he could become."

Alli will be one of six probable members of Hodgson's squad who have come through the apprenticeship programme with LFE. Liverpool full-back Nathaniel Clyne (2) was an apprentice at Crystal Palace (2007-09), Tottenham star Danny Rose was at Leeds United before transferring to Spurs, Kyle Walker began at Sheffield United (2006-08) and John Stones (3) came through at Barnsley (2010-12) before his big money move to Everton.

Another former LFE graduate Jordan Henderson (Sunderland 2006-08) will miss out through injury, while Luke Shaw (Man Utd) is in a race against time to prove his fitness. Shaw, like Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain (Arsenal) and Adam Lallana (Liverpool), was an apprentice at Southampton.

Wales

It could be argued that if it wasn't for the apprenticeship programme, Wales may not have qualified for the Euros! Incredibly, 16 of their likely squad members are ex LFE apprentices, among them four from Swansea and four from Cardiff. Those include Liverpool star Joe Allen (4) and Tottenham full-back Ben Davies (5). Regional Officer Roger Gibbins, a one-time England schoolboy and Cardiff legend insists that he has played a role in developing half of Chris Coleman's team that will take on England this summer.

Others in contention include striker Simon Church, full-backs Adam Matthews (6), Chris Gunter and Neil Taylor while the likes of Johnny Williams and Hal Robson-Kanu will hope to provide the support for Gareth Bale and Aaron Ramsey in more advanced positions.

Northern Ireland

Many of Michael O'Neill's Northern Ireland squad who qualified for the Euros in astonishing fashion, topping their group, feature former LFE apprentices.

Full-back Conor McLaughlin was an outstanding youth team player at Preston North End, earning his Championship debut while on the ASE scheme and becoming a regular before breaking his leg. He is now rebuilding his career at Fleetwood Town. Canadian-born Caolan Lavery came to Suffolk via County Armagh, spending two years in Ipswich Town's youth team while Will Grigg (7) started out on an apprenticeship at Walsall and moved to Brentford and MK Dons (on loan) before landing at his current club Wigan.

Others to come through the system include goalkeeper Trevor Carson (Sunderland), Josh Magennis (Cardiff City) and Billy McKay (Leicester City).

Republic of Ireland

Martin O'Neill and Roy Keane's plans for the summer are also likely to involve a couple of former apprentices as Eire take on a Group of Death facing Belgium, Italy and Sweden.

Cyrus Christie who started out at Coventry in 2010 and dynamic midfielder Jeff Hendrick (Derby County) are both set to be included in O'Neill's plans.

"You mention Bryan Robson - that's the player I would like to think he could become."

Roy Hodgson on Dele Alli

How a team comprised of former LFE apprentices could look at the European Championships



LEWIS COOK

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Young Player of the Year The Football League Awards

BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE

One year on from being named as The Championship Apprentice of the Year, Lewis Cook's meteoric rise was once again brought into sharp focus at The Football League Awards in April when he was named as The Football League Young Player of the Year.

As a winner of this prestigious award Cook moves into exalted company, succeeding last year's winner Dele Alli and other former recipients of the award that include the likes of Gareth Bale, Wilfried Zaha and Fabian Delph who also started his career with Leeds.

The progression of Alli, who is now providing the thrust to Tottenham's Premier League title challenge has been noted at Elland Road, with current Leeds manager Steve Evans, who has described Cook as "magnificent" this season, drawing comparisons between the pair.

"He follows a boy who is an absolute star in the Premier League and Lewis Cook will attain that level and play at that level, I'm sure," Evans said.

Those who watch Leeds with any regularity would agree. Cook's maturity, class and vision belies his age. He only turned 19 in February yet has been a mainstay in the Leeds midfield all season making (to date) over forty appearances this term.

In that time, it has been easy to understand why several Premier League clubs have already started queuing for his signature should he elect to leave Elland Road when his current contract expires in 2017.

The teenager, capped by England at Youth level has simply been a revelation.

Cook who claimed the prize ahead of Fulham's Moussa Dembele and Walsall's Rico Henry, to his credit remains an unaffected individual though.

"I'm immensely proud of myself and I want to thank the club and my family for everything they've done," he said.

"It's a bit of a surprise as there's a lot of good young talent in The Football League, so I'm extremely happy."

Reflecting on the task of emulating the likes of Alli, Bale et al Cook added: "Obviously they are great players and they have gone on to great things so there's a bit of pressure for myself but it's all good."

"Thanks to the club and everyone who supported me. It's a really big achievement."

"Obviously last year I got the Apprentice of the Year so it's good progression for me. I am really happy to win the young player this year and it just shows that I am doing positive things on the pitch."

"I still can't quite believe it. It's a bit of a surprise to me but I am really proud of myself."

And so he should be. The award however does further raise the profile of United's prized asset at a time when the club are hoping to tie him to a new deal and discourage would-be suitors. While he refused to be drawn on specific contract talks, Cook has made no secret of his current happiness at Leeds.

Questioned about his Whites future at his own Thorp Arch press conference the day after picking up his illustrious award, Cook said: "Obviously I have still got a contract at Leeds and that's all I can focus on."

"I enjoy playing my football here and the club is great and all the lads are great so why not?"

"Every young footballer wants to end up in the Premiership - it's being the right time and whether you are good enough. Everyone wants to be there at one point in their career. That would be the dream - to do it with Leeds."



PFA Safety Net



My working week can vary and that can also depend on the time of the season. If you go back several weeks, the 1st of March was the deadline for Under-16 players to be offered scholarships.

So I fielded a lot of calls from parents asking about the regulations around that. My job in that instance is to stay detached and explain the processes, regulations and implications of accepting or rejecting the offer. In many ways it's similar to what happens at 18 if a player refuses a professional contract. The club offering the scholarship can maintain their right to compensation, so if another club wants to sign that player they will have to agree a compensation fee.

At other times in the season issues can fluctuate into other areas. Parents or players might make contact on a range of issues like being unhappy with training or travelling arrangements and the distance or costs associated attending training or matches.

Some parents and players receive approaches from other clubs so I advise them on the correct protocol in that instance. It might be a case of concerns around a player's education or someone asking how to secure their release, it can be a real mixed bag.



Former Rochdale apprentice George Bowyer now works for The Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) as an independent youth advisor supporting academy players (Under 9 - 16) and parents.

Here he tells LFE the challenges of his role and explains why the PFA have invested in the development of an online resource called 'The Safety Net':

When I first arrived at The PFA I was on the commercial side but I always wanted to get more involved with players so when this role came up and covered an area I was familiar with, helping and supporting academy players, I wanted to get involved.

“When this role came up and covered an area I was familiar with, helping and supporting academy players, I wanted to get involved.”

I try to be as dispassionate as possible, outline the rules and processes and try and help facilitate a resolution that suits all parties.

Agents is another area that crops up. It's a massive issue.

The regulations don't allow players to sign with an agent before the 1st of January in the year of their 16th birthday but a lot have already developed relationships before then. Agents or Intermediaries as they are now called, want to initiate contact and align themselves with players earlier so that they can build a relationship up. Offering advice and incentives like free boots may persuade players to sign with them later on.

Lads are being contacted via social media and almost every angle is used to get to players. The big issue is that anybody can be an Intermediary. The FA License and exam has gone so it has

opened up the market for anyone to represent players regardless of their background, qualifications or expertise.

We are happy to advise players if they need us to look at agreements that have been given to them from agents. Our general stance is that players don't need an Intermediary between 16-18 years-old.

Parents automatically think great, my son has an agent, he'll be able to move to the best club and get the best deal but that's far from guaranteed. The Football Association guidelines for Intermediaries are about 3 per cent but some players end up paying five percent or even up to ten per cent of their weekly wage.

As the rate of pay on first year professional contracts can often be pretty standard it can almost be worthless at the end of the day.

THE SAFETY NET

This tool was devised by ex players Lee and Nick Richardson. Lee who is now a sport psychologist has been a driving force behind much of the content we offer. At Under-9s to Under-16s we provide information only but then this support widens once players become PFA members as apprentices or professionals.

This falls in line with work of our Player Welfare department and our 24/7 network of counsellors. Players are ultimately going to have highs and lows. It might be drug awareness, alcohol issues, mental health, stress, anxiety, depression etc... the safety net is there to help them understand how they are feeling and provide a tool that offers further support.

It's important to remember that everyone is different. For example you could spend years at a club and then be released. Some people can brush that off, trial elsewhere and bounce back whereas for others it can have a negative effect and lead to issues.

Being released isn't a positive time but players across the country are going through the same thing and just because you've been let go by one club it doesn't mean you can't be a success at another.

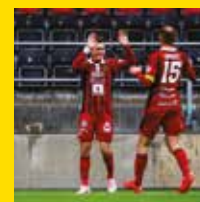
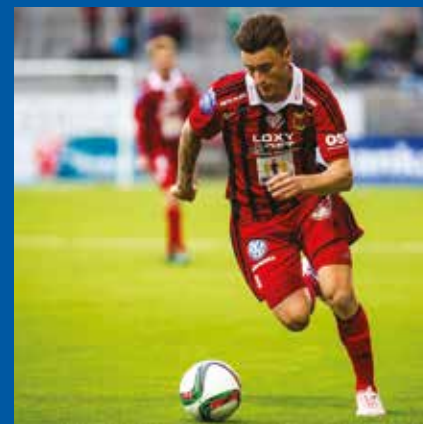
Just look at Harry Kane, he was with Arsenal, was released but is now a major success for Tottenham and England.

To access the Safety Net visit www.thepfa-safetynet.com and register your details.



ENGLISH TRIO ENJOY MOMENT IN THE SUN

When the Swedish Premier League season got underway early in April the unfamiliar name of Ostersunds FK was listed in the fixture list.



For the minnows from a modest garrison city that has a population of just 44,000 it represents something special - their first ever season in the Swedish top flight.

Three former LFE apprentices are living that dream as well. **Jamie Hopcutt** (York City), captain **Alex Dyer** (Northampton Town) and central defender **Doug Bergqvist** (Aldershot). Dyer who was shortlisted for the Apprentice of the Year award several years ago made over 30 appearances for the Cobblers before drifting into non-league with Wealdstone and Welling.

Bergqvist, originally from Stockholm, earned a two-year professional deal at The Recreation Ground but spent almost the entirety of that time on-loan at non-league clubs before he passed through Exeter and Welling on his way back to Sweden.

However it is Hopcutt who has become the stand-out name. Released by York, he was playing for Tadcaster Albion in the North East Counties League before he joined Ostersunds courtesy of LFE's player placement programme.

He has not looked back. Now 23 the winger turned striker helped his current club to two promotions in three seasons. Last term it was his goals that fired Ostersunds to promotion. He scored the only goal to defeat the division's champions Jonkoping and then netted a late equaliser in the final game. That meant OFK could look forward to welcoming Champions League qualifiers Malmo and two-time UEFA Cup winners IFK Gothenburg this year.

Hopcutt's efforts did not go unnoticed at national level and he was crowned Player of the Year in the Superettan - Sweden's equivalent of the Championship - and only missed out on the league's Golden Boot by one goal after ending the campaign with a tally of 15.

If that was a notable high, Hopcutt's start to this season could aptly be described as a nightmare.

Starting on the bench he entered the action at the Tele2 Arena in the 54th minute but then left the field in agony after suffering a "freakish" double fracture of his tibia in the 82nd minute of a 1-1 draw at Hammarby.

Hopcutt admitted that the prospect of missing a large chunk of this season had been "tough" to contemplate but he has retained a positive outlook on things.

"When it happened it was tough to take because I haven't really had a serious injury before and I'd had the best season of my career last year," he told Touchline.

"There's nothing you can do. These things happen I've just got to work hard and try and come back. It can be between four and six months but I have to see how it heals in the first six weeks.

"The surgeon was really positive and the club have bought a machine to help speed up the healing process. There's no pressure on me [to come back] anything that happens now is better than missing the full season. Fortunately I haven't had a cast which would've made it [recovery] longer and the fracture wasn't much out of place. It was two small cracks rather than the bone being displaced."

"I'll take it week by week but I think I'll be able to get back and still have a good impact on the season. I've

had set-backs before in my career. I restarted from the bottom and have worked back to the top here."

That rehabilitation process is underpinned by Hopcutt's memories of the last few years and the ambition to help OFK deliver more success - though he admits that he's already exceeded his expectations in some respects.

"Being honest I didn't expect this [when I arrived]," he added.

"The last few years have been amazing. I scored the goals that got us promoted last year and it was a special few days for the team and for me personally. It was crazy. There were celebrations in the town square because it means a lot to the people here to have a team in the top division."

"The club wasn't well known when I first arrived. Every year though it has grown in ambition. When I arrived we were getting crowds of 500. We got over 7,500 for the first game this season.

"The set-up is of a really high standard and it gives players the platform to improve. It's a really good place to play football."

Eleven more hopefuls recently left England for Sweden courtesy of LFE's Player Placement programme.

The latest exports:

ANGE IF

Tyrell Mitford
QPR

Taylor Roles
Wimbledon

Billy Bishop
Wimbledon

Ioan Evans
Sheffield United

BODENS BK

Dean Billingsley
Exeter City

Adam Johnson
Rotherham United

Patrick Weaver
Scunthorpe United

IFK OSTERSUND

Romario Reid
Walsall

Declan Randall
Bournemouth

Ytterhogdals IK

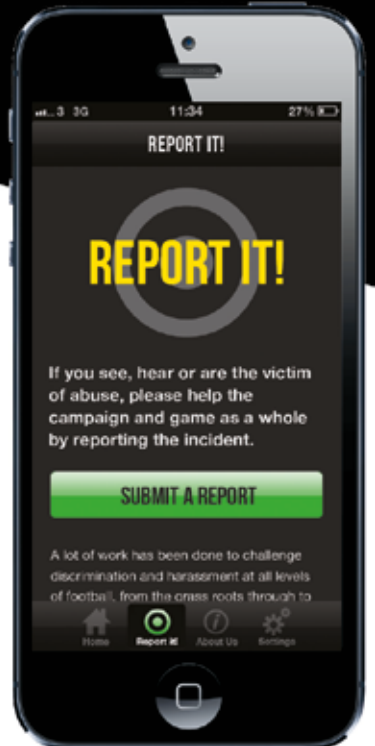
Sheiden Rodgers
Huddersfield Town

Lewis Moynes
Tranmere Rovers

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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

A day at MK Dons for If U Care Share.

If U Care Share Foun @IFUCARESHARE
 Fantastic day working with @MKDonsFC scholars in our EAMH workshop! #ThereIsAlwaysAWay #dons



AFC Wimbledon's Alfie Egan retweets a message of support for Paul Kalambayi.

Wimbledon Academy @AFCWAcademy
 Good luck today Paul... The whole Academy is behind you! Enjoy the experience. COYD's! @AFCWimbledon



Blackpool youth team skipper Macauley Wilson celebrates earning a professional deal

Macauley Wilson @Macauley_Wilson
 Hard work starts now 🍀💪



Notts County's Jordan Richards bigs up a trio he knows very well.

Jordan Richards @jordanrichards
 Congrats on getting your pro contracts, proud of you all 🏆❤️ @JackMcMillan11 @Montel_Gibson9 @lutherwildin



Preston keeper Mathew Hudson congratulates his peers at The Football League Awards

Mathew Hudson @hudson_mathew
 Great night at the #FLAwards congratulations to all the winners thoroughly deserved, very proud to be nominated 🏆🏆



Watford's apprentices visit Bath University

Chris Thurston @cjthurston
 @WatfordFC scholars visited @TeamBath today to see the superb facilities & education on offer #opportunity



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