



Touchline

LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

Mo Adams discusses life in the MLS and his academic mission



PLUS

Al-Amin Kazeem

Caleb Richards

Erasmus+ Projects

Life Skills

LFE SUPPORT DURING COVID-19

SUPPORT PAGE
www.lfe.org.uk/news/lfe-support/

MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Si Williams
@SimonWilliamsV1

Current first and second year @LFEonline apprentices have access to a new 'Well-Being' module on the EMS. Once logged in, it can be found under 'My Courses'.

BWFC Academy Education
@BWFC_Education

So Thursday it is, which can only mean 1 thing, Psychology. The @PFA & @LFEonline have provided 3 months free access to @Headspace so players can work on mindfulness, engage in meditation & help distress during lockdown. Link is in your Google Classroom 🙌
#BWFCsupportprogramme

LIFE SKILLS FROM HOME

League Football Education
@LFEonline

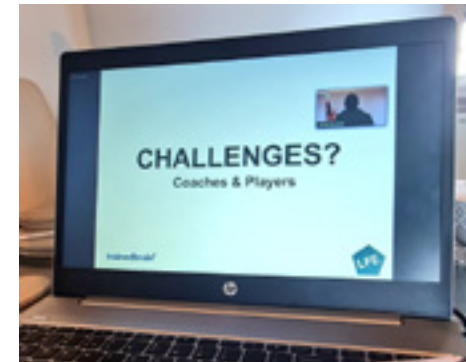
#LFElifeSkillsFromHome
Use your time wisely during lockdown by enhancing your personal development. Here's the first half of LFE's Life Skills tasks for you to consider.
#HealthyAtHome 🏠



MENTAL SKILLS & RESILIENCE

Si Williams
@SimonWilliamsV1

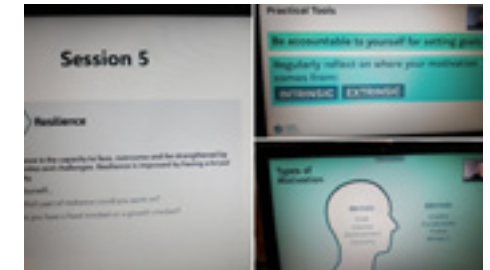
Thank you to @JamieEdwards for delivering an outstanding first of four mental skills webinars to 40+ @efl & @LFEonline players 🙌 #LifeSkills



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

LTFCAcademy
@academylftc

Great personal development session for the U18's today with @elitehoops11 from @LFEonline. Boys looked at motivation and what they can be doing during this period of lockdown #lifeskills #personaldevelopment



SOCIAL MEDIA

Salford City FC
@SalfordCityFC

This afternoon the Academy took part in the pilot of a Social Media Risk & Opportunity course 📱

A big thank you to @WoodCathy and @LFEonline for delivering an engaging and insightful session!

FINANCE

League Football Education
@LFEonline

Red Star Education are creating financial advice videos & blog resources for apprentices.

- 📁 Personal Budgeting | <https://bit.ly/39z7ZMb>
- 📁 Invisible Spending | <https://bit.ly/2UxDNwl>
- 📁 Covid-19 Scams | <https://bit.ly/3dLg2sH>
- 📁 Financial Goals | <https://bit.ly/341eo1D>

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Emma Metheringham
@EMetheringham

@LFEonline
@kickitout
@LincolnCity_FC
Great session today led by Troy Townsend and Marcus Gayle on Racism in Football. Thought provoking and insightful. Scholars were class too! 🙌👍🏆

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Derby County Academy
@dcfcacademy

Thanks to @Cecil_je for this mornings talent transfer workshop with U9/10/11 players and parents. From footballer to dancer and beyond!! 🙌 #SoulSmiling #Talenttransfer #IsolationLife #StaySafe

Established by



Supported by



APPRENTICES STAYING

Here's a look at how apprentices have been keeping busy during the lockdown period.

ACTIVE

Oxford United Academy
@AcademyOUFC

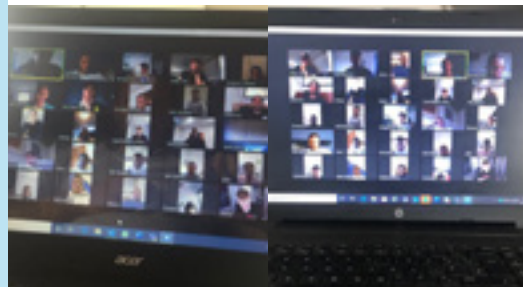
50 Skills for life is now well under way... check out some of the best offerings from our young players here on @YouTube!
<https://youtu.be/JEB-d28rZOE> @LFEonline

@OUFCOfficial #StriveShareSmile
#investingintheLivesofyoungfootballers



Burton Albion Academy
@BAFCAcademy

We've been 'Zooming' this morning! #YoungBrewers PDP staff + players, joined by Club Captain Jake Buxton, caught up on all things @LFEonline education, life whilst away from the Club and staying in good shape! It was great to see everyone together lads! #SquadGoals



BRFC Academy
@academy_brfc

Some great work from our scholars and U16s this week. Running a live programme daily via Zoom covering both player and personal development...

@Rovers

LTFC Academy
@academyltfc

Great insight from ex @LutonTown apprentice @georgemurray_ for the U16's & U18's. George spoke about his academy career, how he prepared for life after his apprenticeship, his scholarship in America and his new podcast project
<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/the-next-step/id1509081090>
@LFEonline #transition



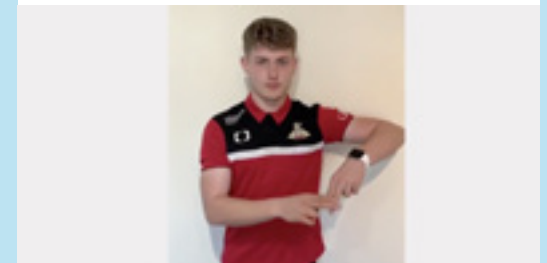
Portsmouth FC Academy
@PompeyAcademy

Kicking things off, Joe Hancott took on the challenge of a Sunday Roast #Pompey



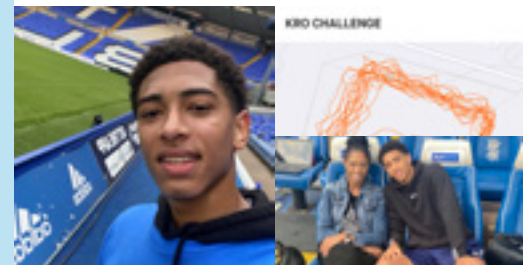
Doncaster Rovers FC
@drfc_official

NEWS | @DRFC_Academy U18s have been learning some football terms in British Sign Language to support @DeafTrust and #DeafAwarenessWeek #DRFC <https://bit.ly/3b7SNXq>



Jude Bellingham
@BellinghamJude

Day 2 of the #KROChallenge done as part of the big night in St. Andrews! Felt so nice to be back St. Andrews! See you all soon <https://justgiving.com/team/bcfstaff>



Joe Thompson
@JJL_Thompson

Preparing the future Two great Zoom sessions this afternoon with both @LaticsOfficial U18s and U23s. Two really mature and engaging groups. Providing them with coping mechanism and strategies for dealing with these uncertain times. Thanks @mikehum76 @LFEonline #inspire

Rochdale AFC
@officiallydale

A day in isolation with @Luke_Matheson41 Our @RochdaleAcademy graduate and England Under-18 international talks education, fitness and down time #RAFC





LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

From being rejected by Derby County, to mixing with elite players in Major League Soccer, **Mo Adams** has overcome many obstacles to earn a career in football.

While Rams Academy products like Max Bird, Jayden Bogle, Jason Knight and Max Lowe have become established first-teamers at Pride Park, Adams was forced on a different path after being released by the club in 2015.

When a prospective move to Blackburn Rovers fell through due to injury, the tenacious midfielder turned his attention to the USA, pursuing a scholarship at the prestigious Syracuse University, which sparked his journey to the MLS.

“As an apprentice, you learn how to be disciplined and you mature as a person,” the 23-year-old told LFE. “You’re working within a competitive environment which requires resilience and mental toughness, so I was prepared to deal with any setbacks that came my way in America.

“I’m a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Nothing worth having comes easy and I have the mindset to use adversity as motivation.

“I remember making a LinkedIn account and messaging over 200 coaches in England, from managers to assistants to scouts, and I didn’t get a single response. I then played in a showcase game for Vertex Soccer and received around 10 full scholarship offers to go to the States, so it was nice to feel wanted again.”

The Brit abroad thrived in his new life in New York, claiming numerous awards in the highly-regarded Atlantic Coast Conference, as well as being named Syracuse’s Rookie of the Year before donning the captain’s armband in his Sophomore season.

“When you come from England and you’ve been in an Academy, you get a bit of respect,” Adams said. “However, with that comes accountability and increased expectations. They invest a lot to give you a scholarship and the way to repay that faith was to be the best person, student and player I could be.

“I came in as a Freshman with a chip on my shoulder and I think that mentality spread to other guys in the group. I wanted to set an example at all times, whether it be in training, in matches, in the classroom or just generally around campus.

“You become part of a family and I was proud to represent the Orange. People are dedicated fans and pay money to watch college sport. Even at our soccer games, we’d consistently play in front of around 4,000 supporters.

“A lot of our matches were nationally televised and nothing goes unnoticed because there is such extensive coverage. ▶



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COMING TO THE STATES GAVE ME THE CHANCE TO PURSUE MY DREAM OF BECOMING A PROFESSIONAL PLAYER WHILE ALSO STAYING IN EDUCATION AND HAVING THE UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE.

||

“Every game counts. It’s very challenging and it motivates you to be competitive every day because there are rewards that will come with performing to a high standard.”

Adams’ success was not just restricted to his performance on the pitch, with his commitment to education resulting in an inclusion on the University’s Athletic Director Honor Roll, which recognises outstanding academic accomplishments.

“Over there, you’re a student first and an athlete second,” he continued. “Coming to the States gave me the chance to pursue my dream of becoming a professional player while also staying in education and having the University experience.

“As a student athlete, there is an understanding that it can be tough to balance your sport and studies, so you’re given the luxury of having as many tutors as you want, who can help you with your assignments.

“I spoke to my Head Coach, Ian McIntyre, about my academic goals and he regularly checked in on how my grades were. The coaches care just as much about your education as they do about your performance on the field because they care about you as a person, first and foremost.”

Despite only being halfway through his four-year course, the dream of a professional playing career became a reality in 2018 when Adams secured a Generation Adidas contract, which allows early entry for the MLS SuperDraft.

The importance of developing himself as a person came to the fore during the draft process, with

player interviews holding as much significance as College highlights and Player Combine performance.

“It is like a job interview when you meet with the clubs beforehand,” said Adams. “The whole point of it is to find out who you are as a person, so you’ve got to be mature, well-rounded and have good communication skills.

“Those qualities also directly translate to being a better player, because you need to communicate clearly with your team-mates and have the confidence to perform under pressure when the spotlight is on you.

“I loved the whole draft experience and hearing my name called out for selection was an incredible moment.”

Having been a free agent with his leg in a cast just two years earlier, Adams was on his way to link up with World Cup winner Bastian Schweinsteiger, after Chicago Fire traded up to select him with the 10th pick.

He said: “Playing alongside one of the most decorated players in the world was a surreal experience. I remember the first time I saw him; I was pinching myself thinking it can’t be real. I was always paired up with him in passing drills or patterns of play, which was an amazing experience.

“I still speak to him now – he texts me every now and again to check how I’m doing. He’s an unbelievable player, but he’s an even better person and the advice and guidance that he has given me has been integral in my development since turning professional.

“I have a lot of fond memories of my time in Chicago. They gave me a lot of opportunities as a first-year player, which isn’t always the case. After my first few games, I’d already been tasked with marking Sebastian Giovinco and Ignacio Piatti, so I was thrown straight into the deep end, but thankfully I managed to rise to the occasion.”

Having spent 18 months with the Fire, 2018 MLS Cup champions Atlanta United – managed by Dutch legend Frank de Boer – came calling for his services last July.

Adams made an instant impact, scoring his first professional goal two minutes into his debut, while he has since made contributions in the MLS Cup play-offs and CONCACAF Champions League, as well as winning silverware in the Campeones Cup.

“I heard that a few clubs were potentially interested in making a trade for me and when I found out I’d be going to Atlanta, I was over the moon,” he added. “They were the reigning champions and it’s a fantastic club, with 70,000 fans at every home game and a great coach in Frank de Boer.

“Playing in the Champions League against the best clubs in North and Central America was an amazing experience. Having the opportunity to play in big games and big competitions is great and I’m determined to establish myself in a winning team.”

Adams has not forgotten his academic ambitions and has recently restarted his studies, with help

from the MLS’ partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, which offers players a flexible online education.

“I made a commitment to complete the whole college experience and you have so much free time as a professional athlete. It’s important to use that time to get better as an individual and to also work on your future,” he said.

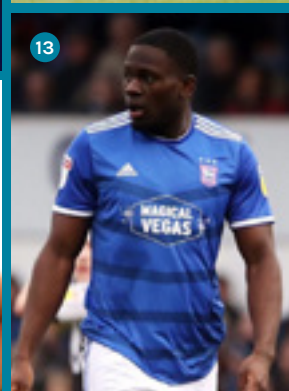
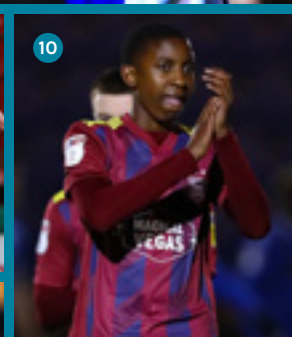
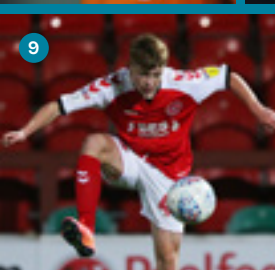
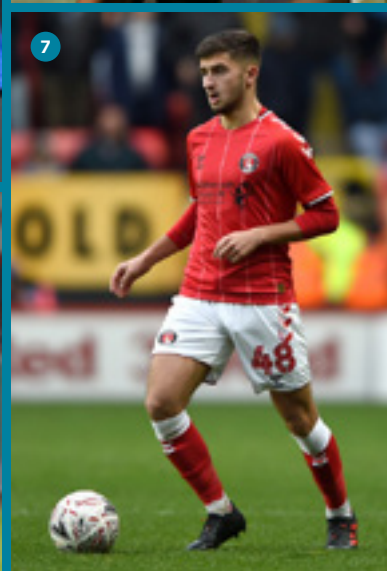
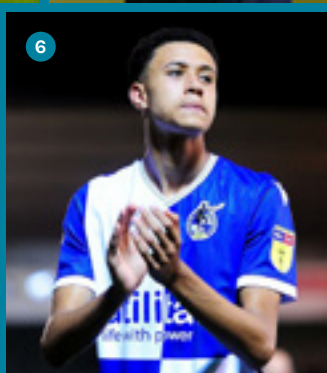
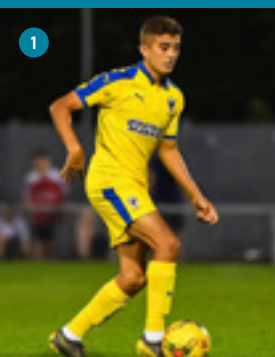
“I’m learning about Sports Management at the moment, but my long-term intention is to get into broadcasting. I’m planning to do a Masters degree in Digital Broadcasting and Journalism and I’m trying to get more involved in media work to build my connections and experience in the industry.

“I also like to read in my spare time. One of my favourite books is Kobe Bryant’s ‘Mamba Mentality’. I do the regular stuff like playing FIFA and watching Netflix as well, but I feel an hour of reading a day can be very beneficial, especially when you’re learning some wisdom from all-time greats.

“Coming to America has definitely been the best decision I’ve ever made. It’s given me the opportunity to become a professional athlete, pursue a degree and gain some amazing experiences along the way.

“I’d advise players to explore options abroad because if you put yourself in a bubble, you’ll never be able to grow. Be open to new opportunities and be willing to take risks. You could be one decision away from a totally different life.” ■

DEBUTANTS



A round-up of talented apprentices who recently made their senior debuts

Ayoub Assal, Jack Madelin & Zach Robinson

AFC Wimbledon



1 2 3 Wales youth international Jack Madelin made his senior bow in October with a late appearance off the bench at Burton Albion in Sky Bet League One and received his first professional contract a few days later.

The central defender, who was named in LFE's 'The 11' in November, also played 90 minutes in the Leasing.com Trophy against Southend United. He was joined in the starting line-up by Ayoub Assal, who turned pro last April, while 17-year-old forward Zach Robinson was introduced at half-time.

Okem Chime

Barnet



4 Second-year apprentice Okem Chime had a week to remember in November as he made his professional debut and starred for Barnet's Under-18s with a brace in the FA Youth Cup Second Round.

Either side of his youth team exploits, the teenage striker was an 81st-minute substitute in an FA Cup clash with Fleetwood Town and gained further minutes in the National League against Stockport County.

Ewan Bange

Blackpool



5 Following a prolific start to the season for Blackpool's Under-18 side, Ewan Bange was rewarded with his first-team debut in October, appearing in the Leasing.com Trophy against Carlisle United.

Having been an unused substitute for consecutive Sky Bet League One fixtures against Bolton Wanderers and Rotherham United, Bange was given a 20-minute cameo by then-manager Simon Grayson.

Luca Hoole

Bristol Rovers



6 Right-back Luca Hoole was handed his first competitive appearance at the start of September when he featured in the Leasing.com Trophy against Plymouth Argyle.

The second-year apprentice, who has represented Wales at Under-19 level, played the final half an hour of a 1-1 draw. Although he is yet to add to his tally, Hoole and Academy team-mate Kieran Phillips have both been on the first-team bench on multiple occasions.

Aaron Henry

Charlton Athletic



7 First-year midfielder Aaron Henry became Charlton Athletic's third youngest ever debutant in January when he appeared for an hour during an FA Cup Third Round defeat to West Bromwich Albion.

The talented teenager is the sixth Addicks player to feature for the first team at the age of 16, with four of those going on to play for England – Jonjo Shelvey, Paul Konchesky, Scott Parker and Paul Walsh.

Aaron Evans-Harriott

Cheltenham Town



8 Seventeen-year-old Aaron Evans-Harriott secured his place in Cheltenham Town history when he came off the bench in a 4-3 Leasing.com Trophy victory over West Ham United Under-21s in October.

The brief outing made him the club's youngest EFL player, although he has since left the Robins to join Sky Bet League One club Coventry City, who snapped him up at the end of February after the two teams agreed a compensation package.

Cian Hayes

Fleetwood Town



9 At the age of 16 years and 145 days, Cian Hayes set a new Fleetwood Town record for youngest player in a competitive fixture after appearing in a 5-2 Leasing.com Trophy win against Oldham Athletic.

The young Irishman joined the action for the final quarter of an hour, making him the fourth current apprentice to earn playing time in the competition for Joey Barton's side this season, following in the footsteps of Barry Baggley, Jay Matete and Shayden Morris.

Tawanda Chirewa, Liam Gibbs, Alex Henderson, Tyreece Simpson & Tommy Smith

Ipswich Town



10 11 12 13 14 Five apprentices were given their professional debuts in Ipswich Town's run to the third round of the Leasing.com Trophy. Defender Alex Henderson was the only member of the quintet to be included in a starting line-up, playing the full match against Peterborough United.

Tommy Smith joined him on the pitch against Posh, appearing as a half-time substitute, while first-year apprentices Liam Gibbs and Tawanda Chirewa featured earlier on in the group stage at Colchester United.

Elsewhere, striker Tyreece Simpson made his senior bow back in September during a 2-1 victory over Tottenham Hotspur Under-21s. The 18-year-old worked his way into contention for further opportunities just before lockdown, amassing three Sky Bet League One appearances against Blackpool, Fleetwood Town and Coventry City.

DEBUTANTS CONTINUED

Finlay Brennan

Milton Keynes Dons



15 Milton Keynes Dons got defender Finlay Brennan involved in their Leasing.com Trophy campaign, using him as a second-half substitute in two of their three group games.

Eighteen-year-old Brennan helped the Dons see out the last few minutes of a 1-0 victory over Fulham Under-21s in October and gained another 10 minutes of action against Wycombe Wanderers a month later.

Reece Gaskell & Lewis McKinney

Oldham Athletic



16 17 Midfielders Lewis McKinney and Reece Gaskell both experienced Sky Bet League Two football for Oldham Athletic in October, while 15-year-old Zac Emmerson also featured to become the second youngest player in EFL history.

McKinney managed to appear twice for the Latics during matches with Macclesfield Town and Port Vale, with Gaskell earning his solitary outing in a 2-0 win against Walsall.

Tyler Goodrham

Oxford United



18 Sixteen-year-old Tyler Goodrham was first included in a matchday squad in August, when he watched on from the dugout as Oxford United beat Millwall on penalties in the Carabao Cup.

Three months on from that night, the exciting winger, who has featured in LFE's 'The 11', grabbed the headlines with a 15-minute cameo during a 4-1 Leasing.com Trophy victory at Crawley Town that made him Oxford's youngest ever player.

Bobby Copping, Archie Jones & Benjamin Mensah

Peterborough United



19 20 21 Having already confirmed their progression from the Leasing.com Trophy group stage after two games, Peterborough United elected to hand professional debuts to Academy trio Bobby Copping, Benjamin Mensah and Archie Jones against Cambridge United in November.

Former Bury Academy player Copping and first-year full-back Mensah slotted into proceedings after the half-time break, while Jones was introduced in the 76th minute as a young Posh side, which also included second-year apprentices Harrison Burrows and Ricky-Jade Jones, claimed a 2-1 win.

Jarvis Cleal

Plymouth Argyle



22 After making the switch to wing-back, versatile youngster Jarvis Cleal forced his way into the first-team reckoning at the end of January when he appeared on Plymouth Argyle's bench for the first time against Crawley Town in Sky Bet League Two.

The 18-year-old, who was part of LFE's 'The 11' in March, established himself as a regular member of the senior squad before finally gaining his first competitive runout in the latter stages of a 3-0 victory over Macclesfield Town, which proved to be their final fixture before lockdown.

Joe Blackham, Jake Burton, Kyle Hayde, George Nugent & Lewis Sinnott

Tranmere Rovers



28 29 30 31 32 Tranmere Rovers relied on some of their Academy products when they took on Leicester City Under-21s in the third round of the Leasing.com Trophy in January, with seven current apprentices included in the matchday squad.

Kyle Hayde, who had been an unused substitute a week earlier at Coventry City in Sky Bet League One, played the full game alongside midfielder George Nugent, while Jake Burton was an early replacement off the bench.

Joe Blackham and Lewis Sinnott were brought on in the second half, with Ethan Gouldbourne and Harrison Musuamba only appearing as unused substitutes.

Kwadwo Baah, Louie Clarkson & Joe Dunne

Rochdale



23 24 25 Rochdale's conveyor belt of Academy talent continues to deliver, with Kwadwo Baah, Louie Clarkson and Joe Dunne adding their names to the ever-growing list of homegrown players to make their senior debuts for the club.

Of the trio, highly-rated striker Baah has featured most prominently, racking up 10 appearances across three competitions, including a start in the FA Cup Third Round draw with Newcastle United.

Elsewhere, Dunne played the full 90 minutes as Dale saw off Bradford City 2-1 in the Leasing.com Trophy in November, while Clarkson joined him on the pitch for the final 10 minutes.

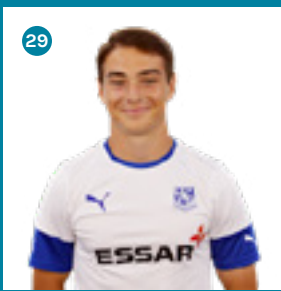
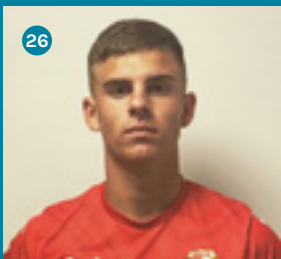
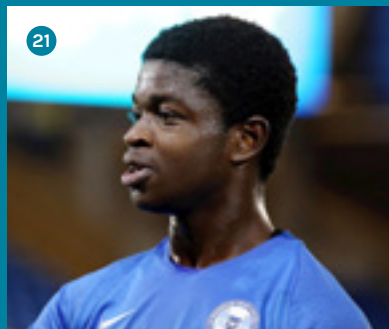
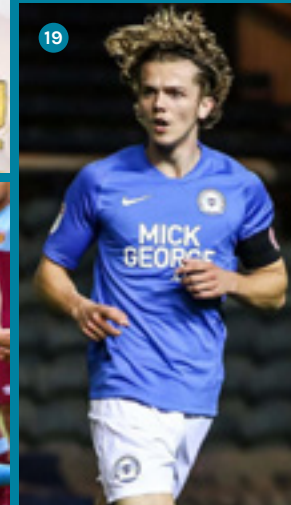
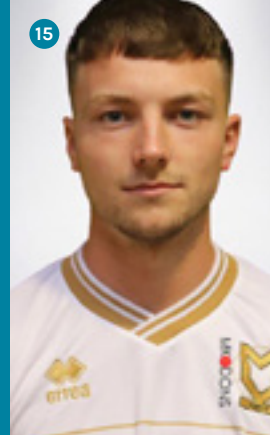
Toby Holland & Harry Parsons

Swindon Town



26 27 Harry Parsons' keen eye for goal in the Under-18s led to the first-year apprentice being rewarded with a professional debut in the Leasing.com Trophy at Bristol Rovers in November.

The 17-year-old striker showed promising signs during his 70-minute stint before being withdrawn for second-year midfielder Toby Holland, who stepped up to first-team action for the first time after also impressing at youth team level.



MAN OF STEEL



Significant efforts have been made in recent times to remove the stigma of vocalising mental health concerns in football and society as a whole.

Cambridge United apprentice Harvey Steel is an advocate of raising awareness, having been through his own struggles.

Following a 12-month period of suffering in silence, the 18-year-old sought help and has not looked back since.

He told LFE: “Heading into the apprenticeship, I was solely focused on making the best start possible and ended up growing apart from my school friends, so I didn’t really have an escape from football.

“While they were enjoying their summer holiday after GCSEs, I was always thinking about football and I couldn’t switch off. As the season progressed, I lost my place in the team, which wasn’t how I’d envisaged my apprenticeship going.

“I had to adapt and show some resilience, but I didn’t have the capability at the time. I found it very difficult and I didn’t speak to anyone or get help, so I started to feel alone and quite separate from my team-mates, family and friends.”

Steel’s struggles gradually built up before eventually leading to a handful of serious episodes, which finally motivated him to express his emotions in a conversation with his parents.

“I felt like a weight had been lifted off my shoulders,” he said. “After reaching out to them, my dad called The PFA and within a week I was put through for 12 weeks of counselling (provided by Sporting Chance Clinic). The PFA covered the costs as well, which was incredible.

“I’d go to the counsellor’s house once a week, sit down and talk about how I’d felt and things I’d encountered during that year of struggling. We talked about coping mechanisms, so how I can identify when I’m starting to feel down and then working out ways to address that.



“My parents also had a meeting with Tom Pell (Academy Manager) and Jimmy Unwin (PDP Lead Coach) and they were brilliant, too. They’ve been really supportive and allowed me to focus on getting back to a healthy mental state.

“Getting help has really benefited my football as well because I started to build confidence in myself again and I had that belief and drive to go in to the club and work hard, which is what I’d lost when I was feeling low.”

Using his spare time on an interest away from football became a key focus point for Steel, who recognised sports journalism as an alternative career that he intends to pursue. Possessing a new-found confidence, the teenager contacted industry professionals to gain advice on his next steps.

“I had a few days off college after completing some pieces of work earlier than the deadline, so it gave me the chance to do some work experience with the media team at Cambridge,” said Steel. “During that time, it really confirmed that I do enjoy it and that encouraged me to look deeper into it.

“I direct messaged Jake Humphrey on Instagram and just asked for some advice on where to start and what to do and he was really helpful. He gave me some advice and I set up a blog and Twitter page and got that in motion.

“I went on Wix to create a free website and spent about a week or so setting that up. My dad helped me with the logo and slowly I’ve put it all together. ▶



"I'm not really the most artistic lad, but I have enjoyed creating it. It's given me the ability to focus on my football, but also have an open mind about what could be next. It's helped me to grow and develop as a person."

"I spoke to Mark Roberts (LFE Personal Development Mentor) on LinkedIn, who used to be a player at Cambridge. He said he did a University course during the time that he captained Stevenage to back-to-back promotions, so that just emphasises that having other interests to focus on definitely isn't going to hold you back or hamper your football."

Steel has written numerous articles, including match reports and a regular series called 'Loan Watch', which tracks his Cambridge Under-18s team-mates, while he also documented his mental health experience in an honest and informative piece.

"The lads have all been really supportive and shared my content on social media," he continued. "I think I've also been able to help them by giving them some publicity, because a few of them have done well on loan and by writing about their success, I've been able to get them some exposure."

"The aim of the mental health post was to normalise this topic while giving people a bit of advice, whether they're current apprentices or preparing to start next season."



"We had a Life Skills workshop from If U Care Share at some point, which centred around mental health. Their aim is to remove the stigma of talking about your feelings and it was tough sitting in that because I hadn't reached out for help at that time."

"That sort of session showed me that there is a massive support network available to anyone who's struggling, and it encouraged me to then reveal my experience and show other people that they should feel comfortable about opening up. It's something I didn't do initially, but I've realised that talking is massively important."

The young right-back was recently offered the role of Youth Team Mental Health Ambassador, which sees him attend various events and workshops with Cambridge's Community Trust. He said: "I've been involved in a mental health workshop with some elderly people and I attended a session with Darryl Coakley – the club's Mental Health Officer. He runs a programme going into schools and talking about a range of subjects. I assisted him with his plan to familiarise younger kids with mental health."

"Cambridge have also started an initiative to help people with disabilities and connect them to the club, creating a close-knit group of people who help each other. The sessions bring them happiness and get them active, so the programme is brilliant and it was really special for me to see that and be a part of it."

"Being involved means I'm helping people, making new contacts and learning new skills, so I can only see myself doing more of this stuff moving forward to benefit others and myself."

Despite maintaining the ambition to become a professional footballer, Steel's forward-planning and triple distinction grade profile on the Extended Diploma has allowed him to put plans in place to study a two-year fast-track University degree, starting in September.

"Mark Roberts pointed me in the direction of The PFA because they offer financial bursaries to help you move into University and other qualifications," Steel added. "They also put me in contact with Staffordshire University and we worked out what would be the right course for me."

"I selected the Sports Writing and Broadcasting option and then the application process was quite straightforward. I'm hoping to do a blended learning course, so I can study alongside football if I'm able to get a professional contract, either at Cambridge or somewhere else."

"I wanted to make sure I had plans in place for my future transition at an early stage, to make things easier for myself and also to ensure I am moving forward with something that I really want to do."

"Having that planned early has eased my mind. I've taken ownership of my situation and put myself out there and now I'm seeing doors start to open, so I'm looking forward to seeing how I can progress." ■



"Getting help has really benefited my football as well because I started to build confidence in myself again and I had that belief and drive to go in to the club and work hard, which is what I'd lost when I was feeling low."

“I’M PROUD OF
WHAT SHE’S DOING
BUT ALSO DON’T
WANT HER TO
GET THE DISEASE.”

The spread of the Coronavirus has changed lives for people across the globe, with extended periods in lockdown and the loss of loved ones. Colchester United apprentice **Al-Amin Kazeem** has experienced the impact first-hand, as his mother continues to treat patients on the frontline as a nurse in the Intensive Care Unit at Princess Alexandra Hospital.



“EDUCATION HELPS WITH CONCENTRATION AND BEING OPEN-MINDED TO THE INFORMATION THAT YOU’RE GIVEN WHEN STUDYING.”

“My mum has been working roughly 13 hours a day, dealing with a lot of the Covid-19 patients,” he told LFE. “She comes back with sore feet and she’s very tired, so even though she comes home, she’s not really present because she goes off to bed most days to rest for her next shift.”

“She tells me that there’s hardly any time to rest or have any breaks during the day because there’s a massive influx of people coming in to be treated. They have to provide beds and make sure they’re clean.”

“She’s dealing with people who have very severe symptoms and she said it’s been the toughest time she’s had, but she just carries on and stays focused on trying to save as many people as possible. It’s worrying – I’m proud of what she’s doing but also don’t want her to get the disease.”

With his father working from home as a contractor in banking, Kazeem has accepted extra responsibility around the house, taking care of his four younger siblings, in particular his youngest brothers – aged seven and eight.

“Seeing my mum has left a big impression on me in the way she’s taken everything in her stride and has worked so hard,” he said. “Every day that she comes home, my dad will pamper her. He’ll ask her what she needs and he cooks for us all.”

“I help to take care of my siblings, so he can focus more on his work and my mum. The two teenagers can handle themselves really, so I take care of the two youngest ones. I make sure they have a bath or shower in the morning and I’ll also read them bedtime stories, which they enjoy.”

“If they’re hungry, I’ll get them food and I make sure they do some reading or do their maths homework for school. Their attention span isn’t the longest and at first it was a challenge, but I’ve persisted

with trying to embed a routine and now we’ve got into a pattern of work in the morning and then they’re rewarded with TV in the afternoon.

“It’s given me more responsibility around the house and I’m happy to take it on. Normally, I wouldn’t really help out or spend much time with them, so it’s been good to connect with them and share some of my experiences, because they like learning about me and hearing stories.”

In addition to these new commitments, the 18-year-old has maintained a training regime to keep his fitness levels high, while he is also working hard studying for three A-Levels.

Kazeem added: “In the afternoons, while the others watch TV, I do my workout routine. I’ll go for a run and then come back to do core, lower and upper body workouts. Being indoors all day and having to look after younger ones can be quite difficult mentally, so it’s important to have some time on your own. Working out helps me relieve all the stress and release some energy.”

“Doing my workouts clears my head, so after that I try to spend two or three hours focusing on my work. I’m studying chemistry, physics and maths. We can’t do our exams at the moment but I’m still keen to keep learning and refresh my head of each subject.”

“You have to be determined because we’ve got pretty much an unlimited amount of time at the moment, so it’s easy to put it off. My mentality is to get the work done and then I’m able to relax later when my mum gets home.”

The U’s youngster believes his large academic workload has helped him make great strides on the pitch, having impressed on loan at Maldon & Tiptree, while he recently received a professional contract offer from Colchester.

“Education helps with concentration and being open-minded to the information that you’re given when studying,” he said. “You have to source information and ask your teachers in the same way that you’d ask coaches for explanations of certain drills or tactics. This is the case for other areas, like sport science and nutrition.”

“As a left-back, if I practice on my defending or my crossing and overall attacking contribution, when I get into a game I’ll show improvement from investing time in that, which is the same as revising topics for an exam paper.”

His thirst for learning has led Kazeem to pursue even more additional interests during lockdown, with the multi-faceted teenager intent on learning two new languages.

He continued: “I’ve been trying to learn Japanese, because I love the culture there, and I’ve also spent time on French as well. My older brother learned French and still keeps up with it, so he helps me with that and he has French friends as well, so they also give me tips.”

“I’m struggling at the moment but I’m going to keep trying and see how good I can get. Japanese involves a completely new alphabet and way of speaking and writing, but I’m enjoying the challenge.”

“At the moment, we’ve got a lot of time to spare, so there’s no better way to use that than by learning something new to develop yourself. You don’t want to just sit around and do nothing. Use this time to be productive and add a skill to your arsenal.”

If that was not already enough, Kazeem is hoping to follow in the footsteps of his two older siblings by studying a University degree alongside football.

“My sister’s studying architecture at Anglia Ruskin and my brother’s studying electronic engineering at Southampton,” he said. “I’ve been looking at the Open University to potentially start studying a degree in my spare time as a professional footballer.”

“I’m looking at chemistry or something within that department, like chemical engineering. I’ve been fascinated by chemistry since the start of secondary school. I enjoy trying to absorb as much information as I can and trying to understand the different concepts.”

“My dad’s always tried to make sure I stay open-minded and it can never harm you to have something else in your locker. Education can’t be a detriment, it’s only a positive.” ■



COACHES TRIP

LFE's Coaches Trip, funded by Erasmus+, allowed 11 EFL coaches and two PFA regional coach educators the chance to experience new ideas and methods of developing young players by visiting various clubs across the Basque region of Spain.

COACH PARTICIPANTS

Stuart English | Birmingham City
Tom Pell | Cambridge United
Tom Ramasut | Cardiff City
Liam Bailey | Colchester United
Jason Pearcey | Derby County
Matt Blinkhorn | Fleetwood Town
Neil Wainwright | Morecambe
Lewis Craig | Salford City
Rob Williams | Shrewsbury Town
Iain Sankey | The PFA
Stephen Torpey | The PFA
Kyle Kirby | Walsall
Peter Murphy | Wigan Athletic

Day 1

Observed Athletic Bilbao first-team, B-team & Under-19s training
Presentation from Head of Methodology Andoni Bombín
Discussion with Women's Goalkeeper Coach Manex Sagarna

Day 2

Observed Arenas Club first-team training
Question & answer session with Head Coach Javier Olaizola & Sporting Director Toño Vadillo
Presentation from Danok Bat CF Coach Julen Santisteban

Day 3

Guided tour of Athletic Bilbao's San Mamés Stadium

Day 4

Full tour of Real Sociedad's training facility
Open forum with Head of Academy Luki Iriarte
Observed B-team training led by Head Coach Xabi Alonso
Presentation of session plans from Sergio Francisco & Unai Gazpio

Day 5

Observed Eibar first-team training
Question & answer session with Head Coach José Luis Mendilibar & Analyst Andoni Azkargorta
Interactive meeting with Head of Methodology Jordi Clares

Tom Ramasut | Cardiff City
Under-23s Coach

It's been a really good opportunity to come out to Spain and experience and understand the methodologies of a range of clubs in the Basque region.

We've had the chance to watch a lot of training sessions of different age groups. They go into a lot of detail about tactics and nearly all the players are very cultured and comfortable on the ball. The biggest thing I noticed about the clubs was the strength of identity and their values and how they live by them on a daily basis.

One of the clubs doesn't have a first team, it's solely an Academy club up to the age of 19 and their whole purpose is to develop these young boys to have a professional career. The resources and clear planning and the effort that they put into that is really impressive and it's an interesting model.

There is a lot to learn when you visit these clubs and I'd definitely recommend it for anyone who's aspiring to improve and develop as a coach.



Stephen Torpey & Iain Sankey | The PFA
Regional Coach Educators

ST: The guys at the Spanish clubs have been really helpful. The presentations have been fantastic and they've been really open. One actually missed the start of training because he was talking us through his session. They're really passionate in terms of coaching throughout the departments.

IS: I think the most interesting thing has been in the way they recruit their players. They don't generally start taking players into their Academies until much later than we do in England, but they've got a network of clubs, who play football under their umbrella every weekend with kids down to the ages of nine and 10.

ST: For the Under-18s, if they're on the LFE programme in England, they're in college part-time. In Spain, they're in full-time education in school and then come to the club in the evening, so they take three or four sessions in the week and then play on the Saturday or Sunday, so that's vastly different to the way we do it in England.

IS: A lot of the coaches that have come on this trip are our members that have come through our coaching pathway, so it's given us a chance to catch up with them too. We can also have a look at possible career pathways for our members at home and give them that information of what is going on in other countries, if they can't find a career in England.



Stuart English | Birmingham City
Academy Head of Coaching

It's been great to come to a different country that's renowned for producing top players. To get an insight into Athletic Bilbao and also a couple of smaller clubs and see how they work their programme from top to bottom has been very interesting.

Bilbao have got over 140 partner clubs, where they send their Academy coaches to work in twice a week. That's an interesting model in terms of how you create links with the local clubs around you to try to get the best players and the best staff. They've connected with all the clubs and those clubs are pushing the players in their direction, so that puts them in a really good place.

We can get caught in our own bubbles, we work every day really hard to try to develop the best programme for the kids. A big part of the success of our Academy is the fact that everyone's always eager and enthusiastic to learn and develop, from the players to the staff. When this opportunity came up, it was a great way for me to get an insight from some really successful Academies in Spain.



Tom Pell | Cambridge United
Academy Manager

We've visited La Liga clubs and grassroots clubs, so that's been really nice to gain some varied experiences. At the three main pro clubs - Athletic Bilbao, Real Sociedad and Eibar - there was a real community feel. They go into local schools and have feeder clubs and work with the local community to get players in. The importance they put on that was really evident and it's something that we could look to enhance at my club.

The Danok Bat grassroots club was also very impressive. You got the sense that for everybody within that local area, that was their safe haven where they all came to enjoy playing football and being with their coaches. That sort of passion came across in both the children and the staff.

The chances for us to have a really open q & a session with a Premier League manager back home I'm assuming would be very slim, so the access has been great. The Head of Methodologies and Academy Managers that we've spoken to have been really open. Even when I posed a question about finance, the Sociedad Academy Manager was very open about their expenditure and revenue and annual budgets, so that was really valuable information.

I wanted to get out here to get out of my own comfort zone. I wanted to see different, to feel different, to get a sense of what goes on in the Basque area. I would really recommend it to people because you're gaining different experiences. Every day is a learning day.



Wigan Athletic's Under-18 team have achieved unprecedented success in recent times, winning three trophies last season and topping the table in their first Professional Development League North campaign.

While many of the exciting Latics prospects are eyeing progression into the first team, midfielder **Joe McWilliam** is targeting further accomplishments away from the game.



Alongside his apprenticeship, the 18-year-old has pursued his keen interest in business, creating five online clothing companies with a combined following of over 200,000 people on Instagram.

"I've had ups and downs with playing time and injuries, but I've really enjoyed being an apprentice at Wigan," he told LFE. "I've been inspired by the success of some of the other lads who have excelled on the pitch.

"At the start of last season, I damaged my MCL and spent six or seven months out. This year, I've struggled with hamstring injuries. Being a footballer is something I've dreamed of since being a child, but I came to the realisation that a career at a high level wasn't tailored to my skillset. I found that my talents were probably better suited to other areas.

"I've had an interest in business from a young age. At the age of 13, my first venture was painting on shoes, which I eventually sold. Aged 14,

I did gardening for six months, where I created leaflets and handed them out to everyone around my area. From that, I bought a weed stick at Home Bargains for £2.99 and off I went.

"People think as an athlete, you can't be creative or can't have other interests, but I looked at players like Tyrone Mings, who has his interior design business, so there are examples of players at the highest level that have managed to pursue other industries."

McWilliam decided to step away from his playing commitments at the turn of the year, focusing more of his time on completing the BTEC Extended Diploma and building his online brand, with 'The Unseek Hub' and 'The Bootcycle' becoming particularly popular.

He continued: "I package parcels, I buy stock, I manage my own finances, I advertise and answer all messages on social media, I try to model as well as I can – although that's probably not my best area.

"There's obviously different elements to those roles as well, like packaging parcels can be broken down into getting the order on your phone, inputting the shipping address, using your label printer, packaging the product, stocking up mail supplies and so on.

"My photography probably isn't the best and sometimes it'll take me an hour trying to get the right angle and lighting, but if it leads to a sale then that time spent is worthwhile.

"I've hit hurdles at times. I was a bit overwhelmed with tax and how to manage my finances, considering different bank accounts and stuff like that. But I just thought, 'why can't I make some time and learn about this stuff'? I felt that I'd come to the stage where my business was doing really well, and I no longer wanted to juggle that with football."

The young entrepreneur identifies communication and confidence as the primary attributes that have contributed to his success so far, which he feels are transferable skills between football and business.

"On the pitch, I've never claimed to be the most talented player," said McWilliam. "I've always lacked a left foot and a yard of pace, but in other areas I've been able to lead. I've used my voice to help others and I've demonstrated leadership by directing my team-mates.

"Speaking effectively is very important for a footballer during a game and in the dressing room and that translates into everyday life. I remember walking to school and speaking to a lady walking her dog most days. It was only a two-minute conversation, but I felt that was important for my development and also just hopefully making her day a bit better.

"I think there is a perception that young people can be ignorant and indulged in their mobile phone. To put the phone down, speak to people and plan things that you want to do or achieve, I feel that's a better use of your time.

"Developing confidence is something I'm always striving for and you achieve that by testing your comfort zone."

Reading has also become a focal point of McWilliam's routine, offering a combination of relaxation, entertainment and stimulation.

He added: "My mates ask me why I read even though I'm a footballer and I tell them I want to educate myself, I want to develop as a person. I'm always keen to read about successful people's process and try to install their positive habits into my routine.



TheUneekHub
theuneekhub.com
The Boot Cycle
thebootcycle.com
MissUneek
missuneek.co.uk



"Speaking effectively is very important for a footballer during a game and in the dressing room and that translates into everyday life."

"It's brought clarity to my own thinking. I knew it was unlikely that I'd be able to make the next step to becoming a professional, but I identified the skills I do have and thought about how they can help me succeed in other areas.

"I've read books like Bounce and The Talent Code. I'm currently reading The Secret, which has really changed my mindset because it's encouraged me to be more positive and given me more belief. There's no point hoping something will sell, I've got to believe that they will. If I can't sell the idea to myself then I won't be able to sell it to others."

His drive to expand the business has seen McWilliam attempt to unlock foreign markets, with a Christmas trip to Paris involving networking visits to various big brands.

"I went there with my girlfriend and we had a good time. We went to Disneyland and did some exploring, but then on Christmas Day I was shopping and looking for ways in which I can make money or find products that people will want to buy," he said.

"I guess it comes back to confidence. I don't speak any French other than 'bonjour' and 'au revoir', but I went into shops and tried to network with others and see if there were any sales on. I tried to speak to people in store and get email addresses and other contact details so that I can shop in Paris from the UK. I've now developed contacts in Louis Vuitton and Gucci.

"At the airport, my girlfriend rang me asking where I was because we had to board the flight. I was in Louis Vuitton having champagne getting a new rucksack. I had to run to the gate to catch the flight, but

the next day I sold that item for an extra £200. In the moment, you might be flustered, but ultimately I maximised my time and came home with a profit."

Having accepted a professional career in football is not the pathway he will lead, McWilliam is grateful to have invested his spare time into exploring alternative options, as well as concentrating on his studies.

He said: "There hasn't been a day in the seven years I've been at Wigan where I haven't developed. I've probably reached the peak of what level I can achieve as a footballer, but there are a lot of lessons I've learned in football that I can take with me.

"I've never been the most talented player, but I've always worked hard. My time at Wigan hasn't ended because I focused my spare time on business. By pursuing another interest, I realised that my skills were better suited to that industry.

"As a contingency, it's been important to complete my education. I've looked at University and other avenues to increase my business knowledge. To have the Extended Diploma and the target grades that I've been set, if I achieve those then it certainly puts me in a good position for the future.

"I started my current business with £20 from my nan. I started my gardening business with £2.99 and within six months I'd made about £3,500, which at 14-years-old is an exponential amount of money. If you're able to sell your product, sell your ideas and present yourself in a manner that people can trust, there's nothing stopping you succeeding, no matter what financial backing you've got."

LIFE SKILLS

Crewe Alexandra apprentices learned about the pitfalls of professional football and how to avoid destructive behaviour patterns during an LFE Life Skills seminar from the Sporting Chance Clinic.



Delivered by Head of Education Alex Mills and ex-footballers Eddie Johnson and Lee Thorpe, the teenagers gained valuable information on how emotional well-being links to addictive behaviours like gambling, alcohol use, drug use, gaming, social media and sex.

“We cover lots of different issues within the session and we also provide lived experiences with former footballers discussing their particular issues,” Mills told LFE. “The lads are really able to relate to someone talking about their own experiences, and also delving into not just what they did, but why they did it.”

“The apprentices might not drink or play on a games console, but they may relate to certain emotions that caused Lee to become a recreational drug user. That’s why it’s important for them to identify with the emotions behind problematic behaviour.”

“Some people are more resilient and can handle different emotions and move on quite quickly. Others can suffer a severe impact from certain life events or certain emotions and that’s something that we want to address before it then leads to problematic behaviours. Sporting Chance is there as a completely independent source of support.”

The workshop is split into phases, starting with detail on different emotions and how they can lead to various issues, while the youngsters then discuss and compare their understanding of the range of topics before ending with personal tales from the ex-professionals.

Mills continued: “The first part of the session attempts to make them feel comfortable with talking about emotions and admitting that they have them and that they’re perfectly normal. We’re trying to remove that stigma that exists. Once we address that, then we look at engaging them with ways to identify those emotions and ways to deal with them.”

“Addiction is the end of the line. We want to get lads talking about these things before it develops into that sort of a significant problem. Cultural change is the holy grail and if groups of players are able to support each other and set certain standards about how they talk with and about each other, that’ll definitely produce a more aware and open generation.”

“Ultimately, the biggest thing they can take away with them is the Sporting Chance phone number, because that number saves people’s lives and may save their life or a team-mate’s life one day. That’s why we’re here, to help them address emotional health issues that can cause them problems.”

“There’s no emotion too small for them to pick up the phone and call. You’re the best judge of whether something is bothering you or not and that’s the only thing that you have to bring to the table. A professionally trained person will work with you to achieve solutions.”



“ADDICTION IS THE END OF THE LINE. WE WANT TO GET LADS TALKING ABOUT THESE THINGS BEFORE IT DEVELOPS INTO THAT SORT OF A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM.”



Former Manchester United Academy player Johnson suffered with his own difficulties as a player, which came to a head when his career was cut short at the age of 27 due to injury. Having received support from Sporting Chance, he is now keen to pass on his experiences to the next generation.

He said: "It's important for the lads to know that they're not alone in the way they are feeling. There are thousands of players who use our service, so they just need to know how and where they can get help should they ever need it.

"There's a 24-hour helpline that the lads can access at any time, whether they've just woken up in the middle of the night and don't feel quite right, or whether they're in a more serious situation and require counselling, which is another service that is provided - funded by The PFA.

"It's okay to be vulnerable and open up and talk. I bottled things up and it caused me a lot of problems. The fact that I didn't use the services available to me led to losing relationships, losing money and making stupid choices.

"Once I did speak to Sporting Chance and built some foundations of acceptance that I wasn't a professional footballer anymore, I thought it would be beneficial for me to then pass on my experience. If we can spark thoughts in their heads and give them more awareness of these topics, then I genuinely believe we can change people's lives."

Under-18s goalkeeper Jerry Le Grand Akpo acknowledged that the session was effective

in breaking down barriers between team-mates, creating a more open dressing room.

"I found it very informative because it's a side to football that not many people take into consideration," said the 17-year-old. "It's good that we get taught about it because if anyone does need their help, they know where to go.

"Discussing these topics with my team-mates allowed us to get an insight into each other's perspective of how things stand. If as a team collectively we know what's right and wrong, then it makes it easier to advise each other and identify where someone's going wrong.

"We talked about what we individually feel can be considered as a problem and what's normal, so we can set that standard between each other and we acknowledge that we can interact with each other if something does get out of control.

"Sometimes, the pressure of football makes you focus on yourself and you end up prioritising yourself over the welfare of your team-mates. It's important not to compromise the well-being of your team-mates for the sake of your career.

"Someone's issues can be hidden, so you've just got to take a step back and look at the bigger picture and just ask someone if they're okay from time to time because sometimes all it takes is just starting up a conversation."

“SOMETIMES THE HARDEST THING IN THE WORLD IS ADMITTING YOU NEED HELP”

TONY ADAMS MBE

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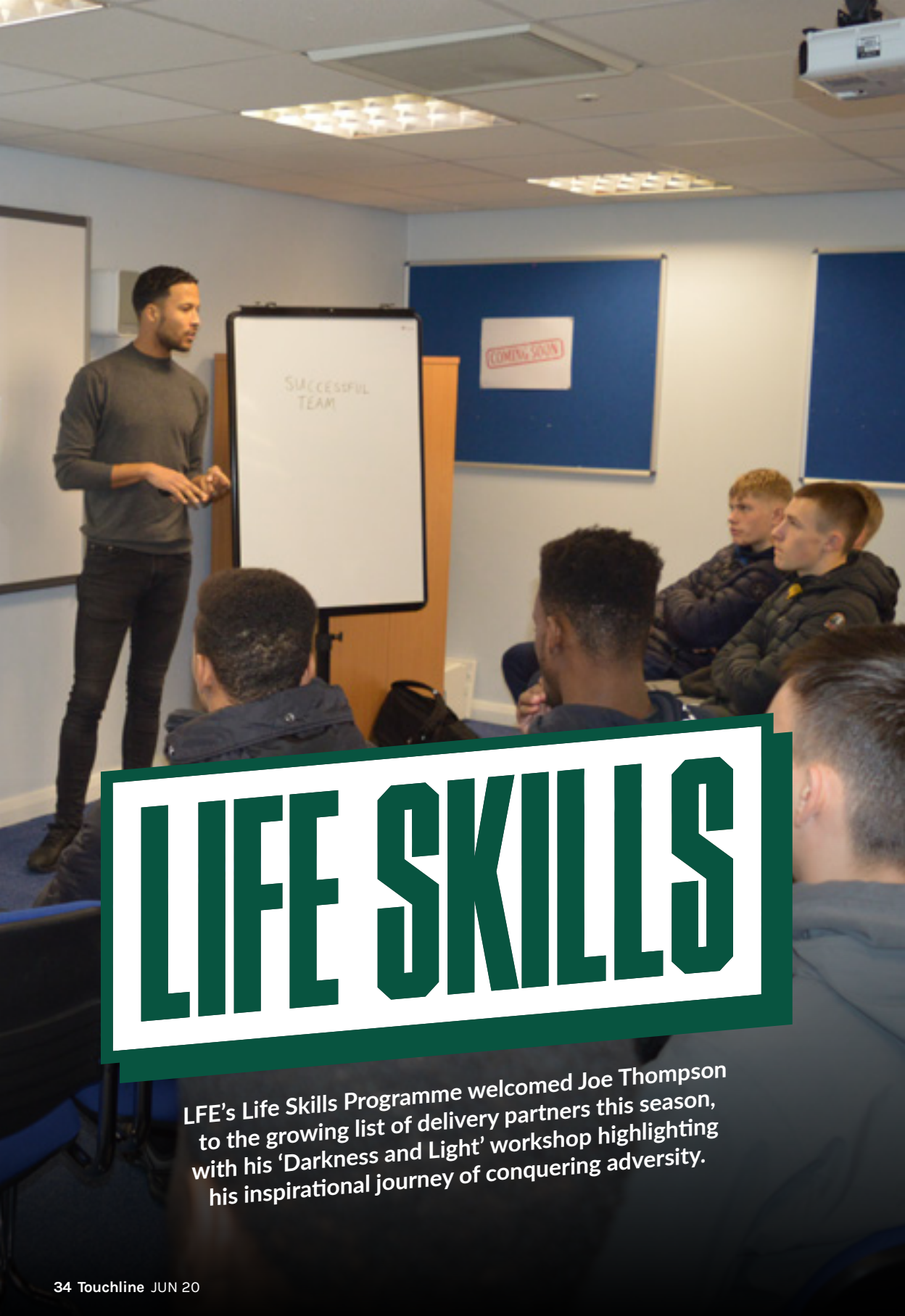
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SPORTING CHANCE



League
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LIFE SKILLS

LFE's Life Skills Programme welcomed Joe Thompson to the growing list of delivery partners this season, with his 'Darkness and Light' workshop highlighting his inspirational journey of conquering adversity.

Bolton Wanderers apprentices were among those to experience the talk, which promotes resilience, courage and well-being, as Thompson discusses the lessons learned from his 13-year professional playing career and two battles with Hodgkin Lymphoma.

"The session focuses on resilience and overcoming obstacles in your football career and in life," the former Rochdale midfielder told LFE. "I got diagnosed with cancer twice and I had to use certain things that I'd learned in football, from managers and mentors and other people within football, and then try to apply them to overcome a setback.

"I'm forever grateful for what I've learned along the way and that's why I think it's so important to give back to the younger ones because life is to be enjoyed, but I also want them to realise that it is fragile at times.

"I always know going into a session that it's going to be tough for me to emotionally show up and be honest with them, but that's the impact. Being raw and true in delivering the message is something that they can take with them."

Thompson, who collected the prestigious Sir Tom Finney Award in 2019, leads an interactive discussion on being a good team-mate, provoking consideration of key skills that can be used in and out of football.

"Nobody is successful on their own," he continued. "Particularly at this stage of their career, the better the team is, the more likely their chances are of getting a professional contract.

"That doesn't mean that those traits won't transfer to other jobs either. I'm starting to understand that now myself as I start doing talks in banking and corporate environments. Having that respect for a team-mate, giving your all and those fundamental things that you need to have as a person, take you so far.

"The one thing I'd really want them to take from my session is to never give up. It's not going to be plain-sailing because success doesn't just come easily and overnight, there's a process to it. You're going to need to show resilience along the way in different areas of your life. Find out what motivates you and hold onto that because it's about making memories.

"I would also say to trust yourself. Footballers often think they can only do football because it's all they've ever known but there are so many transferable skills. It's tough when you make the transition and it does take you out of your comfort zone, but I wouldn't fear it, I'd try to embrace it."

Academy defender Myles Edmondson admitted the session was an eye opener.

He said: "It's been a tough season here at Bolton and we've all had to be resilient from the start. It's definitely brought us all closer because we had to play a lot of games and there was a lot of uncertainty about the future of the club, so we had to help each other through it and became strong as a group.



"THE ONE THING I'D REALLY WANT THEM TO TAKE FROM MY SESSION IS TO NEVER GIVE UP."

"Joe gave us a different perspective that not everything's about football and you've got to think about your own mental well-being before anything else. He talked a lot about the importance of family and how they got him through a lot of hard times.

"You need to have people that you know you can speak to when you're going through tough times, so you have to consider the support around you."

Meanwhile, first-year apprentice Finlay Hurford-Lockett experienced his own personal adversity this year when he required surgery due to an irregular heartbeat, which restricted him to the sidelines for an extended period.

The 17-year-old, who has made three first-team appearances, said: "The club doctor found an issue during a routine scan and I was told that I was at high risk of having a heart attack on the pitch, so I can sort of relate to Joe's journey, although it wasn't as bad as fighting cancer.

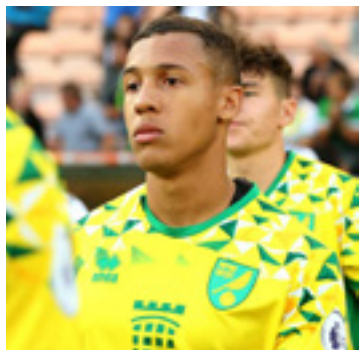
"I had no symptoms, so it was a big shock, but it's just made me aware that it's a short career and it can be taken away at any moment. I've also shown to myself that I'm capable of overcoming obstacles and I've tried to turn it into a positive.

"It halted my progress, but I've recovered and I'm back to full fitness and I'm stronger for the experience, so now I'm more determined than ever to kick on again."



COAST TO COAST

Back in the summer of 2018, **Caleb Richards** was in search of a new club after being released by Blackpool.



The young left-back quickly found a new home with Norwich City, which has seen his fortunes take a considerable turn for the better, with the catalyst being a hugely successful loan spell at Tampa Bay Rowdies last calendar year.

"It was in my mind to play in a different country at some point because I love to travel," Richards told LFE. "It's not just a normal loan spell because you're quite far away from your family and your usual environment and you get to experience a new culture."

"I lived in a house with a lad who was on loan from Sheffield United, Jordan Doherty. The facilities were amazing – we had a pool and a gym, the training surfaces were great and we had all the equipment we needed."

"We lived in St. Petersburg in Florida, which is where the team train and play games. There are beaches all over and Tampa is the main city nearby, where all the restaurants and shopping centres are."

"When you go abroad, it's really important not to just stay in the house and actually get out and experience the local culture. It helped us get closer to the rest of the team as well because they'd take us around to different places."

The 21-year-old was immediately exposed to the USL Championship club's community campaigns, with his involvement in a range of activities allowing Richards to make a positive contribution off the pitch, as well as on it.

"One of the biggest shocks was the media attention," he said. "Everything we did was very extravagant. We had to do a lot of media activities and there were plenty of visits to various places to promote the club in the community."

"There was one event where we were in a restaurant making food and serving it to some young fans, so that was great to interact with them. There was also a fan who had a heart condition and we'd visit him every week."

"That's something that leaves a lasting impact even during a short stay because that helped him through a tough time. Doing these things has made me much more at ease communicating and the practice has developed my skills in that area."

On the pitch, Richards was an ever-present for the Rowdies, featuring in all 36 league games and performing well enough to earn the Mid-Season Young Player of the Year award.

"I didn't expect to play so much, I think I reached 40 appearances including cup games," he continued. "I played the left side of a back 3 and I was having to deal with different types of players. Some strikers would be big and powerful, others would be small and quick, so I was having to adapt my game from what I'd usually face in an Under-23s environment and that was really beneficial."

"IT'S GOOD TO BE KNOWN AS MORE THAN JUST A FOOTBALLER BECAUSE FOOTBALL IS ONLY PART OF YOUR LIFE."

"Our coach used to be a defender as well, so he gave me plenty of advice on positioning and improving in the air, so I feel I've improved a lot defensively. When I came back, I felt really sharp in training and so much more comfortable in games."

Despite his encouraging development as a player, it is the off the pitch experience that has left the biggest impression on Richards.

He said: "I knew I was going to make progress playing with experienced players and learning from new coaches, but I think I developed as a person even more by gaining more confidence on and off the pitch, taking that American easy-going and happy nature that they all seem to have."

"I feel like I'm a bigger character in the group since coming back. I noticed when going out to Yeovil recently that compared to my previous loans, I was a much more outgoing character joining up with them, which helped me settle in quicker."

"It was probably the best 10 months I've had. I think the fact that you're doing so much in the local area, in addition to all the training and games, just makes it an amazing experience and you're constantly creating memories."

"One thing came up on my Snapchat memories the other day, where we went on a boat trip and saw dolphins up close. A couple of baseball and hockey games we went to have come up recently, too. It's those memories that stand out just as much as the playing side of things."

"We visited 12 or 13 states in the Eastern Conference, like New York, New Jersey, Pittsburgh and Georgia. We got to see a snapshot of these places, which was really interesting. Oklahoma was a ghost town but had interesting architecture, while Memphis was so lively as we were next to Beale Street, which is like a big party. Seeing those different cultures makes me want to explore more."

The opportunity to play abroad and gain new life experiences is part of Norwich's philosophy to develop well-rounded youngsters through their Academy.

"The club is very focused on personal development opportunities," said Richards. "We have a lot of mental health workshops and we have a session after training focusing on a different life skill almost every week."

"It's important because throughout your career, you're going to have to deal with the media, you're going to have to build mental strength to handle the ups and downs, you need to be aware of getting sucked into things like gambling and the mental health problems that can cause."

"It makes us more rounded people, which also helps us become better players because they make you more mentally prepared for the challenges that football presents."

In recent months, nutrition and cooking has emerged as a keen interest outside of football for Richards. Having committed to becoming vegan, the Canaries starlet pushed himself out of his comfort zone by releasing an e-book about his transition to a plant-based diet.

He added: "Learning to cook is an important life skill, regardless of football, but obviously it does help when you're trying to stick to a balanced diet. We have plenty of free time as footballers and I've used some of that to develop my cooking."

"A few of us in the Under-23s watched the documentary Game Changers and decided to try a meat-free diet. It reduces inflammation when you eat a lot of vegetables and I noticed after a couple of weeks that my speed was increasing during the tests that we do."

"A lot of my meals are just the same as before, except I use a meat-free substitute like quorn. I've started to incorporate chickpeas and lentils into my diet now and I've enjoyed trying new foods."

"English was never my strongest subject in school, but I just started to document my experience in my spare time while on loan at Yeovil and then the lockdown gave me further encouragement to invest more time into writing a book."

"A lot of people from all over the world have bought it and I've heard from a lot of people that have decided to give it a go. It's definitely exceeded my expectations of what I thought it would achieve and it feels good to know I've been able to change perspectives and educate people about a vegan diet."

"It's definitely spurred me on to try more things out of my comfort zone. It's good to be known as more than just a footballer because football is only part of your life. If you get released or an injury takes you away from the game, you'll be left with nothing and that can be very difficult mentally, so it's really important to have other aspects to your identity."



PLAYER PLACEMENTS



SPAIN



LFE's Erasmus+ Player Placement programme provided former apprentices Delsin Ackom and Jack Leask the opportunity to join Spanish fifth tier club CD Almuñecar City.

The pair were able to test themselves on the pitch in a new environment, while also developing off the pitch, gaining life skills, learning a new language and immersing themselves in the day-to-day life of a new culture.

First-team captain and Head of Recruitment Sean Morris told LFE: "We have an academy with players that range from 14 to 19-years-old. We use that as a platform to build into our senior projects. We then have two Under-23 teams and a Senior squad which play in the Spanish League structure.

"Players who come here are in a beautiful area of the world and they come into an environment that's designed to be as professional as possible to prepare them for a full-time career in the game.

"We have people from over 30 countries in this club, ranging from European countries like France, Norway and Denmark, to African nations like Zimbabwe, Ghana and South Africa, and even a handful of players from Australia.

"With so many different personalities from various backgrounds, they all bring their piece to the puzzle. We've had guys go out and visit each other in their respective home countries, so it's a project that creates many different experiences that go beyond just playing football.

"Ultimately, this whole project is designed for the players who come here. All we ask is that they are ready to work and willing to integrate with the team, the culture and the community. That's when a lot of really great things can happen."

Delsin Ackom
CD Almuñecar City
Former Milton Keynes Dons
Apprentice

Coming back to full-time football has been a great experience and the set-up has been amazing. You have your own room and the accommodation provides breakfast. For lunch and dinner, you're with the boys at the club's restaurant, so you integrate with them really quickly while having good quality meals.

We train almost every day and you've also got a lot of free time to relax, do gym work, enjoy the scenery and travel. The weekly money allowance helps you to explore the city and you can also use it to eat elsewhere if you're not a fan of what's been provided by the restaurant.

Everyone comes from different cultures and backgrounds and I've

learned a lot from watching the different playing styles that they have. It also makes you appreciate where you come from because some of the players are from deprived areas, so it just highlights that you can't take this opportunity for granted.

The Academy team provide plenty of opportunities to play some of the big clubs and then the first team play some strong teams as well. I played 90 minutes against Salar CF, who were top of the league and we drew 1-1, so that was a great experience. Knowing that the manager has trust in me to start and play a full game is a real confidence boost after being released last summer.

It is a great opportunity to come out here. It's got me back into enjoying football and appreciating aspects of life that I was probably taking for granted. I've become more independent and the different coaching methods have brought new aspects to my game, so I feel like I've really improved as a player and a person.



Jack Leask
CD Almuñecar City
Former Shrewsbury Town
Apprentice

It's been a great experience, one that I'll probably never forget. Living out here on your own and not being with your family, it's the first time I've done that, so it's been a big challenge, but it's been a great one to experience.

Being more independent has definitely changed who I am as a person - I'm not relying on other people as much as I did.

I'm more conscious of looking after myself and making sure I eat the right food, drink enough water and just generally making sure I'm prepared properly for training and games.

Coming out here, you're getting a whole new experience of a different country, so it's important to be open to the different aspects of the country to get a full experience.

I've been to watch a couple of La Liga games, I've been across Malaga and visited Granada to have a look around and I've also slowly picked up some of the language during the weekly lessons.

Playing against La Liga clubs for the Under-19s, such as Sevilla, Granada and Barcelona, has been a real highlight. To be able to experience playing against top teams in Spain is a unique opportunity.

I wasn't sure whether I'd manage to handle being away for an extended period because three months does sound like a long time, but it goes very quickly. I'd definitely recommend it to anyone; it's a great experience and I can't fault it.

PLAYER PLACEMENTS



SWEDEN

The total number of ex-apprentices to have taken part in LFE's Erasmus+ Player Placement programme since 2008 is now approaching 300, with eight more apprentices experiencing Sweden before quarantine was introduced.

Since being released last summer, former Bury Academy player Jack Hatton was working in a cricket club bar and playing non-league football at weekends until Scandinavia came calling.

The 19-year-old enjoyed a month at fourth tier club Ytterhogdals IK before being forced to return home early due to the Coronavirus outbreak. Here, full-back Hatton gives an insight into the opportunity.



Jack Hatton
Ytterhogdals IK
Former Bury Apprentice

I really enjoyed my time in Sweden and it was disappointing to have to come back home. I'd like to go back because I loved the experience and there's more for me to explore.

I'd probably lost a bit of love for the game after being rejected by Bury and then I went on trial at a few clubs but didn't get offered anything, which was a bit demoralising. Heading out to Sweden has made me feel wanted again. Being back in a competitive environment and mixing with a group of lads who are all ambitious to progress was great and it can be a stepping stone to other experiences.

I expected it to be a good standard, but it was probably better than I thought it would be, even though I only played pre-season games. The level I was playing at in England was nowhere near what I experienced in Sweden. It might be fourth tier, but it's really competitive.

When you're in an Academy, you're being pushed to be better every day and I think that's what you miss in non-league when you're not full-time anymore. To have that back again in Sweden was great and we were all pushing each other and demanding high standards.

A lot of lads in the group at Ytterhogdals are from England and so is the manager, so there's a lot of common ground. The manager stressed that everyone's left things behind at home and made a sacrifice to be here, so let's give it everything we've got to make it worthwhile. That sort of attitude made it a great environment to be part of.

Obviously, it's not just a football opportunity. You learn a lot about yourself being away from home

and it can lead to a whole new life for some. There were a few lads out there who keep going back every year and some have made a permanent life for themselves in Sweden.

Before I went, I could get by cooking a few things, but I really developed that and made plenty of different meals, so I've gained a really useful life skill. There are other things that you probably take for granted if you've just been at home all your life as well, like keeping the house clean and washing up and just generally growing up a bit.

I was also learning some Swedish on the OLS (Online Linguistic Support) app on my phone and a few of the Swedish lads were helping me a bit as well. Even though everyone speaks English at the club, it's all part of the experience to learn some of the language and it did help when I was picking out items to buy in the local shops.

We had a good relationship with the people who are in charge of the club, too. They told us that we'd be expected to integrate with the local community and he initially talked about going to the bingo hall and helping out there. The people in the town support the club, so it's our duty as players to give back, although unfortunately we had to come home before I got chance to be involved in anything like that.

I'd recommend that people consider it as an option. Before my Regional Officer, Craig Skinner, mentioned Sweden to me, I was a bit dismissive and apprehensive about ever playing abroad because I probably hadn't given it enough thought. Once I'd looked into it and made the decision to just go for it, the nerves were replaced with excitement.

Having had a taste of it, I think I'm more open to trying other countries now and seeing other parts of the world, so it's definitely made me more open-minded and confident about taking on these sorts of opportunities.



PLAYERS ON PLACEMENT

Jordan Boon
IFK Ostersund
Former Bolton Wanderers
Apprentice

Aaron Ekumah
Gottne IF
Former Norwich Apprentice

Raece Ellington
IFK Mora
Former Bradford City
Apprentice

Luke Hirst
IFK Mora
Former Dagenham &
Redbridge Apprentice

Kain McGaughey
IFK Mora
Former Wigan Athletic
Apprentice

Harvey Simson
Bodens BK
Former Blackpool Apprentice

Dylan Switters
Gottne IF
Former Stevenage Apprentice

NORTHAMPTON

TOWN



Northampton Town's Academy system has made great strides recently, with the club showing commitment to developing their young talent



Over the past two seasons, the Cobblers have established an impressive record, handing out eight professional contracts, seven senior debuts, over 100 first-team appearances and winning an EFL Youth Alliance South East trophy.

Lead PDP Coach Jon Brady has been at the heart of the planning process since taking over the Under-18s side in 2017.

He told LFE: "We've been lucky with the two most recent managers, Dean Austin and now Keith Curle, who have both been very keen to give our youth players opportunities to progress.

"Winning the Youth Alliance league was nice and it shows what we're doing in training is working, but I think the proof in the pudding is appearances in the first team, because that's our ultimate goal."

Although progress on the training pitch remains a key piece to the puzzle, Brady highlights work off the pitch as the primary reason for their success.

"First and foremost, when we're looking at young players, we make sure they've got the right attitude," he added. "Are they willing to work extremely hard and put the extra effort in? Are they a good teammate and are they a positive character? Do they have resilience? All those values are really important to us before we even look at them technically and tactically.

"Keith Curle is very influential in helping players with the transition from youth team to first team. They design development programmes to keep them on track, so performance is observed and mental well-being is monitored through regular conversations.

"If you've got a player who feels good about himself, or is going through some issues but knows he has a support system to get through that, then they're going to feel more comfortable and have more freedom to go on the pitch and perform. It's fantastic that the players are a lot more willing to talk freely with us coaches, not just about football, but about life in general."

A close connection between the coaching and education staff has been vital in devising an effective life skills schedule for the teenagers.

"Our Head of Education, Pete Stephenson, has been extremely influential in making sure that the boys have an extensive life skills programme and have a wide range of experiences, whether it's talks or going out for community visits," said Brady.

"It gets players to see the bigger picture, so instead of pinning all their hopes on football, they're encouraged to build a life outside of football. Gaining these life skills gives players the capability to speak to potential employers, find another trade or further their education and be confident about themselves in order to do that.

"From my experience, when my sole focus was football, I felt such a huge pressure to perform. Then later on in my career, when I started my coaching business, I didn't feel that pressure because I had other interests that I could fall back on, so I had more freedom to play.

"I'm keen for the boys to have other interests and life allows that now, particularly with social media outlets. It's important for players to switch off from football because you need that downtime."

Second-year apprentice Scott Pollock is a prime example of a young footballer expressing himself in a variety of areas. Having shot to fame by winning Hashtag United's YouTube Academy series in 2017, the 19-year-old has used his following of over 170,000 people across multiple social media channels to engage in a range of experiences.

Brady continued: "People have been able to see Scott's pathway of trying to become a player online and that's given him plenty of other opportunities to have interests outside of football. He's very level-headed and down to earth about it as well, which you need to be to find that balance.

"Scott was in our Football Education programme prior to becoming an apprentice. During that time, he played at Wembley against some Premier League All-Stars and was named man of the match. Since then, Scott's risen to every challenge that he's been given and has now played over 20 games for his boyhood club.

"He's been creative with making videos, he's had some brand deals and he gets the chance to go to different events, so he's making the most of his spare time while also keeping the right amount of focus on his football.

"Similar to Scott's pathway, we've just signed Ethan Johnston from our FE programme. Working so closely with the education staff has allowed us to be regularly informed of whether all the boys are keeping up with their work.

"If they're not, there can be consequences, so that adds to the motivation for them to continue working hard in the classroom. If they're doing things right off the pitch, it's setting great habits and standards to take onto the pitch."

Throughout the quarantine period, the Northampton staff have maintained consistent contact with players across the Academy age groups to continue their personal development messaging.

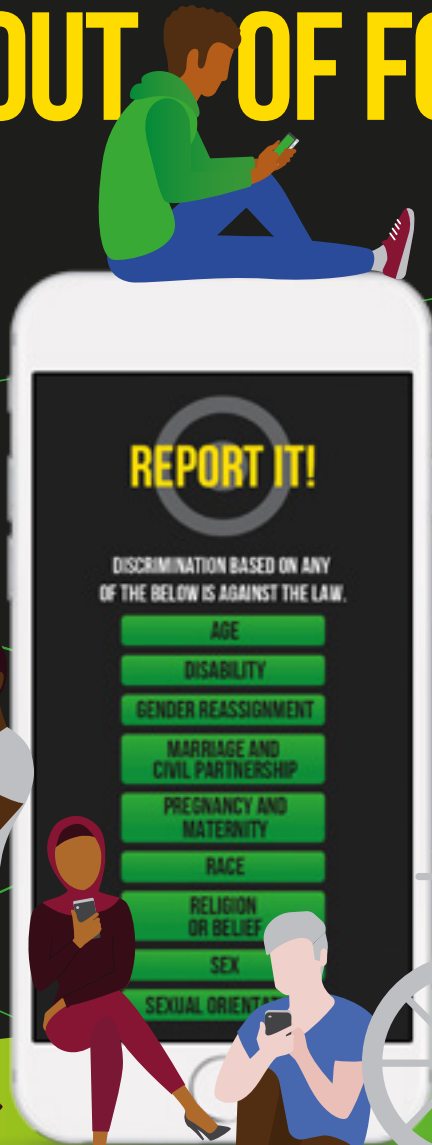
Brady said: "It's important for us to create a connection with families and making sure the boys are mindful of how they can make a positive impact at home, while also developing some important life skills.

"There is a difference between playing on a PlayStation all day and not really achieving anything, compared to helping out with the washing or mowing the lawn, or learning how to cook. These activities show that they can look after themselves and take ownership of their nutrition, which is important when considering the discipline and growth of any individual, not just as a footballer.

"If we can create players that have the life skills to be a well-rounded person, that's the most important thing for us. We want to develop youngsters that are good people off the pitch and good players on the pitch."



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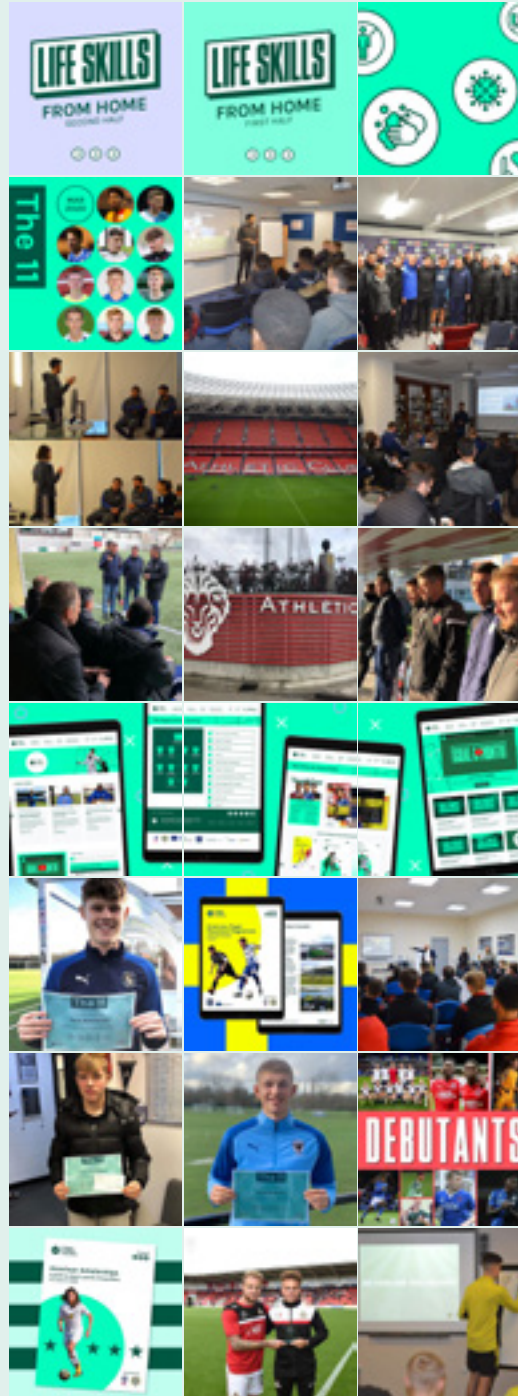
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533 posts	462 following	1,000 followers
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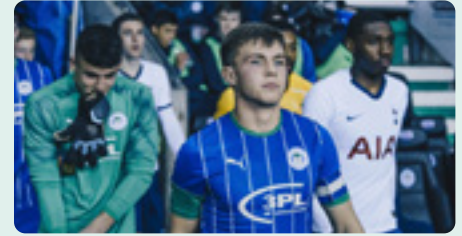
14.5K tweets	2,184 following	6,096 followers
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Portsmouth FC @Pompey
 🌟 #Pompey have offered third year scholarships to three @PompeyAcademy players



BBC RM Sport @BBCRMsport
 😭 Crying face Tears from mum
 💪 Flexed biceps Pride from dad
 🎓 Graduation cap Education in America
 @harryjolley4 is a bright @LaticsOfficial prospect and had a one-year deal on the table. He's decided to go to America to study instead and 'doing what's best' for him. #WAFC



Si Williams @SimonWilliamsV1
 Thanks to @GNev2 for jumping on a call to discuss timely support and our life skills activities for academy players. And for the ideas and potential to do more together, action needed! @LFEonline @EFL @PFA @_kelbuterworth

FIFPRO @FIFPro
 Released by @ManCity as a 16 year old, @LBelBell explains in his latest column what happened next. <https://www.fifpro.org/en/education/building-a-second-career-while-playing-professional-football> (Spoiler: some useful career tips for other professional footballers.)





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