



Touchline

PLUS

James Doig

Joel Bonner

Charlie Binns

Bradley Middleton

Renell McKenzie-Lyle

GRAFT

RAP'S RISING STAR TALKS ABOUT HIS TRANSITION AWAY FROM FOOTBALL

Higher Education

Academy players who achieve the required academic qualifications at the end of their LFE apprenticeship can pursue a route into University.

Practical and independent advice is available in LFE's 'Guide to Higher Education Applications'.



USA Scholarships

A Scholarship in the USA offers apprentices the chance to extend their playing career, while also gaining a degree.

LFE's 'Guide to American Scholarships' provides an informative outline of the student-athlete pathway.



To download our guides to Higher Education and USA Scholarships visit lfe.org.uk/touchline-downloads

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

LFE has built strong partnerships with a variety of different organisations – from employers to leading universities in the UK and USA.



Browse the range of career opportunities at lfe.org.uk/careers

Erasmus+ Player Placement

LFE's Erasmus+ Player Placement programme offers recently released apprentices the opportunity to experience European culture, training facilities and techniques in Spain or Sweden.

More information on the project and eligibility is available at lfe.org.uk/erasmus-player-placements/

FirstPoint USA

All LFE learners have free access to the expertise of FirstPoint USA.

Thanks to an exclusive partnership, young footballers can use their consultancy service for support throughout the recruitment process at no cost.

www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education/

Hudl

LFE has invested in a new Hudl account, which gives apprentices free access to create and share highlights packages to clubs or universities in the UK and abroad.

More information is available at lfe.org.uk/careers/hudl/

PFA SUPPORT

All LFE apprentices are advised to become PFA members to gain access to the numerous benefits and services on offer, including:

Membership

www.thepfa.com/players/membership

Education

www.thepfa.com/education

Coaching Courses

www.thepfa.com/coaching/courses

Well-Being Service

www.thepfa.com/wellbeing/24-7-helpline

Safety Net

thepfa-safetynet.com/

Transfer List

If you are out of contract and looking for a club, upload your details on to the PFA's Transfer List and allow clubs to contact you directly.

www.thepfa.com/YourAccount/Transfer-List

Coaching Directory

Upload your CV on to the PFA's Coaching Directory and put your details in front of potential employers.

www.thepfa.com/YourAccount/Coaching-Directory



THE PFA

PFA WELL-BEING SERVICE

LFE Life Skills partner Sporting Chance provides support to current and former PFA members, via confidential talking therapy or residential treatment.

Apprentices can call a trained professional at **07500 000 777** or email wellbeing@thepfa.co.uk



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ACADEMY LEAGUES

Round-Up



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH EAST DIVISION

Notts County and Scunthorpe United currently lead the way at the top of the North East division, although it is 2018-19 champions Grimsby Town that are in prime position to surge to the summit.

Neil Woods' young Mariners are the only unbeaten side across all four EFL Youth Alliance leagues, although they do have several games in hand. Their success has been built from the back, with six clean sheets from eight games, while they recently found their scoring touch when Josh Smaller bagged a brace in a 4-0 victory over Huddersfield Town.

Despite being eight points adrift of top spot, Grimsby have played five games less than Notts, with the two teams scheduled to face off at the end of February.

Elsewhere, Scunthorpe had moved themselves into contention after five straight wins, including a remarkable 4-3 victory over the leaders, who had been 3-0 up with 20 minutes remaining. However, their title aspirations have drifted away following three defeats in four.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH WEST DIVISION

Fleetwood Town were in the running for the North West crown throughout the curtailed 2019-20 season, and they are back in the mix this year alongside Fylde Coast rivals Blackpool.

The Tangerines started the campaign with three losses in succession, but have bounced back in formidable fashion, stringing together 10 consecutive league wins, largely thanks to the goalscoring exploits of Brad Holmes and Rob Apter.

Exciting forward Holmes has been particularly prolific, netting a hat-trick during a 4-2 victory over their fellow title contenders, although Fleetwood reasserted their authority with a 7-0 triumph at Walsall to reclaim the ascendancy on goal difference.

Last year's runners-up Preston North End are still in the hunt, but are faced with a five-point deficit after enduring a difficult January, losing twice on the trot, including a 4-1 reversal against Blackpool.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH EAST DIVISION

Peterborough United's talented youngsters wrapped up their second successive South East title in February, completing the job by overcoming 2018-19 Merit League One winners Southend United 2-1.

Posh are undefeated since the turn of the year, with their only dropped points coming in a goalless stalemate against second-placed Luton Town, who completed their regular season campaign with back-to-back draws.

The young Hatters have been impressive for large parts of the season, but lost twice to Southend and were recently beaten by Cambridge United, leaving the door open for both teams to overtake them in the table, if they can win their remaining fixtures.

Lower down the league, Stevenage have managed just three victories all season, although two of them came home and away against the champions, registering 3-1 and 2-1 victories. Seventh-placed Gillingham were the only other team to claim all three points against Posh.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH WEST DIVISION

The South West division appears to be going down to the wire, with usual suspects AFC Bournemouth and Oxford United going head-to-head for first position.

The Cherries have set the pace for most of the season having avoided defeat in their opening 13 league matches, however, two defeats in the space of four days against Exeter City (3-2) and Forest Green Rovers (5-3) saw them fall closer to the chasing pack.

And the reigning champions relinquished control when they suffered a 3-1 defeat to their nearest challengers Oxford at the end of January. Despite losing 4-1 to Yeovil Town in their next fixture, Leon Blackmore-Such's side are now in pole position to go one better than their runners-up finish from 12 months ago, sitting a point behind with a game in hand.

Meanwhile, Plymouth Argyle have found form at the right time, with three impressive wins against Swindon Town (4-2), Portsmouth (3-1) and Forest Green (5-0) helping them make a late push for Southern Merit League One qualification.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE NORTH

Wigan Athletic continue to be dominant at Under-18s level, amassing 27 points from a possible 33 to make them firm favourites for back-to-back Professional Development League North titles.

The Latics are the only side in the North and South divisions to have avoided defeat this season, led by top-scorer Sean McGurk, who has 14 goals in 12 appearances in all competitions, including a treble during a 5-1 rout of Crewe Alexandra in November.

With multiple games in hand on their closest challengers, Wigan currently sit third in the table, a point behind Barnsley and two adrift of Birmingham City. A run of four straight wins lifted the Blues into first place, but an Amir Ariely double gave Barnsley a 4-3 win to reduce the gap.

At the other end, Nottingham Forest are rooted to the bottom despite producing two of the biggest winning margins of the season, with Dale Taylor scoring a hat-trick against Queens Park Rangers (7-0) and Fin Back repeating the feat against Cardiff City (6-2).

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE SOUTH

Defending Southern champions Millwall currently stand ahead of the rest again this season. The Lions boast the most potent attack in the region, with Ollie Bate netting eight times in his last four outings, while Abdul Abdulmalik's tally of 11 goals is only eclipsed in the PDL by Coventry City's Harrison Nee (14).

A seven-match winning streak has given them the edge over Ipswich Town, although the Tractor Boys have played two games less and are just a point behind the leaders.

Adem Atay's team are on an excellent run of their own after winning four in a row, including a 2-1 triumph over third-placed Watford after first-year apprentice Edwin Agbaje slotted home a dramatic 92nd-minute winner.

Elsewhere, Colchester United's form has dipped in recent months, but they had made a spectacular start to the season, seeing off Ipswich 3-2 and then hammering Watford 7-2, with striker Tom Stagg hitting the target on four occasions.

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE NORTH

Middlesbrough are the best of the EFL clubs in the Northern section, sitting fifth behind leaders Manchester United, Liverpool, reigning champions Manchester City and Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Although their form has slipped since November, Boro got off to a flying start to the season, winning five of their opening seven matches, with Calum Kavanagh doubling up during wins against Leeds United (3-0), Newcastle United (4-3) and Blackburn Rovers (3-1), while Josh Coburn struck three in a 4-0 victory over Sunderland.

2018-19 winners Derby County also had a fast start, seeing off North East trio Sunderland (2-0), Boro (3-2) and Newcastle (4-3), although an inconsistent run since then has seen them drift to seventh position.

In contrast, Blackburn Rovers have enjoyed an upturn in fortunes over the past month, claiming three wins on the bounce, including a last gasp 1-0 victory over Liverpool, with Georgie Gent getting on the scoresheet.

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE SOUTH

Crystal Palace are the current frontrunners in the Southern section after beating second-placed Fulham home and away in 2021. The Eagles are a point ahead with a game in hand, although Aston Villa are in hot pursuit, just four points back having played two games less.

The Villains began the campaign with five wins on the trot and have responded admirably to their only defeat of the season against Fulham in October, collecting 11 points from the next available 15.

Arjan Raikhy's second-half winner saw them overcome Palace towards the end of November, while the 18-year-old also found the net in an impressive 4-2 victory over Chelsea a week earlier.



RAP GAME CHAMPION

Leeds United have taken the Premier League by storm this season, producing some eye-catching displays under world-renowned manager Marcelo Bielsa.

And while they have gained many admirers on the pitch, one of their own has been making waves in the music industry after winning series two of 'The Rap Game UK', which sees six unsigned MCs go head-to-head in a range of challenges, in pursuit of a record deal with rap legends Krept and Konan.

Jovanni Sterling, aka 'Graft', was an apprentice at Elland Road during the 2015-16 campaign before spending the following season at Rotherham United, but devoted his spare time to his passion of creating music.

Still only 21, the former defender is establishing himself as 'one to watch' within the rap scene.

"I started making music when I was 14, before I got signed for any professional club," he told LFE.

"When I was playing football, my main goal was to become a professional footballer and music was more of a hobby.

"But as time went on, I didn't get a professional contract and I wasn't seeing any success from trialling at various clubs.

"There came a point where my music was going so well that I couldn't ignore that pathway any longer, so it was a natural process.

"Having that clear pathway made my life a lot easier after completing the apprenticeship. My transition away from football was so much smoother because that option was there, and I'd already built the foundations to move towards that route.

"I'm grateful for that because many young footballers put all of their hopes and energy into pursuing a career in football and if it doesn't work, then it can leave them in a difficult place. It's important to realise that there are many different avenues other than football, and they've built up skills that make any job attainable if they put the right preparation and effort into it."

Sterling credits his commitment to an alternative interest for keeping him mentally healthy and insists there are many transferable skills between football and music.

He said: "Both industries are very competitive. You've got to be strong-minded and believe in yourself, regardless of what obstacles arise.

"In football, I learned about discipline, hard work, self-belief and mindset. Developing those sorts of skills as a footballer has been very beneficial, as I've been able to transfer them to my music career. ▶

"As an apprentice, music was the way that I would express my feelings and get things off my chest emotionally. Everyone goes through a lot of ups and downs in their life, everyone has their own stresses and challenges, and writing lyrics was my release that allowed me to be creative in a way I enjoyed.

"Rapping is probably a bit different to the norm as a footballer, but it's important to have other interests because you don't want to be stuck as just being known as a footballer. When football is gone, you need to have something else that you can identify with.

"If it's something you enjoy, then go for it because you never know what's going to come from that. The best thing about doing things you enjoy is that you'll put your all into it. You can never have too many options."

By the age of 17, 'Graft' had already achieved exposure on BBC Radio 1Xtra and earned thousands of online views on his music videos. Since completing his apprenticeship, he has headlined for the likes of Wiley, Bugzy Malone, Tion Wayne and Nadia Rose, and even won the MOBO Unsung Award in 2018.

"OVERCOMING OBSTACLES IS WHAT LIFE IS ALL ABOUT AND YOU NEED TO SHOW STRENGTH, MOTIVATION AND CHARACTER TO BE ABLE TO GET BACK UP WHEN YOU'RE KNOCKED DOWN."

"I used to watch the MOBO Awards on TV, and still do, and you think about massive artists like Jay Z, Stormzy, Krept and Konan, Craig David and so on, all winning MOBO awards," he added. "For me to receive recognition from the same company was crazy. I'm still young and it's early in my career, so that was a very proud moment for myself and my family.

"I've definitely progressed a lot over the past few years. The message that I'm promoting in my music is very clear and my lyrical ability is so much better because I'm always practising and learning from others in the industry.

"Music is my passion and I've worked really hard at perfecting my craft. I really appreciate the art of writing lyrics and expressing yourself creatively. I study a lot of artists, I've grown up listening to many different genres and that helps when you're trying to develop

yourself, because you're learning techniques and creative processes from established professionals.

"The more music I make and release, the clearer I am in my head about what style I want, the message in my lyrics and being relatable to others, the use of metaphors and punchlines, and just becoming more confident as a performer."

The budding star's progress caught the attention of BBC talent scouts, who offered him a place on the Rap Game show, alongside five other hopefuls.

With tasks including acapella and orchestral performances, duets, battle raps, recorded tracks and time-restricted assignments, their adaptability and composure under pressure was put to the test.

"What really distinguishes someone from the rest is how they bounce back from mistakes and how they use mistakes to their advantage," said Sterling.

"Overcoming obstacles is what life is all about and you need to show strength, motivation and character to be able to get back up when you're knocked down.

"In episode one, I flopped on both challenges because I let the nerves get the better of me. I was shocked by that because I hadn't suffered any failures during my music career to that point, but that's where my football experience came to the fore.

"I've been through failure and hardship in football. I've been in situations where you're behind and have to dig deep and stay resilient to turn things around and that experience served me well when I had to recover from my mistakes.

"I used that disappointment as a driving force to prove everyone wrong. I came back with more intensity and I took the rankings by storm in every other episode. I had loads of viral moments, I showcased what I can do and I'm happy my journey went that way."

Following his disappointing series opener, the Leeds rapper never ranked outside of the top two positions in each of the remaining five episodes, claiming plaudits from many star guests and viewers.

"All of the defining moments from the series, where you look back and vividly remember, involved me," he continued. "The standout for me was the orchestra 'I Spy' challenge. I messed up in episode one, came back with a vengeance in episode two, and then by episode four I really showcased the levels that I can reach.

"I believe it's a performance, so once I've got my lyrics nailed down, I'll think about my hand gestures and movements to add to the package of the lyrics and the song. I take it step by step and I make sure every detail is spot on. I was able to produce the full combination in that performance."

Throughout the competition, Sterling spoke openly about a range of important topics, including racism, violence, sexism and stereotypes, while his final performance with DJ Kenny Allstar accentuated the importance of family and his desire to represent his home city.

"As an artist, I pride myself on being versatile and showing different sides to myself because that makes me more relatable to a wider range of people," he said. "I feel that I have a responsibility to portray the right message, have the correct type of lyrics in my songs and influence people in a positive way. Music is universal and I want to make a difference and be an inspiration.

"After my mum and dad split up, I've seen my mum work extremely hard, doing whatever she can to put food on the table and give me the best upbringing possible. They've both shaped me into the person I am today. I've got a lot of respect for my family and I wanted to highlight that.

"I believe I've represented Leeds as a whole and I can see that love from so many different people, whether it's old school friends that I've not seen for years or even people I've never met, young and old.

"Ultimately, I don't try to be like anyone else, I'm just myself. I want to make a difference in the industry and for my local area and being on the show provided an opportunity for me to change my life."

Having claimed the Rap Game crown, the former academy footballer is on the right path to doing just that. With a single supported by Krept and Konan's Play Dirty record label upcoming, he has set himself lofty targets to attain.

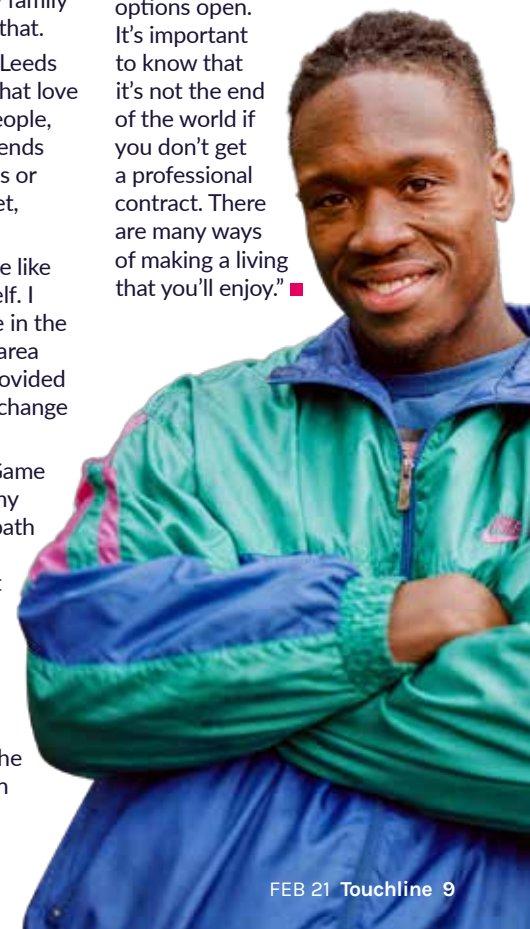
"My short-term goal is to build a team around me," he said. "I want a manager, an A&R rep, a PR consultant,

etc, so that I can manoeuvre within the industry in the most effective and efficient way and open doors that weren't previously available to me.

"Obviously, I'm aiming to create a great single, get it to chart and hopefully it attracts a lot of interest from labels and other influential people in the industry. I'm really determined to make great music, where I'm known all over the world, inspiring people and touching the hearts of millions.

"Long-term, I want to eventually set up my own record label and I'd like to invest in property, shares and other things where I can be making residual income. I want to put myself in a position where I don't have to worry about money, and I can give back to the people that mean the most to me.

"For all the young footballers currently on the apprenticeship, the key is to keep your mind and options open. It's important to know that it's not the end of the world if you don't get a professional contract. There are many ways of making a living that you'll enjoy." ■



DEBUTANTS

A total of 91 LFE apprentices have played first-team football for their respective clubs this season, including 76 debutants at 32 clubs.*

Here is a selection of the talented youngsters to make their first appearances at senior level.



Louie Barry, Mamadou Sylla Diallo, Kaine Kesler, Hayden Lindley & Arjan Raikhy

Aston Villa

A Covid-19 outbreak gave Aston Villa's academy players the incredible opportunity to play against Premier League champions Liverpool in the third round of the FA Cup in January.

A full squad of Under-18s and Under-23s was fielded, with current second-year apprentices Louie Barry, Mamadou Sylla Diallo, Kaine Kesler and Arjan Raikhy earning starts, while Hayden Lindley was introduced off the bench.

It was a particularly memorable night for Barry (pictured), who scored against a side containing the likes of Fabinho, Jordan Henderson, Sadio Mane, Mohamed Salah and Georginio Wijnaldum.



Rob Apter

Blackpool

Midfielder Rob Apter signed professional forms in November, securing his future at Blackpool until the summer of 2022, and made his professional debut in the same month during a 3-0 victory over Leeds United in the Papa John's Trophy.

The 17-year-old, who was recently named in LFE's 'The 11', bagged an assist on his Sky Bet League One debut last month, contributing to a 5-0 rout against Wigan Athletic.

Lewis Bell

Carlisle United

Having caught the eye in a pre-season friendly cameo against Liverpool, winger Lewis Bell was rewarded with a professional contract in September, before making his senior bow the following month.

The 18-year-old featured in the Papa John's Trophy against Sunderland and Aston Villa Under-21s, while his Sky Bet League Two debut came as a late substitute during a 2-0 victory at Walsall.



Charlie Barker & Dylan Gavin

Charlton Athletic

Defender Charlie Barker (pictured) enjoyed a meteoric rise in his football development during the early part of the season, featuring nine times across four different competitions during the autumn months.

The second-year apprentice scored in a Carabao Cup win at Swindon town, penned his professional contract and was named in LFE's 'The 11' in November, while his most recent outing in the Papa John's Trophy against Leyton Orient coincided with Irish teenager Dylan Gavin's first taste of the action at senior level.

Marley Marshall-Miranda, Harvey Sayer, Junior Tchamadeu & Samson Tovide

Colchester United

Four apprentices have appeared for Colchester United's first team this season, with Marley Marshall-Miranda featuring most frequently.

The 18-year-old midfielder, who signed a professional contract in December, has come off the bench on five occasions in three competitions.

First-year right-back Junior Tchamadeu (pictured) is the only member of the quartet to gain a start, with three Sky Bet League Two appearances on his tally, while Harvey Sayer and Samson Tovide both experienced time on the pitch in the Papa John's Trophy.



Myles Bright & Patrick Jones

Huddersfield Town

Wales Under-17s international Patrick Jones (pictured) penned his first professional contract in October after playing for Huddersfield Town's first team in a pre-season friendly a couple of months earlier.

The flying winger gained his first competitive action in January with a trio of cameo appearances, debuting in the FA Cup before two outings in the Sky Bet Championship.

Fellow second-year apprentice Myles Bright was also involved in the Terriers' cup tie with Plymouth Argyle, earning a runout for the final seven minutes.

Osazee Aghatise, Max Bardell, Bartosz Cybulski, Ola Ibrahim, Hugo Jkinson, Harrison Solomon & Dylan Williams

Derby County

Seven current apprentices were able to gain their first taste of men's football in a Derby County kit when the first-team squad was forced to miss out on an FA Cup tie with National League North club Chorley, due to a Covid-19 outbreak.

Seventeen-year-old Dylan Williams and second-year apprentices Hugo Jkinson and Harrison Solomon played the full 90 minutes, while Max Bardell (pictured) and Osazee Aghatise were also in the starting line-up. Elsewhere, Bartosz Cybulski and Ola Ibrahim were second-half substitutes.



Josh Bailey, Malaki Black, Jack Davies, Lewis Johnson & Charlie Smith

Milton Keynes Dons

Milton Keynes Dons have used the Papa John's Trophy to develop their young players, with apprentices accounting for over 450 minutes on the pitch during their run to the quarter finals.

Seventeen-year-old forward Lewis Johnson (pictured) has been the main beneficiary, with four appearances, including two starts, while he has also featured four times in Sky Bet League One, as well as being a late substitute in the FA Cup against Burnley at Turf Moor.

Josh Bailey, Malaki Black and Charlie Smith also contributed in the Papa John's Trophy, while Jack Davies, who signed a professional contract in the summer, was handed his league debut after initial involvement in the cup.



DEBUTANTS

Callum Brain, Harrison Bright, Aneurin Livermore, Zack Maher, Callum Ryan-Phillip & Lewys Twamley

Newport County

Newport County handed out seven debuts to apprentices last season, and six more have added their names to the list, as well as Under-16 player Sonny Lewis.

Winger Lewys Twamley was the first of the group to gain first-team experience back in September, and tops the appearance tally with three.

The following month, Twamley was joined by Callum Ryan-Phillip in the starting line-up against Norwich City Under-21s, while Harrison Bright and Zack Maher were introduced as second-half substitutes.

Five of the youngsters featured in the final group game against Plymouth Argyle, with goalkeeper Callum Brain and midfielder Aneurin Livermore (pictured) getting their first starts for the Exiles.



Charlie Bell, Alfie Bridgman, Harrison Brook, Seok Jae-Lee, Gerard Storey & Harry Jewitt-White

Portsmouth

Portsmouth Manager Kenny Jackett offered first-team playing time to seven current apprentices, including six debutants, in this season's Papa John's Trophy. While Harvey Rew had already taken to the field last season, Charlie Bell, Harrison Brook, Seok Jae-Lee, Gerard Storey and 16-year-olds Harry Jewitt-White and Alfie Bridgman all featured for the first time this campaign.

Bell (pictured) was a starter in two group games, while first-year midfielder Jewitt-White played from the first whistle in Pompey's third-round tie with Peterborough United, two months after becoming the club's third youngest player in their post-war history. The November game against West Ham United Under-21s was also the scene of debuts for Brook and Jae-Lee, with Storey earning a half-hour cameo in a second-round victory over Cheltenham Town. Elsewhere, having overcome several setbacks as a schoolboy, midfielder Bridgman's landmark moment came as a late substitute during the knockout stage defeat to Posh.

Ethan Brierley & Kacper Mialkowski

Rochdale AFC

As a 15-year-old, Ethan Brierley found himself on Rochdale's bench for their FA Cup clash with Newcastle United in January 2020. Nine months later, the talented teenager entered the first-team arena with a brief runout in a 1-0 Carabao Cup triumph at Huddersfield Town.

Midfielder Brierley has amassed eight appearances for Dale in total, including four in Sky Bet League One, making his first league start against Gillingham before Christmas.

Meanwhile, fellow first-year apprentice Kacper Mialkowski (pictured) replaced Brierley for his debut during the latter stages of a goalless draw with Manchester United Under-21s in the Papa John's Trophy.



Alfie Lloyd

Yeovil Town

Having been involved with the senior set-up throughout pre-season, striker Alfie Lloyd's prolific scoring form for Yeovil Town's Under-18s side encouraged Manager Darren Sarll to promote the 17-year-old into the first-team fold.

Lloyd was included in the matchday squad for The Glovers' National League fixture with Hartlepool United in November and was given the opportunity to make his professional debut as an 81st-minute substitute.

Harry McHugh

Wigan Athletic

A torn ACL sidelined Harry McHugh for the entirety of his first year as an apprentice, so the 18-year-old wasted no time in making an impression after returning to full fitness, rifling a shot from the edge of the area into the top corner on his full debut.

The exciting midfielder was an extra-time substitute in the FA Cup against Chorley in November and stole the show three days later with his first senior strike at Tranmere Rovers in the Papa John's Trophy, while he was also called upon from the bench in a Sky Bet League One stalemate with Bristol Rovers to cap off a memorable month.



Mackenzie Chapman, Vani Da Silva, Ben Hough & Will Sutton

Oldham Athletic

Four apprentices have featured for Oldham Athletic's first team this season, with forward Vani Da Silva stepping up first as a late substitute during a 3-0 Carabao Cup victory over Carlisle United in September.

He also appeared off the bench in the Papa John's Trophy against Bradford City, which was the night of defender Will Sutton's debut, playing 90 minutes in a 3-1 win, while Ben Hough (pictured) was also handed his professional bow in the same competition, staying on for the whole game as the Latics defeated Wolverhampton Wanderers Under-21s 4-0.

Elsewhere, 18-year-old goalkeeper Mackenzie Chapman was the club's backup early on this season and had the chance to get his first competitive minutes in Sky Bet League Two against Morecambe in October, when experienced number one Ian Lawlor was forced off at half-time due to an injury.



Flynn Clarke

Peterborough United

Flynn Clarke has become a regular fixture in Peterborough United's first-team squad this season, having penned a professional contract as a first-year apprentice back in December 2019.

The Scotland Under-19 international has featured 11 times across four competitions, including six starts, since making his debut in the Carabao Cup in September, and found the net in all three Papa John's Trophy group games, which saw him named the competition's Player of the Round.



Max Dyche

Northampton Town

Defender Max Dyche was first added to a matchday squad in September for a Sky Bet League One trip to Shrewsbury Town, remaining on the bench alongside fellow second-year apprentice Josh Flanagan.

While Flanagan is yet to make his first-team bow, Dyche appeared in back-to-back games in December, playing the final 20 minutes at Crewe Alexandra before earning a start three days later against Oxford United.

TOP OF THE CLASS

SINCE THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC BEGAN EARLY LAST YEAR, MANY PEOPLE HAVE DECIDED TO TAKE UP NEW HOBBIES AND SET THEMSELVES FRESH TARGETS TO ACHIEVE.



Former Cardiff City apprentice Bradley Middleton has tackled a particularly unique challenge,

having spent the last 11 months establishing the newly registered 'Levels School'.

The specialist institution is designed as a nurturing environment for students with specific learning difficulties and co-occurring diagnoses.

"It will be open for eight to 18-year-olds," he told LFE.

"We're starting with Year 4 to Year 11 and then there will be a Sixth Form in a couple of years' time. Most students will have dyslexia, but we also cater for co-occurring difficulties, so that could be dyspraxia or dyscalculia.

"Some of our students will just be suffering from anxiety and need a smaller nurturing environment compared to a normal school. Our classes are no larger than eight, so more attention can be given to each child.

"Our children will be offered speech and language and occupational therapy, so some will need more support with their speech and language, some will need basic skills of hand-eye coordination. We're not just providing a school, there's also therapy provision attached as well.

"There aren't many schools, certainly none here in Somerset, that can meet the needs of the kids who do have severe dyslexia and co-occurring difficulties, so this is life-changing for these families."

Middleton's desire to provide the required level of support to those in need comes from his own experience growing up with dyslexia.

He continued: "When I was at Cardiff and said that I'm dyslexic and needed extra help with the college course, the club had never come across someone with similar requirements. The Head of Education, Steve Ellis, found a one-to-one tutor to sit next to me in classes and support me with my work, and I certainly wouldn't have got my Diploma without that extra support.

"It varies of course, but for me I find it extremely difficult to read and absorb what I've just read. Ultimately, the key thing is to understand the children and their individual needs.

"They are no different to anyone else, they just think a little differently.

"They're not stupid or anything, they just sometimes take a bit longer to process things, so they require that bit of extra support and patience. I'm really passionate about showing these kids that you can get somewhere in life in spite of these barriers and it's just about your mindset to get through them."

Middleton boasts significant experience in this environment, having worked at a specialist school for over a decade until he was made redundant when it went into liquidation at the start of the first lockdown in March. "When I got released by Cardiff, I went to Aldershot Town, who were in League Two at the time.

"Unfortunately, I had a really serious facial injury from an accidental elbow and that pretty much ended my career," said Middleton.

"Using the FA Level 2 Coaching badge that I did as an apprentice, I managed to get a role as a sports coach, alongside playing semi-professionally. After a couple of years, it evolved into a full-time position, and I did further qualifications in individual sports to become a Level 2 or 3 Coach for about 15 different sports.

"In the last few years, I moved into providing pastoral care to the children. Because I'm a practical teacher, rather than a sit-down teacher, the kids were more comfortable talking to me as it was a more informal environment to the classroom. ▶



“I KNEW I WANTED TO HELP THESE KIDS AND NOTHING WAS GOING TO STOP ME SETTING UP A SCHOOL FOR THEM.”

“I know that the curriculum can be a bit overwhelming for them at times, so it’s great to be able to give them a safe space away from that for a short time and just reassure them that they’re on the right path, and that’s why I love my job.

“Originally, it was just something that I’d fallen into, but watching these kids have similar issues to myself, I realised how lucky I was to get extra help and these students needed that same level. The school’s closure meant that 40 students were completely out of school and I was determined to maintain that support, which is why I decided to set up my own.”

In order to succeed in completing such an enormous task, the former full-back used skills that he had developed as an apprentice footballer to help him along the way.

“We’ve made the school a real team environment,” he said. “In football, you can have one or two players who are amazing, but you need a full team of 11 to get through the match. That’s the mindset I’ve had when developing the team at The Levels School. There’s 16 of us and as a unit we all work extremely hard in our own designed roles to bring it all together.



“I knew I wanted to help these kids and nothing was going to stop me setting up a school for them. It has been a rollercoaster, but I always kept that determination and belief that it’d happen and it’s from the knockbacks I experienced in football that gave me that resilience.”

Having found a suitable premises within a 20-mile radius of the previous school, converted the property for school use and recruited staff and students, Middleton and his colleagues then had to pass a gruelling Ofsted inspection as part of an application to the Department of Education (DfE).



At the end of November, the school was finally authorised to deliver full-time education when its DfE registration was approved, marking a notable milestone in the arduous process.

“It was really exciting, not only for the students who can get back to school, but also the staff members who have been with me and made a lot of sacrifices to get to this point,” Middleton added.

“At the start of 2020, I never would have expected to be setting up an independent specialist school. Not many people can say they’ve built a school from scratch and have done it in such a short space of time.

“Our next step is to wait 12 to 18 months for our next Ofsted inspection, and obviously we want to be outstanding for that. Our challenge is to get to our limit of 65 students and I’ve already had a conversation with our Head Teacher, Carol Cook, about building another school

like this in a different county in three to five years’ time, and then hopefully a few more across the country.”

Although football was once his primary focus, Middleton, who is also a carer for his severely autistic brother-in-law during his spare time, has found a career away from the game that fulfils his passion to help people who are less fortunate than most.

“I thought at 17 or 18-years-old that football was going to be my life, but one injury changed my path,” he added. “It’s really important for lads to make sure they have something else to focus on because you never know what’s round the corner.

“You don’t need to box yourself into the sports industry just because you’ve been involved in football. You’ve gained skills that will transfer into any industry, it’s just about pursuing something you’re passionate about and willing to put the required level of effort into.

“Initially, I was in a sport role, but over time I’ve drifted into a different area and now I’ve set up my own school, so if you put your mind to it and have support around you, I think you can do anything you want.

“For anyone wanting to go down the route of teaching, I’d recommend them to get volunteering. Get into a school and offer your time to an after-school club or support teachers with whatever they may need. Get in as early as you can and build your experience.

“There is a balance to find between when it’s time to have a bit of fun and when it’s time to learn, and you need to be willing to make an effort with the kids outside the classroom doors, as well as inside.

“As someone who has always cared about helping people, it’s something that suits me perfectly.” ■

BIG MONEY TRANSFERS

Around £200million has been spent on former LFE apprentices during the 2020-21 season.

Here is a selection of the biggest deals.

Ben Chilwell

£45m



Ollie Watkins

(Former Exeter City apprentice)

£28m



Ben Godfrey

(Former York City apprentice)

£25m



Jude Bellingham

UNDISCLOSED



Callum Wilson

(Former Coventry City apprentice)

£20m



Ebere Eze

(Former Millwall apprentice)

£19.5m



Aaron Ramsdale

(Former Sheffield United apprentice)

£18.5m



Ben Davies

£2m



Max Lowe

UNDISCLOSED



Jayden Bogle

UNDISCLOSED



Jamal Lewis

UNDISCLOSED



Demarai Gray

(Former Birmingham City apprentice)

UNDISCLOSED



Bright Osayi-Samuel

(Former Blackpool apprentice)

UNDISCLOSED



OTHER DEALS

Karlan Grant

(Former Charlton Athletic apprentice)
Huddersfield Town ▶ West Bromwich Albion
£15m

Ivan Toney

(Former Northampton Town apprentice)
Peterborough United ▶ Brentford
UNDISCLOSED

Joe Gelhardt

Wigan Athletic ▶ Leeds United
UNDISCLOSED

Oli Burke

(Former Nottingham Forest apprentice)
West Bromwich Albion ▶ Sheffield United
SWAP

Jamal Lowe

(Former Barnet apprentice)
Wigan Athletic ▶ Swansea City
£800k

Charlie Kelman

Southend United ▶ Queens Park Rangers
UNDISCLOSED

Jack Simpson

AFC Bournemouth ▶ Rangers
UNDISCLOSED

Regan Riley

Bolton Wanderers ▶ Norwich City
UNDISCLOSED

Perry Ng

Crewe Alexandra ▶ Cardiff City
UNDISCLOSED

Fabio Tavares

Rochdale ▶ Coventry City
UNDISCLOSED



“GOING THROUGH THE WHOLE BATTLE WITH EPILEPSY REALLY HAS HELPED ME TO DEVELOP AS A PERSON. I DIDN'T THINK I WAS STRONG ENOUGH, BUT I JUST HAD TO BE RESILIENT, KEEP MY HEAD UP AND MAINTAIN BELIEF THAT EVERYTHING WOULD BE OKAY.”



When Renell McKenzie-Lyle started his apprenticeship at Barnet in 2017, it seemed like he was destined for success.

The young goalkeeper quickly found himself on the first-team bench for games against AFC Wimbledon and Swindon Town, with a senior debut feeling like a realistic expectation.

However, he was dealt a cruel blow just days after his 18th birthday that would ultimately scupper his progress with the Bees.

Having suffered multiple seizures, McKenzie-Lyle was diagnosed with epilepsy, which limited his availability on the pitch and eventually led to his release.

He told LFE: “I was trying on clothes in front of the mirror and the next thing I remember, I woke up and there were two paramedics standing over me and my brother beside them looking really confused. I was just on the bathroom floor with an oxygen mask on. It was so scary.

“I had to get a CT scan and they found that something was there, so I went for an MRI scan and they told me they'd found a benign tumour in my brain, which was causing me to have tonic clonic seizures.

“My first thought was that I'm not going to be able to play football again. I felt like my life had come to a complete stop. It probably sounds dramatic, but at the time, I just thought everything was over.

“Physically, it takes a lot out of you when you have a seizure. You can't really do much for a few days afterwards. Mentally, I think it makes you feel a bit different from everybody else. You feel like you're carrying this thing that nobody really knows about, because being epileptic is invisible.”

In need of professional support, McKenzie-Lyle turned to Young Epilepsy, the UK's only charity dedicated to creating better lives for children and young adults with epilepsy and related conditions.

“The club weren't really sure how to deal with it because you don't come across many people in football with epilepsy, so that was where the charity came in,” he said. “My support worker, Alex, came in to speak to the players and did a session with the staff to inform them about epilepsy. ▶

"After I came out of hospital, I felt very low for a while. I felt helpless and I was just sleeping a lot, so I used Young Epilepsy as a support network. I needed to be educated on it and also needed some emotional support.

"I was introduced to Leon Legge, who is a professional footballer and also has epilepsy. I was able to speak to him on the phone and that really gave me the drive to still pursue my football. Speaking to him just showed that it's possible to continue your career and make things work, even with epilepsy."

Inspired by his conversation with Port Vale captain Legge, the 20-year-old decided to increase his involvement with Young Epilepsy, raising awareness and providing support as a Young Ambassador.

"I wanted to do more to help others, so I started off by talking at an event," said McKenzie-Lyle. "Afterwards, I received positive reviews from people, saying they were really inspired by my story and liked my presentation.

"From there, Young Epilepsy asked me to be the face for their Christmas campaign and then I did an interview for ITV's lunchtime news. Shortly after that, I became a Young Rep and a Young Trustee, so I now have a bigger voice for young people and adults with epilepsy. It's been a crazy experience to go from using them as a support network, to now working for them and helping other people.

"Going through the whole battle with epilepsy really has helped me to develop as a person. I didn't think I was strong enough, but I just had to be resilient, keep my head up and maintain belief that everything would be okay.

"It's quite surreal for people to be inspired by my journey with epilepsy. It feels amazing to be able to help other people who can relate to my story and I'm glad I can show them some positivity."



"I HAVE THE MINDSET TO GET UP EVERY DAY AND SHOW EVERYONE THAT HAVING EPILEPSY WON'T STOP ME REACHING WHAT I WANT TO ACHIEVE."

Informative blogs, advice videos and even an interview with Jamie Redknapp are also on McKenzie-Lyle's list of accomplishments as he aims to spread knowledge of the condition, which affects 112,000 people under the age of 25 in the UK.

He added: "One thing I'm really keen to do is go into different clubs and teach staff and players about the topic, because it's not something we learn about in first aid courses and it's something that we don't need to be scared of. Epilepsy is fairly common and it's not the end of the world if you are diagnosed.

"There are a lot of handy tips that I've learned and I think it's important to pass on that advice to others. You do really have to plan things properly and that is one thing that can sometimes get you down. If I want to go out at night or meet friends, I've got to make sure my schedule is right.

"I need to get plenty of sleep, take my tablets on time and I don't really drink alcohol. I work with my neurologist and listen to his advice about my tablets and what I should and shouldn't do. Once we found the right balance for my medication, I've been able to avoid having seizures.

"Many people have experienced rising cases during lockdown due to feelings of stress and not being able to go out and meet friends and family. To combat that, I've been doing a lot of reading and meditation, I've been on plenty of walks and have just generally tried a lot of things to keep my brain active."

Now nearly 18 months seizure free, McKenzie-Lyle is determined to get back to full fitness and rise back up the leagues, alongside expanding his ambassadorial duties at Young Epilepsy.

"I'm currently at Hayes & Yeading United," he said. "Epilepsy definitely set me back, but it's just an obstacle that I'm overcoming and I'm focused on moving forward now and seeing how far I can go.

"For anyone that may go through a similar experience, I'd say it's important to realise that it's a journey that will make you stronger. It can be hard to always keep a positive mindset, but there is light at the end of the tunnel, and although it may seem like a long process, you will develop a lot as a person.

"It's made me really strong and resilient. One thing I really used to struggle with was responding to making a mistake, and I don't really think about that anymore because my mindset is different now. I think about what I can do next to make the situation better, so being mentally stronger is something I've definitely noticed in myself.

"I have the mindset to get up every day and show everyone that having epilepsy won't stop me reaching what I want to achieve. I want to show other people with epilepsy and other invisible conditions that you can still achieve great things in football.

"I'm really keen to become more and more involved with Young Epilepsy and I'm interested in becoming a support worker. I really want to help people and share my experience, and also spread awareness within sport." ■



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TONY ADAMS MBE

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SPORTING CHANCE



League Football Education



It has been seven and a half years since James Doig completed his apprenticeship at Accrington Stanley.

While he may not have achieved his dream of becoming a professional footballer back in 2013, Doig's time as an academy player has helped him forge a new life in New York.

SCOUSER IN NEW YORK

The Merseysider's academic qualifications, alongside his footballing ability, enabled him the opportunity to pursue a soccer scholarship at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut, where he excelled on and off the pitch.

Now 26, Doig has established himself in the Big Apple with his own emerging company, Social Scousers, which specialises in social media management, website and graphic design, photography and videography for its growing list of clients.

"I told my family and friends that I was probably going to go for three months, play the season and then come back at Christmas," he told LFE.

"I thought I wouldn't be able to cope with the academics because university standard would be too tough for me, so I really didn't expect to last much longer than that.

"But in truth, I think that footballers have the skills to adapt and be high achievers anywhere. From a young age, we've had the discipline to concentrate for extended periods of time, organised exercise and nutritional regimes, listened to instructions and executed them, worked on developing technique and problem-solving in various scenarios.

"You sacrifice a lot and work a tremendous number of hours to get to the apprenticeship level, so without even knowing it, you've built up an array of skills that can be transferred into any number of different areas."

Despite having doubts over whether he would settle in the States, Doig was immediately made to feel welcome and quickly lost his inhibitions. ▶



"I flew into New York and straight away I was greeted by the coaches at the airport," said Doig. "They took me to a treatment room to do a fitness test and I even had a press release announcing my arrival, so I was really surprised about how seriously they took it."

"All in the first week, I met with a dietician telling me what I should be eating, I was given a gym and nutrition programme and I was made aware of a service that I could contact if I needed a sport psychologist."

"For matches, we'd all travel together in a coach or a plane and stay in hotels and have our food catered for us before and after games, which just shows how much funding they put into it."

The Brit abroad was also complimentary of the high standard of play, with athletes from all over the globe competing for team and individual prizes at the college level.

"One of my close teammates was a lad from Brazil and he was a fantastic player," Doig continued.

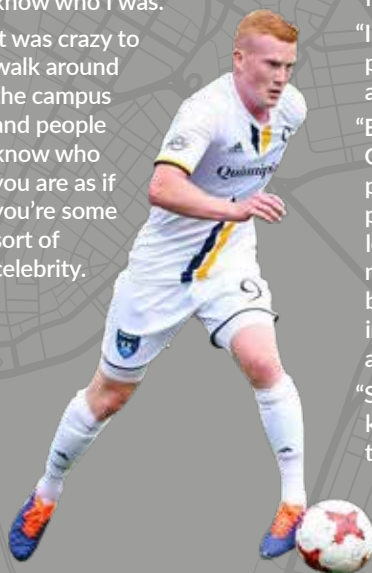
"He explained that the opportunity to play at

amazing facilities and have his academics covered in the U.S. was far better than turning professional in Brazil, and that's the case for many of the foreign guys.

"We had players from 13 different countries from all over the world. There are many conferences and they're balanced in terms of budgets, so it's all very competitive and every game matters."

"They do a lot of individual awards and I wanted to win them. It sounds a bit vain, but I wanted to have the media coverage and I wanted everyone at the university to know who I was."

"It was crazy to walk around the campus and people know who you are as if you're some sort of celebrity."



"Students would create signs in the crowd and chant your name; I loved that experience. The banner that really stood out for me was one that said: 'Teach me how to Doigy' - that was a good one."

The Accy academy graduate was part of the first ever Quinnipiac side to reach the National Championship during his freshman year, and went on to pick up several individual honours, as well as concluding his career with the most wins by a player in the university's history.

And it was not just on the pitch where Doig thrived, with his commitment to education leading to him finishing on the Dean's List for his Master's degree, which recognises academic excellence.

"They call you a scholar-athlete because the education comes first," he said. "To remain eligible to play soccer, you need to maintain a 2.0 grade point average. I remember one of my first lessons, I rang home and was buzzing that I'd got the equivalent of a C, so to end up finishing on the Dean's List and getting a 4.0 GPA, which is basically straight As, was fantastic."

"I was driven and a leader as a player and took that into the academics."

"Each team must meet a certain GPA to be eligible to play and I prided myself on being a 'GPA player' that helped keep our levels high as a collective. In my freshman year, I was being bailed out by others, so that was important to me to turn that around and set the standard."

"Some kids will come over and know exactly what they want to do, but if you don't then their

system accommodates you as you're able to try all sorts of different classes before deciding your major. I was undeclared for the first year and a half and I was able to try a variety of different courses before electing Communications."

"The school and the coaches help you every step of the way. You're given study hours for extra support and we had our own tutors and academic advisors if we needed them. All of that guidance helped me to excel."

Although the ex-Quinnipiac captain had offers to continue his playing career in Sweden and Iceland, Doig decided he was ready to pursue his next pathway.

Following internships at AC Connecticut and New York Red Bulls, he began blogging for officially licensed Liverpool FC retailer The Anfield Shop, which was the catalyst for developing his own company.

Doig added: "I hadn't done any blogging before, but I took the position and hoped that I could find my way. It wasn't long before I was pointed in the direction of someone who needed help with their social media accounts, then a football club got in touch asking if I could help them and before I knew it, I was building a clientele and running a no-name business."

"I started hiring people to do jobs for these different people and organisations, and all my project management and education was at the forefront of what I was doing. After about 18 months running social accounts for various football clubs and retail companies, I decided to put a brand on it and push it forward, which is where I developed Social Scousers."

"The team is made up of three full-time staff, but then a lot of work is done via freelance. We focus mainly on social media development for companies of varying sizes. We develop an online presence for them and give them an understanding of how the marketing side can help them."

"We're working in many industries, such as sport, retail, music, plumbing and labour. With the pandemic, a lot of companies have been unable to meet face-to-face with people and they need to focus more of their efforts on connecting and engaging with their customers and audience online."

"Due to the fact it's an online business, I'm able to have clients back in England as well, so I'm looking to grow the company both over here in the U.S. and back home."

It may not be the route he was visualising as a 16-year-old starting his football apprenticeship, but Doig is now relishing his new challenge and plans to progress his academics even further.

He said: "In hindsight, I'm so grateful for the education that ran parallel with the football during my apprenticeship."

"When I decided I wanted to go to the States, I needed the required education to make me eligible, so it was very valuable to my transition."

"It's okay to be sceptical about it. I came over thinking I'd give it a go for three months and come back, but look at me now, I've just bought my first home in Long Island and I'm building a business with long-term ambitions to stay here."

"I also hope to continue my education by studying a PhD. I often think: 'how have I done this?' I want to keep doing that. I want to keep surprising myself and pushing the boundaries that I'd previously set for myself."

"I definitely took a risk coming here, but it was a risk worth taking. I developed leaps and bounds on the pitch as I was given a new injection of confidence and had all the guidance and facilities to improve my lifestyle and performance."

"On a personal level, I was forced to mix with people from all over the world and find my way in a completely new country, plus academically I was learning in all sorts of areas, so combining all that has really helped me to grow." ■



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*Dale Brunton, Head of Education and Welfare,
Luton Town F.C.*



CHARLIE BINNS



FROM YORK CITY APPRENTICE TO
PERFORMANCE NUTRITIONIST



May 2012 was a month to remember for York City. The Minstermen lifted the FA Trophy and then regained their EFL status after securing promotion from the Conference via the play-offs.

But for Charlie Binns, it was the start of a new career path away from the club, having been released at the completion of his apprenticeship.

Since then, the 26-year-old has forged his way back into the professional game in a different capacity, working as a Performance Nutritionist at Birmingham City, as well as founding his own CMB Performance and Nutrition consultancy business.

“The apprenticeship certainly gave me valuable skills that have helped my transition after playing, in particular learning how to conduct myself in an elite environment,” Binns told LFE. “I became a lot more professional during those two years, which enabled me to push on in a different career.”

“As a Nutritionist, I employ a multidisciplinary approach. I work closely with players, physios, coaches, psychologists, chefs, strength and conditioning coaches and so on.

“Obviously, you need to know the science around nutrition, but having the ability to build a rapport is vital when working with people from so many different sections of the club.

“Generally, you’re looking at how a player is doing in training and on a matchday and analysing whether he is feeling fatigued, if he needs a bit more of a presence and should add weight, or if he needs to lose a bit of bulk to enhance his performance. It’s always different with every player.

“When I was an apprentice 10 years ago, there wasn’t so much investment in learning how nutrition impacts performance. Nowadays, clubs are taking it much more seriously, hiring part-time or full-time nutritionists, and players are more interested in how it can maximise their potential, too.”

Binns’ route into this area began in 2015 when he enrolled onto the Sport and Exercise Nutrition degree course at Leeds Trinity University, earning first-class honours.

While continuing to play at non-league level, Binns studied a Master’s degree in Applied Sports Nutrition at St Mary’s University, Twickenham, as well as qualifying as a UK Anti-Doping (UKAD) accredited advisor and achieving an ISAK Level 1 award in Clinical Nutrition.

“It was never my plan to go to university until I looked further into sports nutrition and becoming a nutritionist,” he said. “I was just a steady college student, but when I got to degree level and it was something that I was 100 per cent interested in, I excelled at university.



+
Binns provides services through CMB Performance and Nutrition

“It took me a couple of years after being released to figure out what I wanted to do, so I would advise apprentices, especially second-years, to have a real good think about their interests outside of football and what the best route to pursue that is.

“Obviously, there is a bit of work to put in, but if you’re passionate about the subject that you are doing, you won’t have any issues because you will be so invested in the work. If you’re willing to put enough effort in, you’ll reap the rewards.”

The York academy graduate, who benefited from PFA bursary funding, landed a Nutritionist role at rugby league club York City Knights in May 2019 before joining the staff at Birmingham City a few months later, working with the club’s senior and academy players, including Borussia Dortmund and England star Jude Bellingham.

“I work with the Birmingham players a couple of days a week, doing one-to-one consultations to see how they are getting on with their diet,” said Binns. “Every player has their own individual goals, so it’s interesting to find the right plan for all of them.

“The players have breakfast and lunch at the club, so it’s vital that I’m in close contact with the head chef, so that he knows what to cook and when to cook it. It’s also important to educate the players on their food and nutrition structure, so that they’re aware of what their body needs when they’re away from the club’s supervision.

“Academy players are more difficult than the senior guys because they’re still growing. You don’t want them to be on a calory deficit as that’s just going to make their bones a lot more brittle. They have such a hectic schedule, fitting in school and training, so the key is to devise a programme that ensures they’re taking on enough calories.

“I worked closely with Jude when he came into the first team as a 16-year-old and we wanted to add a bit of weight to him.

“He took everything on board and obviously it’s worked well. That’s the best part of the job. It’s a very small factor in his success, but you feel like you’ve contributed to his journey to the top.”

Alongside his club commitments, Binns is now providing his services through CMB Performance and Nutrition, where he offers online and face-to-face expertise to a range of clients, in and out of sport.

As well as creating bespoke nutritional plans, he has also developed a recipe service, available via subscription, and delivers talks and workshops, with a strong focus on how healthy eating can improve mental well-being, in addition to physical performance.

“I’ve always wanted to start my own business and when the first lockdown came, I was able to commit all my effort into it,” Binns added. “I’m working with elite athletes, such as World Cup cricketers for England, a few individual professional footballers and then recreational athletes, like golfers, triathletes, cyclists and endurance runners.

“I also offer my services to sports teams and I really want to tap into businesses away from sport, too, because I think it’s an untapped area, whether it’s for office workers or people adapting to working from home.

“I think a healthy body equals a healthy mind. A lot of people think nutrition will just help you physically, but mentally it helps you such a great deal. Eating healthily keeps you on top of your game, helps to optimise your stress levels and makes you and your skin look healthy.

“As an apprentice, I never thought I’d be able to start my own business. I still love football, but it’s not at the forefront of my mind anymore. There are so many opportunities available to you away from the game, so if you have an interest in something else, then definitely have the confidence in yourself to go for it.”



Mark Roberts

Each session is an opportunity for the lads to understand who they are and how they can grow. They may well be competing in a team-based environment, but a career in sport is an individual journey, so it's vital that we do not view their personal development as a one-size-fits-all solution.

There is a core focus on how personal development can support performance, well-being and transition, but my aim is always to help the lads identify ways they can be the best version of themselves in everything they do.

The lads have fully embraced the ideas we are looking to share with them and it's clear, like anything in life, that the more they engage the more they get out of it.

I try to encourage them to see any obstacle as an opportunity to develop, so although in the current climate we are all dealing with significant challenges that we have never encountered before, there are also many lessons that can be learned that will undoubtedly shape their futures in a positive way.

Online and face-to-face workshops on a range of important subjects have been delivered as part of LFE's Personal Development programme this season.

Here, the four LFE Mentors discuss some key takeaways from the sessions.

Chris Elliott

The main point I'd like the apprentices to take is that you are more than a footballer. When you grasp that, then personal development helps, whether football is or isn't your pathway.

When they start to have a different perspective on it, most of the lads start to make their own judgements and can see the magic in it.

Dru Spinks

We explore the stigmas and traditional perceptions that others have of what a young athlete should and shouldn't be, as well as identifying the more modern ideas of how athletes should be perceiving themselves. Subsequently, once we've developed knowledge in this area, it's then about raising awareness of the opportunities for personal growth that are out there in the game and society.

We're always challenging the question, 'what is performance?' There's performance in the game, which is often at the forefront of their psyche and consciousness, but also performance in society, and we spend a lot of time explaining how they are linked and complementary.

That all comes from a foundation of self-awareness and the workshops provide a safe space for the lads to go on a journey of exploring their identity and understanding its importance.

Jack Rutter

The apprentices have more to offer than just being a football player. They've got so many skills from being in the position that they are and can transfer them into other areas. They have to deal with pressure on a daily basis, they have to show great levels of respect, they have to work well in a team environment and they have a lot of self-motivation, determination and resilience to overcome adversity.

Having the belief to transfer their skills into other areas is so important for them to understand. They can do so many things off the pitch that can develop them and improve their characteristics and develop a broader identity. That can give them a lot more security and confidence and provide opportunities away from the game, while also helping them on the pitch.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT MENTORS



JOEL BONNER'S FOOTBALL JOURNEY HAS COME FULL CIRCLE

The 22-year-old was part of Liverpool's academy as a schoolboy, playing alongside current first-team superstar Trent Alexander-Arnold, until he was released at the age of 16.

And while Bonner's dream of playing for his boyhood club did not materialise, the former Shrewsbury Town apprentice rejoined the reigning Premier League champions in a different capacity in November, working as an Under-16s Analyst and Individual Coach. ▶



“My role is to analyse Under-16s games and training sessions and then design development plans for each player, in order to help improve their game,” he told LFE. “I’m also out on the pitch as well, delivering sessions that are tailored to each players’ development programmes.”

“I’m passionate about the tactical and analytical side of the game, plus I’m a massive Liverpool supporter, so it’s an ideal situation. I didn’t expect to be back here, certainly not so quickly anyway.”

The Merseysider’s rapid progression into full-time employment has been facilitated by his decision to study Sport and Exercise Psychology at Loughborough University. Bonner secured a year-long placement opportunity at Manchester United in July 2019, which gave him the chance to develop many skills in a working environment, while also bolstering his CV.

“I worked with the academy department, mostly with the Under-12s to Under-16s, helping to deliver the educational aspect of psychology, teaching the lads about a variety of different components, like motivation, goal setting and self-reflection,” he continued.

“The model of appreciating the person behind the footballer is important, particularly in young player development. Football is an intense environment, so having an emphasis on personal development and mental health is crucial, no matter what level of club you’re at, and it’s embedded in the culture at United.”

“I also worked in other areas, spending time with the analysis, player care and sport science departments. It was a great learning experience, understanding how things work at a top academy and seeing first-hand the up-to-date research that’s being applied in that setting.”

“Having gained so much experience in different departments, I learned that I wanted to go down the analysis and coaching route and I’ve since received support from The PFA to start my UEFA B Coaching badge, which I’m doing at the moment.”

Bonner will now complete his degree course in 2022, in order to accommodate his additional work commitments. Reflecting on his transition from football apprentice to university student, the centre-back believes he was well prepared thanks to the help of staff at Shrewsbury and LFE.

“The apprenticeship is well designed in terms of encouraging us to balance education alongside football,” he said. “The opportunity to go to university was something that excited me,

and I received plenty of help with submitting my UCAS application, which meant it wasn’t such a stressful situation when I did get released.”

“There is a lot of support available to every apprentice, but you’ve also got to take ownership of your own pathway. The information I received was the catalyst for me to then research my options in depth. Being proactive and taking the initiative to sort out your own future is very important.”

“The lure of Loughborough is the sporting pedigree. They have a full-time football programme that you can be involved with alongside studying your degree, and that’s something I was already well prepared for having been an apprentice.”

Several former academy players earn places at Loughborough every year, studying a range of different subjects, while contributing to their substantial games programme, which includes fixtures in the BUCS League and Step 5 of Non-League, entry into the FA Cup, FA Vase and a handful of County Cups, as well as profile friendlies against Category One academies.



Bonner, who was voted Players’ Player of the Year 2017-18, added: “We were training three or four times a week and there is a lot of football to be played.”

“I made over 100 appearances in my first two years at Loughborough and it gave me my first experience of competitive men’s football, which is a step that every young player has to take at some point.”

“You’re doing a degree, you’ve got access to state-of-the-art facilities that are going to help you improve your performance and then you’re able to play a lot of games with lads of a similar age. It’s a unique opportunity to enjoy playing football at a competitive level with your friends.”

“The facilities are so good that all sorts of elite organisations are based there, like British Athletics, the England Cricket team and the England Institute of Sport, who have a lot of high-profile athletes training there.”

“I remember being in the gym and Adam Peaty, the Olympic swimmer, was working out next to me. I’ve been in there when Heavyweight boxer Dillian Whyte was there and there are countless other examples. Being around those sorts of elite athletes is really inspiring and motivates you to give that bit extra and strive for more.”

Bonner, who shared his insight as a speaker on a Premier League Academy Player Support webinar for Under-16 players and parents a few months ago, believes that apprentices are well suited to pursuing the higher education route.

He said: “University is an experience that’s not just about studying for a degree. It’s living away from home and learning life skills, meeting new people and socialising with different cultures, trying new experiences and finding new interests, plus there is a football aspect to it as well.”

“There are essential life skills that you learn at university that have certainly helped me develop as a person. It’s important to consider it as an all-round experience and a wider package than just solely studying a degree.”

“I chose psychology because it’s a subject that interested me and I feel it’s an emerging area within football, but the options are endless really. Some of the other ex-apprentices at Loughborough study economics, accounting and finance, maths and loads of other courses.”

“Ultimately, the apprenticeship has prepared me for the ups and downs you get in general life. There are setbacks involved in football, but they give you the opportunity to show resilience and overcoming obstacles is what life is all about.” ■

Social

The sense of belonging and stability, linked to relationships with other people both online and offline.



Physical

The ability in which physical activities and roles can be performed whilst considering lifestyle choices, limitations, health and disease.

Spiritual

The faith, beliefs, values, ethics and morals which support functioning in life with meaning.

Occupational

The state of balance, purpose and happiness in everyday roles, such as family, work and leisure.

How are you?

WELL-BEING

Emotional

The ability to express feelings which are drawn from thoughts. It is strongly linked to mental health.



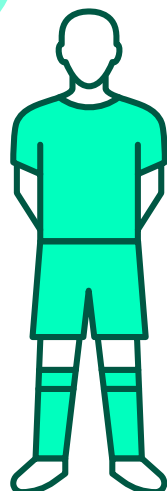
Mental

The process of thinking, thoughts and the ability to cope with the ups and downs of everyday life.



Financial

The state of security and the feeling of having enough money to meet needs, as well as having control of day-to-day finances and financial freedom.



ABOVE AVERAGE

AVERAGE

BELOW AVERAGE

What to do, to help you

Savings and budget planning

Whilst you may not be spending your money the same, how can you be saving it? Use this time to plan out how you are going to save your money and how you are going to spend it.

Think about your roles

How are you managing being a footballer alongside your other roles?

(E.g. family member, student, partner, footballer, friend.)

Stay connected

Now more than ever, it is important to talk. Keep communicating through:

- video calls • phone calls
- instant messaging • gaming
- social media • letters

What can you do to train your brain?

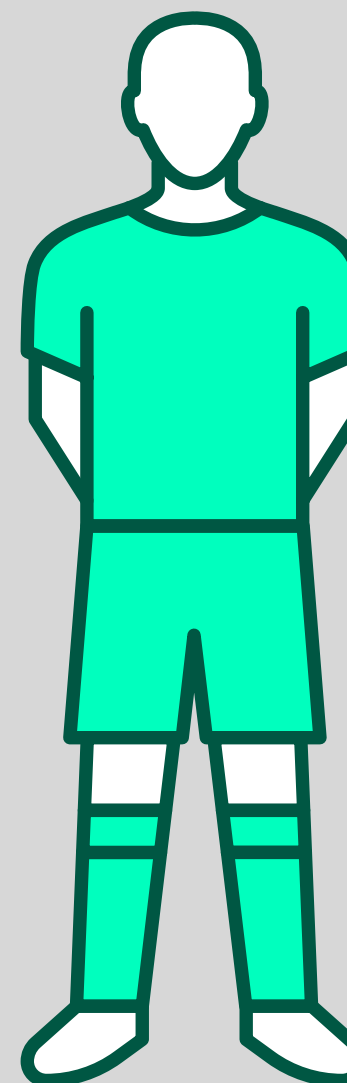
Try some of these mental skills training techniques:

- visualisation
- self-talk
- self-reflection

How are you feeling?

If you are a PFA member, you can use their confidential well-being service to talk about how you feel by calling 07500 000 777 or emailing wellbeing@thepfa.co.uk.

If you are not a PFA member, you can contact Shout by texting 85258.



What inspires you?

Think about your role models and inspiring figures. Why do they inspire you? How do they cope during lockdown and with life changes?

Help yourself, help others

Best protect yourself and others by following your club rules and government guidance.



HANDS



FACE



SPACE

Stay smarter than technology. Stay safe.

We recommend you pay attention to these considerations:

Recognise, reject and report harmful content, featuring:



EXTREMISM



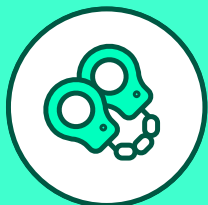
VIOLENCE



BULLYING



RADICALISATION



CRIME



FAKE NEWS



HATRED



DISCRIMINATION

Your accounts can be further protected by using **two-step verification**.



Know who you are talking to at all times.

Social media musts:

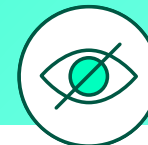
- Fully understand the platform you are registering with.
- Be able to trust and set the security of your personal information.
- Choose your followers and friends carefully.
- Think about your online presence and reputation.
- Protect your digital footprint and check what could be shared publicly by anyone.
- Avoid comparing yourself to others to protect your self-esteem.



Where to find help and report concerns

- Family
- Football Club's Designated Safeguarding Officer
- CEOP (www.ceop.police.uk)
- Report Harmful Content (www.reportharmfulcontent.com)
- PFA Well-Being Helpline (wellbeing@thepfa.co.uk and 07500 000 777)

Criminals have found new ways to scam through phishing emails and calls. These appear genuine, so remember to **check the sender is verified** and that you are not being targeted for private information.



Remember that private messages **do not always remain private**.

Excessive online gaming and purchasing of loot boxes may lead to **addictive behaviours and well-being problems**, such as financial, mental and physical.



Take **regular breaks** from long periods of screen time to maintain your well-being.



Video calls connect you to family, friends and remote learning. Be sure that:

- it is a safe and secure platform
- everyone has their camera on
- you are appropriately presented in appearance and location
- it is not being recorded without your permission
- sharing screens does not expose private or inappropriate information



When sending content or streaming music and video, **know the law and respect it**.





ALL BETS ARE OFF

You are not allowed to place **ANY** bet on **ANY** football, **ANYWHERE** in the world.

This covers any match or competition, wherever it is played in the world. It means you cannot bet on scores or results, or any other event that takes place in any match or competition. It also means you cannot bet on any other football matter, worldwide – for example, who the next manager of a club will be.

So don't fall foul of the rules and remember – you cannot place **ANY** bet on **ANY** football, **ANYWHERE**.

To view The FA's Rules and Regulations, visit TheFA.com

YOUR REPUTATION

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

YOUR CAREER



Follow us on Instagram

@LFEonline

567 posts

523 following

1,240 followers



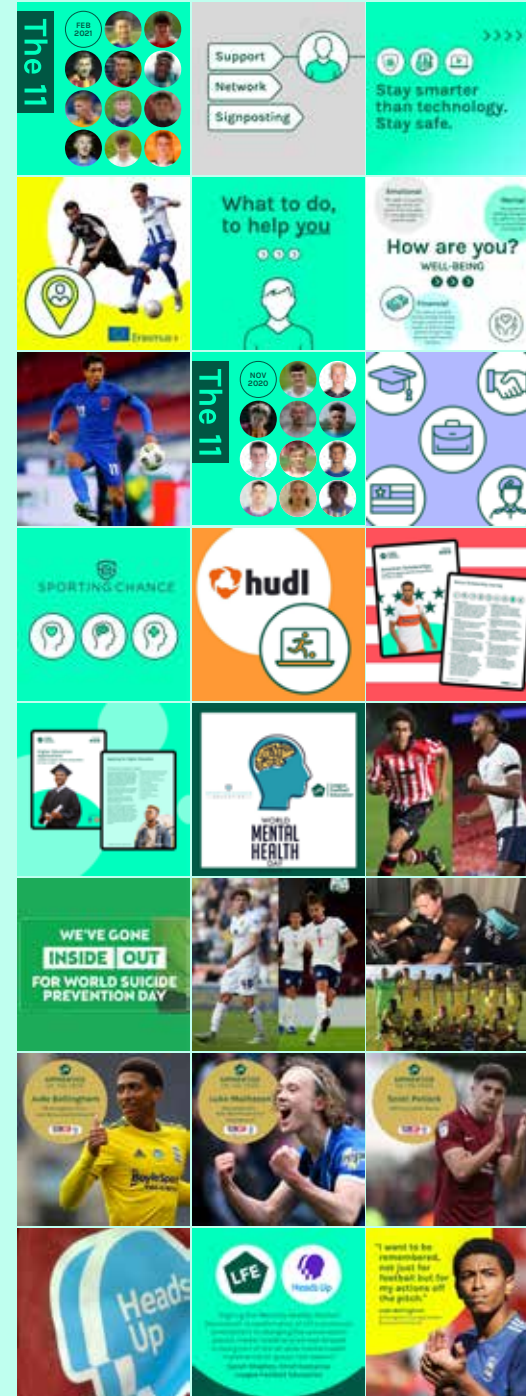
Follow us on Twitter

@LFEonline

15K tweets

2,216 following

6,457 followers



Shrewsbury Town Academy @shrewsacademy
3 of our staff joined @LFEonline and Sporting Chance earlier for a workshop focusing on lockdown and mental health



Joe Thompson @IAmJoeThompson
With the huge help of @LFEonline and the superb support of the clubs.

I continue to do my utmost to support and help these young men in their lives. #PersonBeforePlayer

Thanks @pnefcacademy

@pnefc and @MKDonsFC U18s for real, open and inspiring workshops today. #ProudOfYouAll



Lincoln City Academy @LCFCAcademy
Recently the scholars had an @LFEonline workshop on personal development

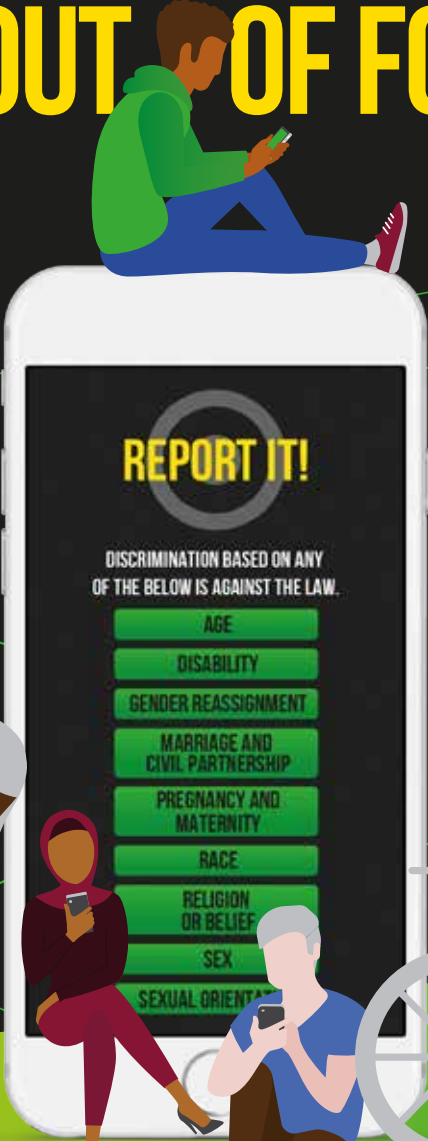
The lads carried out various activities to help them understand how having various interests outside of football can help them improve their overall enjoyment of the game.



REPORT IT.



KICK IT OUT OF FOOTBALL.



DOWNLOAD OUR FREE REPORTING APP

