



Touchline



◆◆ A FOREST FULL OF ◆◆

DIAMONDS

Touchline takes a look inside Nottingham Forest's new Category One academy

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Careers

LFE learners can take advantage of employment opportunities thanks to LFE's partnerships with a variety of different organisations. Browse the range of exciting pathways at lfe.org.uk/careers

LFE Transition Officer

Academy players can seek information, advice and guidance regarding alternative options at any time from LFE's Transition Officer, Anthony Cato.

Contact him at acato@lfe.org.uk

Higher Education

All LFE apprentices can pursue a route to university in the UK or abroad if they achieve the required academic qualifications.

Download our informative guides to Higher Education or USA Scholarships at lfe.org.uk/touchline-downloads



ASSESSMENT TRIALS

LFE's Assessment Trials provide a platform for apprentice footballers and first-year professionals released from clubs to showcase their talents.

The details for this year's assessment trials will be announced in due course, with the traditional north, midlands and south events going ahead as planned.

All games will be filmed, with full highlights and player package highlights published on our official YouTube channel and made available to players free of charge via LFE's Hudl Recruitment page. For more information on how to access and utilise your footage, visit www.lfe.org.uk/careers/hudl/



The PFA's Education Team provide guidance and funding for educational and vocational courses that support personal development and transition towards a second career. PFA members can also receive support in attaining FA and UEFA qualifications, which are often mandatory requirements when applying for jobs in coaching and management within professional football.

For more information, visit thepfa.com/players/education

THE ALUMNI PLAYER VOICE

In June 2021, LFE launched the Alumni Player Voice initiative to facilitate a safe and confidential space for past apprentices to talk about experiences, best practices, and areas for development regarding the transition support provided by clubs and wider organisations.

If you are an ex-apprentice and would like to contribute to our next session, contact Projects Officer, Kelly Butterworth (kbutterworth@lfe.org.uk) or LFE Communications (communications@lfe.org.uk).

ON THE MOVE

The January transfer window is an opportunity for the country's best young talent to be snapped up by teams higher up the pyramid, and January 2022 was no different, with more than 58 LFE apprentices moving on. Here is a selection of the most eye-catching transfers:



JAMES BEADLE
Charlton Athletic ▶ Brighton & Hove Albion

Goalkeeper Beadle was named in LFE's 'The 11' last May, as a reward for his endeavours both on and off the field. His consistent performances during Charlton Under 18s' title win last season earned him a chance to impress in the Under-23's. He also attained distinction grades in the first year of his BTEC Extended Diploma, and will be on course to achieve top marks as he makes the move to Premier League outfit Brighton & Hove Albion.



REGAN SLATER
Sheffield United ▶ Hull City



JAMES HILL
Fleetwood Town ▶ Bournemouth



CAOLAN BOYD-MUNCE
Birmingham City ▶ Middlesbrough



MASON BURSTOW
Charlton Athletic ▶ Chelsea



BILLY CRELLIN
Fleetwood Town ▶ Everton



DYLAN WILLIAMS
Derby ▶ Chelsea

Second-year apprentice Dylan Williams made a dream move to reigning European Champions Chelsea, after impressing for Derby County's Under-23's and first-team. The teenage full-back made his professional debut in the Emirates FA Cup last season and has gone on to make eight first-team appearances under Wayne Rooney this campaign. In the classroom, Williams has also exceeded expectations, as he is currently working towards a double distinction in his BTEC Diploma despite being forecast passes.

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ACADEMY LEAGUES

Round-Up



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH EAST DIVISION

Lincoln City currently top the North East division, with **Bradford City** breathing down their necks in second place and well-positioned to overtake them with two games in hand. The Imps are the league's top scorers with 35 goals, while Martin Drury's young Bantams have displayed significant improvements in recent months, already accumulating more points than they did during last season's eighth-placed finish.

Grimsby Town are two points adrift of Bradford in third, having played a game more. Neil Woods' side has lost just two games all season and conceded the least amount of goals in the North East (12).

After firing out of the blocks with a 6-2 victory over Bradford City, last year's runners up **Scunthorpe United** have suffered a dip in form recently. You have to rewind to October for their last league win when they overcame Youth Alliance newcomers Harrogate Town.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH WEST DIVISION

Preston North End have found the net 45 times in just 15 games and yet it is Mark Birch's **Carlisle United** who lead the way in February. Losses to last year's runners up Rochdale AFC and reigning champions Fleetwood Town are the Blues' only defeats to date. Their success has been built from the back, with eight clean sheets from 18 games. However, with three games in hand, the in-form Lilywhites will be looking to build on their recent 4-0 and 3-0 wins over Fleetwood Town and Rochdale AFC to surge above them.

Postponements have impacted **Blackpool** and **Salford City**'s flow so far, with the latter having played six games less than some teams, but both have somehow managed to stay in touching distance of the frontrunners. The Ammies, who are in fourth place having lost just two games all season, enjoyed a 6-1 triumph over Shrewsbury Town in November, shining a light on their attacking capabilities heading into the closing stages.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH EAST DIVISION

A 5-2 victory over Cambridge United on 1st February, meant that **AFC Wimbledon**'s promising youngsters secured the South East title. It was a historic moment for The Dons as it marked the first time the club's Under-18s side had lifted the trophy since the Academy's inception.

Convincing wins over Northampton (7-1) and Milton Keynes Dons (6-1) will live long in the memory, but the emphatic 4-3 win at second-placed **Southend United** is the one they will look back on with fondness.

Despite an inconsistent start to the season, The Shrimpers put together an impressive run of form recently, winning their last three games and fending off Cambridge United who are snapping at their heels.

Moving down the table, **Sutton United** have enjoyed a solid debut season in the Youth Alliance, with high scoring victories over Stevenage (6-0) and Northampton Town (4-1) in January demonstrating their competence.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH WEST DIVISION

The South West division appears to be going down to the wire, with usual suspects **AFC Bournemouth** and **Exeter City** going head-to-head for first position, along with Darren Way's resilient **Plymouth Argyle**.

The Cherries have set the pace for most of the 2021/22 campaign having picked up 14 points from the opening six fixtures, before a 2-1 loss to Argyle fleetingly knocked them off track. Confidence is high again in the Bournemouth camp after seeing off Exeter for the second time this season, however, The Grecians swiftly bounced back with a victory at Forest Green Rovers at the end of January to keep the pressure on.

Recovering from a shaky start to the season, Merit South League title holders Argyle have seemingly found their feet at a convenient time, winning four of their last five games and scoring 11 goals in the process.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE NORTH

Barnsley and **Coventry City** have made huge improvements throughout the summer and are currently battling it out for the Professional Development League North title.

Tom Harban's Barnsley outfit got the better of the Sky Blues at the end of January, running out 5-0 winners to elevate them to the top of the table - a brace from Fabio Jalo being the highlight.

With four games in hand, all eyes are on third-placed **Sheffield Wednesday** as they look to climb the table. Postponements have meant that Wednesday have only managed to play 10 games, but despite that, have picked up 20 points and will now be looking to build on their recent 2-1 win at Peterborough United.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE SOUTH

A 12-game unbeaten streak has helped defending Southern champions **Charlton Athletic** stand ahead of the rest again this season. The Addicks boast a potent attack having scored a staggering 49 goals from 13 games - 24 of which came in the last five games. 17-year-old forward Daniel Kanu has been the standout performer this campaign, netting a combined 31 goals for the club's U18s and U23s.

Second-placed **Ipswich Town** are nine points adrift of Charlton, despite having just two defeats to their name and being unbeaten since their 6-1 drubbing at Cardiff City last October.

Elsewhere, **Millwall**'s form has dipped in recent months, with two heavy defeats to Charlton and a 4-1 home loss to Colchester United denting any hopes of replicating the 2019/20 title-winning campaign. The Lions will rue their inconsistency after they enjoyed a spectacular October period, seeing off Watford (2-1), Swansea City (4-1) and fighting back in dramatic circumstances to defeat Queens Park Rangers 4-3.



* As of 9th February 2022

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE NORTH

Blackburn Rovers are enjoying a remarkable season in the Northern section, sitting three points behind defending champions Manchester City in second place. Rovers have been going head-to-head with City for most of the campaign, but will have their 4-0 loss to the titleholders to blame for conceding top spot.

Prior to that, Mike Sheron's youngsters went six games unbeaten, with impressive victories over Middlesbrough (2-1), Liverpool (3-1) and Leeds United (5-0). Second-year apprentice Harry Leonard was red hot during that period, claiming five goals and one assist.

Derby County's talented youngsters have impressed again this season, currently sitting in fourth place, despite morale-damaging 6-1 losses to Manchester City and Rovers along the way. Malcolm Ebouwei's recent hat-trick against Leeds United earned The Rams a 4-1 victory and subsequent progression up the table. Those valuable three points came just two weeks after Darren Robinson's late strike completed a stunning comeback win over fierce rivals Nottingham Forest.

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE SOUTH

Ed Brand's **Chelsea** are the current frontrunners in the Southern section, having scored an impressive 45 goals by the end of January. A 7-2 win over North-London rivals Tottenham Hotspurs in August set the tone for the season, with other high-scoring wins against West Brom (5-2) and Brighton & Hove Albion (6-1) also catching the eye.

Southampton are one point behind the leaders with a game in hand; a remarkable achievement considering they finished bottom of the division last season. The Saints showed their class in a 7-2 win over Birmingham City with first-year apprentice Kamari Doyle scoring a 30-minute hat-trick and ending up with five goals on the day. The attacking midfielder was at it again more recently, when his brace inspired a 5-1 demolition of West Bromwich Albion.

Leicester City spoiled The Saints' party when they returned to Leicestershire with all three points last October. As it stands, The Foxes are level with Southampton and have two games in hand on table-toppers Chelsea. And as far as form goes, The Foxes are the ones to watch entering the home straight; winners over Chelsea, unbeaten since 11th September and building momentum. Highly-rated forward Chris Popov has been at the centre of their success, netting 12 goals in all competitions - three of those coming in December's 3-0 win at Spurs.



A FOREST FULL OF DIAMONDS

It is November 12, 2021, and striker Dale Taylor is about to add to Nottingham Forest's rich history of nurturing top young talent.

After impressing for Warren Joyce's Under-18s and Andy Reid's Under-23s in the early stages of the 2021/22 campaign, the second-year apprentice is mentally preparing himself for the biggest moment of his career so far.

In a few seconds, the 17-year-old will tap the hand of Josh Magennis and run onto the field to make his international debut for Northern Ireland.

"I was a bit scared, to be honest. I had goosebumps when I was told to get stripped," Taylor reminisces.

"As I was waiting to go on, the atmosphere blew up, which made it easier for me because the adrenaline just took over."

That appearance against Lithuania made him the 12th youngest player to feature for Northern Ireland and his 'fearless' display, to quote manager Ian Baraclough, drew praise from fans and pundits alike.

"There are not too many words to describe it," the striker adds. "It is by far the best thing that has ever happened to me. Hopefully, my Forest debut is next."

The teenager's meteoric rise onto the international stage underpins the talent that sits within the Forest ranks - players capable of performing on the biggest of stages, with the characteristics to thrive in high-pressure moments, or when called upon by first-team boss Steve Cooper.

And while Taylor's achievements will be used as an example by academy coaches for years to come, the youngsters don't have to look too far for other sources of inspiration, as graduate Brennan Johnson continues to light up the Championship after earning his chance. Not to mention Joe Worrall, Ryan Yates and Alex Mighten, who between them have racked up over 300 appearances since they progressed through The Reds' academy.

The quartet embodies the trust that owner Evangelos Marinakis is placing in the youth system, which, blended with experience, is proving a fruitful recipe during their drive for promotion.

"Historically, the academy has always produced players," Chris Brass explains.

Brass is an ex-professional footballer and manager, who joined the club's recruitment department last summer. "You can go back as far as Jermaine Jenas, Karl Darlow, Jamaal Lascelles, who have all gone on," he adds.

"A fantastic statistic for us is that in the last seven years the club has averaged three academy players making their first-team debuts per year. That is a phenomenal achievement in the world of youth football. The challenge is to build on that now."

It is not just down to potluck, either. The Reds have a very specific set of characteristics that they look for when recruiting and developing young players. As Brass scours the country for potential signings, Head of Coaching and Player Development Jody Caudwell is tasked with ensuring those traits are already present within the academy:

"From a player development perspective, we have always had a strong programme, which has been heavily based around our academy traits. There are certain values and behaviours that we want to see," Caudwell says.

"We have a holistic educational football programme that runs from pre-academy to the Under-23s. Within that we have certain player types, for example, Arvin Appiah was an exciting player and a good dribbler, and now we have Brennan Johnson and Alex Mighten who fit into that profile. Dale [Taylor] is an incredibly talented player who was brought into the programme as a scholar last year, and he fits into our finisher profile."

Since its inception in 1997, the academy has produced a steady and rather impressive production line of players, many of which have gone on to enjoy careers in the Premier League.

But for all those successes, the youth academy has never been in a better position than it has today, having achieved Category One status in May 2021.



THERE IS A NEW CULTURE NOW WHERE STANDARDS ARE HIGH AND THERE IS AN EXPECTATION TO HIT TARGETS.



The step-up has marked the dawn of a new beginning. Thanks to the investment of Mr Marinakis, the club now has access to youth grant funding and its youngsters compete against better quality opposition in their game programmes. The academy's staffing structure has also been enhanced to provide a more comprehensive support network for each player.

There are even plans to redevelop and modernise the Nigel Doughty training facility, which has been the club's training base for over 20 years. But while all of this sounds rather rosy, getting to this point was no mean feat. The extensive audit conducted by the Professional Game Academy Audit Company consists of a full, detailed review of evidence and documentation. For Assistant Academy Manager Chris McGuane, getting the seal of approval was a reward for all the hard work that went into it.

"It was great for everyone connected to the football club, from the owner down to all of the staff. We have some excellent people behind the scenes who invest in the programme and the players," McGuane tells LFE.

"The audit has been a real in-depth process, but it allowed us to shine a light on how good we are as an academy and the positive elements of what we do to the auditors and the Professional Game Board.

"Moving to Category One status has always been a vision of the football club and the owner. We decided that it was the right time for us as a football club to go through the application process.

"I was just really pleased for the academy staff who put in a lot of hard work that goes relatively unnoticed. We all know that it is unsociable hours – evenings until nine or ten o'clock at night and weekends when friends and family will be socialising. It was a reward for their efforts."

To offer some context as to how far Forest's academy has progressed, ten years ago it had just seven full-time members of staff. Today, there are over 100 employees, with almost 50 of those working full-time.

"It has been a massive increase," McGuane explains. "It highlights just how much the programmes have grown over the last decade and, equally, how much extra support is given to young players. You can now put a multi-disciplinary team around each individual, rather than spreading yourselves out around 160-170 players.

"We can go into more depth in sports science, player care, nutrition, psychology and safeguarding. The team behind the players is a lot bigger and a lot better."

Education is another department that The Reds pay close attention to.

Having formed a link with Loughborough College in recent years, the standard of the apprenticeship programme has been boosted.

"We want everyone to come out of the programme with the best possible grades to open up that next step, should they need to fall back on them," says Head of Education Chris Caunt.

"When I arrived here, the first thing I did was take a close look at the existing education programme and evaluate what was going well and what wasn't going so well. From there we started to implement some changes, with the key focus being to raise the standards and make sure the apprentices are coming out of my element of the programme equipped for whatever is next.

"Previously, there was a mentality of 'just getting the boys through and completing the programme', but there is a new culture now where standards are high and there is an expectation to hit targets."

Alongside the traditional BTEC Diploma, Functional Skills, and Certificate in Coaching, LFE introduced the Sporting Excellence Professional (SEP) apprenticeship two years ago. Nottingham Forest was one of six clubs invited onto the pilot programme ahead of its introduction to all member clubs. Since then, overseen by LFE Regional Officer Ian Tombs, former schoolteacher Caunt and SEP Coordinator Matt Sinclair, it has been a huge success.

While Caunt lauded the efforts of Sinclair, it has also been the interest shown by the club's hierarchy that has driven things forward:

"We are extremely fortunate to have an owner and a leadership team that is supportive of education. The new CEO recently asked me about a player who will potentially play for the Under-23s or first team soon, and he was very keen to see how we can structure his education to make sure he doesn't miss out. To have that buy-in from a person at the very top of the football club is pleasing."

As they have done so often over the years, the former European Cup winners are setting the benchmark for youth development in this country, from academic success to first-team debuts. But the question that some may pose is whether the considerable investment in a Category One academy can help them get back to the promised land of the Premier League.

"Most of us have been here for a very small piece of Nottingham Forest's history. There were foundations put in place during a period of great success, which over previous regimes were lost," Brass admits.

"But having been around the game a little bit, I know that there is something special here. Using what we call the 'Forest way', there is a collective belief that those foundations will find their way again."





Harry Leeson
Bristol City

Since returning for the second year of his apprenticeship, Harry Leeson has gone from strength to strength, receiving international recognition with Wales Under-19s, and signing a three-year professional contract at The Bristol City Stadium.

The talented defender has also continued to impress in the classroom, meeting his target grades and showing a real commitment towards his education.



Jevon Mills
Hull City

Defender Jevon Mills has displayed excellent potential during his apprenticeship and has enjoyed a promising start to life as a second year. His assured displays in Hull City Under-18s' defence has led to call-ups to the Under-23 team, as well as recognition on the international stage.

After receiving the call to represent the Republic of Ireland Under-19's in Marbella, Jevon went on to captain his country in just his second international appearance against Sweden.

Alongside that, he has managed to dedicate time towards maintaining a high-quality portfolio of work for the SEP programme and is on track to achieve higher than his target grade.



James Clarridge
Nottingham Forest

James Clarridge has displayed tremendous development on the pitch this season, showing exceptional maturity and leadership that has resulted in a call up to England Under 18's.

While his displays in the heart of the defence continue to catch the eye, it is also his progress in the classroom that is worthy of recognition. Currently on course to achieve a D*D in his BTEC Diploma, James' desire to be the best he can be has impressed everybody at Nottingham Forest.

The club was quick to tie down the centre-back and offered him his first professional contract in May 2021.



Louie Arrowsmith
Southend United

17-year-old Louie Arrowsmith has made impressive academic progress this year, working at triple D* standard on the BTEC Extended Diploma and maintaining high standards on the SEP element of the apprenticeship.

The full-back was instrumental in the club's FA Youth Cup campaign, converting the seventh penalty kick in the Third-Round Qualifying shoot-out win against Aveley.

The 11

In our most recent issue of 'The 11', we recognised eleven apprentices for their outstanding efforts, both on and off the pitch, during the first half of the 2021/22 campaign.

The accolade, which has featured the likes of Jude Bellingham in previous years, acknowledges performance on the pitch and in the classroom, as well as assessing other factors, including involvement in community or charity-based initiatives.

Here, we look back at the players that made 'The 11' and the reasons why:



Jephthe Tanga
Leyton Orient

Second-year apprentice Jephthe Tanga has enjoyed a meteoric rise in his football development in the early stages of the 2021/22 season, appearing on the first-team bench on numerous occasions before making his league debut against Southampton U21's in the Papa John's Trophy recently.

Alongside his football, the winger has enjoyed coaching in the club's academy, completing an extensive number of hours working within the foundation phase.



Dan Gifford
Portsmouth

Following an injury-hit 2020/21 season, second-year apprentice Dan Gifford has been a role model both on and off the field this season. The hard-working striker has made a successful comeback from injury and been in fine goalscoring form for the Under-18's.

As the Under-18s close in on first-placed Bournemouth in the Youth Alliance South West, it is Gifford's attacking performances that continue to capture the attention of Pompey manager Danny Cowley, highlighted by his inclusion on the first-team bench when they travelled to AFC Wimbledon in the Papa John's Trophy last September.

In the classroom, his desire to achieve the best possible BTEC grade has been a real positive.



Alex Aitken
Stevenage

17-year-old goalkeeper Alex Aitken has made excellent academic progress this season and has impressed the first-team coaching staff with his performances between the sticks for the Under-18s.

On course to achieve a D*D*D* in his BTEC Extended Diploma, Alex has applied maximum effort to his studies and will now be looking to maintain those high standards.



Brooklyn Ilunga
MK Dons

Since second-year apprentice Brooklyn Ilunga made his senior debut on the final day of the 2020/21 season, he has featured on three more occasions and penned his first professional contract. His recent achievements have been a reward for his tremendous hard work both on and off the football pitch.

The 17-year-old has had to overcome adversity by dealing with the loss of his father, a long-term injury, and the disruptions of Covid-19.



Henry Hawkins
Queens Park Rangers

Dominant defender Henry Hawkins has made a promising start to life as a second-year apprentice at Loftus Road, displaying leadership qualities on the field and an impressive work ethic off it.

In this review period, Henry has consistently exceeded his target grade and has led by example in the SEP programme. QPR's Head of Education, Stephen Quinn praised Henry for his commitment towards improving his self-awareness and understanding of what he needs to do to improve.



Tommy Simkin
Stoke City

First-year apprentice Tommy Simkin has excelled both on and off the field at The Bet 365 stadium. The goalkeeper has established himself as the number one in the Under-18's side, and spent the first half of the campaign on loan with Midland League Premier Division outfit Hanley Town, appearing in a number of high-profile FA Cup ties.

Alongside his on-the-field achievements, Tommy is putting in lots of effort to achieve his BTEC Diploma target grade. He has also engaged in several community initiatives, including a gardening project within the local community.

His dedication and positive attitude have been praised by staff members after he has spent time training with the Under-23 goalkeepers, and now finds himself on the radar of first-team coaches.



Ryan Howley
Coventry City

Since securing his first professional deal with The Sky Blues and making his first-team debut in the EFL Cup against Northampton in August, Ryan Howley has continued to show excellent development on the football pitch and in the classroom. He has also earned international recognition during his apprenticeship, representing Wales Under-19s in September in an international friendly against Croatia.

Despite having to catch up on his BTEC work due to regular involvement with the senior team, Ryan has refused to let it affect his target grade of D*D*D*.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

At the end of an apprenticeship, players often go off in different directions.

Some may be offered professional contracts, while others might choose to go into Higher Education, accept a USA Scholarship or explore other careers.

We caught up with five former Bolton Wanderers apprentices to find out which path they chose...



Jack Everest
2015-2018



What are you doing now?

I work in the family business and DJ music events on the side.

How did you get to where you are today?

Working for the family business happened naturally. I didn't really need any specific qualifications, however, I have since gained lots of experience which is allowing me to take on more senior roles.

With music, I paid for private tuition and taught myself, this has allowed me to now work my way up in the music world and have releases out on various platforms. I have spent an endless number of hours in my studio to get me to this point and I still don't even feel like I'm anywhere close to where I need to be.

If you had to give advice to an apprentice today, what would it be?

The main thing it taught me is that those who have the desire to be the best will always get the furthest. Talent can only get you so far, but those who are willing to sacrifice everything are the ones who reap the rewards, in whatever field they are in.

I now try and take this approach with most things I do in life.

Do you still play football?

I no longer play football as it doesn't really coincide with trying to make it in the music industry.

Cole Lonsdale
2015-2017



What are you doing now?

After football, I have taken a different route entirely, currently working as a steel erector. Essentially, I make bridges and walkways for big construction firms like Network Rail and Transpire.

How did you get to where you are today?

I managed to pick the job up through my grandad, who was the supervisor at the time. I initially served as an apprentice and two years down the line, I'm still here.

If you had to give advice to an apprentice today, what would it be?

Keep setting goals and challenges. Aim bigger and higher every time and you never know where you could end up.

Do you still play football?

Currently, I'm at Clitheroe FC where I have been for three seasons. I've loved it and enjoy playing regular football, week in week out, in front of a good crowd. Football gives me enjoyment alongside work, especially when working the long hours that I do.

Ryan White
2015-2017



What are you doing now?

I work for LFE within their Projects and Communications team as a Support Officer.

How did you get to where you are today?

I got here by gradually building up different skills throughout school and college. I have a broad range of experiences due to me trying a few different careers. Eventually, though, I have found a job I love and feel passionate about. I use a lot of what I learnt at Bolton in the workplace today. I have good team-working skills, which I came to realise in my first job as a waiter. Utilising the experience, knowledge, and qualities I built up during my two-year apprenticeship has allowed me to discover a role that suits me.

If you had to give advice to an apprentice today, what would it be?

Try and find hobbies and things to do outside of football, whether it's education, another sport, family, social events etc., as I believe it benefits your performance on the field. Focusing solely on football can often lead to overthinking and anxiety. While you must dedicate yourself to your profession and live a healthy, professional lifestyle, having something else to focus on can provide a healthy distraction.

Do you still play football?

I play for Bamber Bridge FC, which is part-time, but it's great. It allows me to juggle my work commitments and still be involved in the game.

Cam Moore
2016-2018



What are you doing now?

I'm currently doing a BSc international business degree at Loughborough University while playing for the performance football team.

How did you get to where you are today?

I did the BTEC Extended Diploma during my apprenticeship at Bolton and that helped me accumulate enough UCAS points to get me onto an elite athlete pathway programme.

If you had to give advice to an apprentice today, what would it be?

Do all the courses offered to you when signing your apprenticeship forms, including the extended diploma if you can. You always want to give yourself the best opportunity to succeed beyond football, even if you don't know what that looks like just yet.

Do you still play football?

I play here at Loughborough University. The standard is high, and it's nice to play with others that have been on a similar journey to me. The facilities are second to none, which makes it a really enjoyable place to play your football.

Matthew Fearnley
2016-2018



What are you doing now?

I am currently in my last year studying and playing on a US scholarship at Georgia State University in Atlanta.

How did you get to where you are today?

I got where I am today by going through a sports recruiting agency, which got me in touch with schools in America.

If you had to give advice to an apprentice today, what would it be?

Football can be a strange world. One minute you can be up at the top, the next it could all be gone. I would just say, enjoy your football whilst you can but football is not the be all and end all. Don't put all your eggs in one basket.

Do you still play football?

I currently play in the US playing Division One football for Georgia State University in Atlanta.



AIMS ONE YEAR ON

"It makes me realise that I can really help the future generation of Asian players to break through and help them with any setbacks they may face."

Dillon De Silva, QPR

This month marks a year since the PFA launched the Asian Inclusion Mentoring Scheme (AIMS), an initiative focused on increasing the number of Asian players within professional football.

The scheme, which has been running since the early part of the 2019/20 season as a pilot, aims to enhance the experience of Asian footballers at all levels of the professional game by creating a structured network of support that allows them to thrive, both on and off the field.

Current and former players, who have playing experiences across all four leagues and internationally, including Danny Batth, Malvind Benning, Neil Taylor, Otis Khan, Zesh Rehman and Anwar Uddin, are working with the PFA to provide support to the future generation of Asian heritage players.

PFA Player Inclusion Executive, Riz Rehman, sits at the centre of the scheme, facilitating formal meetings, workshops, and player-led events that give scholars, academy players, and their parents/guardians a unique opportunity to connect with senior Asian players.

Rehman, a former Brentford FC professional, is the brother of ex-Fulham defender Zesh. Back in 2004, Zesh proudly became the first British Asian Pakistani to start a Premier League match.

Speaking to Touchline, Riz Rehman said: "Historically, Asian players and their parents/guardians have not had the networks in the game to help them navigate the academy system.

"For the last 30 years we've heard the same lazy stereotypes labelled against Asian players, but it is now time for us to start talking about and recognising the positive contribution these players have made to the game. The narrative needs to change and this is a start.

"Under-representation, whilst a big problem for our communities, shouldn't be the defining narrative. We ultimately want to develop a sustainable flow with proportional representation of professional football players of Asian heritage playing at the top level of the men's and women's game."

"We are 12 months in now since the inception of the AIMS programme and have had lots of fantastic events, meetings and positive success stories. We want to take it to the next level now.

"The aim is to get to a place where every club in the country recognises the value of a support programme for players from a minority background."

Statistics show that Asian and British Asian people make up almost 7.5% of the British population, but in the 2020/21 season, just eight players made first-team appearances across the Premier League and English Football League. This season, there is an all-time high of Asian representation in professional football, with 16 players on professional contracts and 23 apprentices within the system – a figure that still seems shockingly small.

Despite this, the AIMS initiative's senior mentors have had overwhelming success across the game, racking up over 1,500 league appearances between them.

"Growing up I didn't have the opportunity to tap into any mentoring from experienced players," Mentor and Sunderland AFC player Danny Batth commented.

"My support network was simply my family and friends, so now I am delighted to be able to support academy players and their parents from similar backgrounds on their journey into the game.

Working alongside the PFA I am able to share some experiences, setbacks and things I have learnt which I hope will help to progress the careers of these young players," he added.

For the mentees, the AIMS programme has provided a community for support, advice and guidance. Dillon De Silva, an Under-23 player at Queens Park Rangers, explained how he has also used the scheme as a source for inspiration:

"Connecting with the senior players and listening to people like Danny and Neil [Taylor] has inspired me to work even harder and make sure I have a career in the game like them.

"I recently shared my journey with the younger academy players on the AIMS programme and I really enjoy having these conversations. It makes me realise that I can really help the future generation of Asian players to break through and help them with any setbacks they may face."

It isn't just the players who feel supported either. Raj, the father of Sunderland Under-18s player Sonny Singh, expressed his gratitude to Rehman and the mentors for the support they have provided since its launch:

"Through my son's journey and as a parent, I've found it difficult to speak to a coach or club as I'd be worried about how it would affect my son at the club," Raj revealed.

"I've found the PFA and Riz to be very supportive and helpful when it comes to any concerns that I've had. Having regular 'Zoom' calls gives me great reassurance as a parent that the PFA have his best interests at heart."

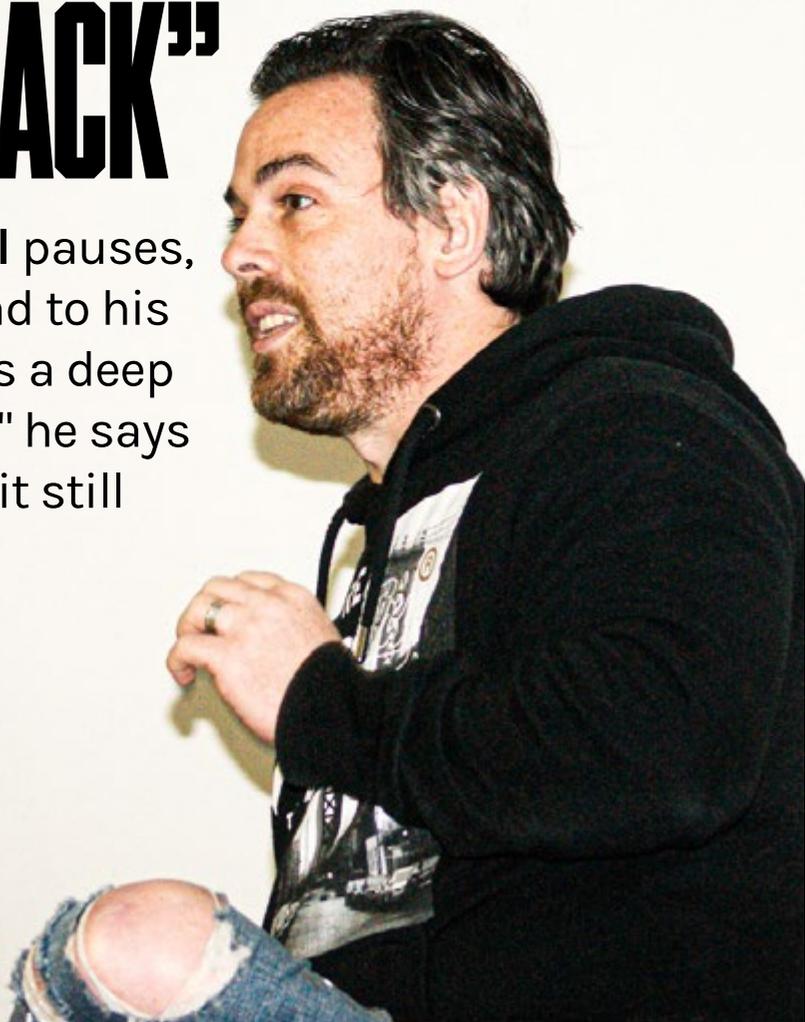
A key focus for the PFA is to work with Club player care staff to build a database of Asian academy players within the youth development phase to establish methods of support and easily connect them to like-minded apprentices and individuals with lived experiences. The database has also enabled them to track the number of players currently within the academy programmes on a year-by-year basis.

AIMS is open to all football players on a professional playing career path who feel they could benefit from additional support. The PFA is also encouraging current and former players to join the support network as mentors and share their valuable insights with the next generation of Asian footballers.

If you would like to know more about the scheme, please contact PFA Player Inclusion Executive, Riz Rehman (07391 512974 or Riz.Rehman@thepfa.com)

“I’VE GOT GOOSEBUMPS WATCHING THE VIDEO BACK”

Peter Mitchell pauses, raises his hand to his face and takes a deep breath. "Sorry," he says to the group, "it still gets me."



It has been 19 years since the car accident that prematurely ended Peter Mitchell's lifelong dream of becoming a professional footballer, but the emotions are still as raw today as they were that evening. Peter is at Blackpool and Fylde College, delivering one of six in-person sessions as part of his commitment to LFE's Life Skill programme. He is passing on his experience of overcoming adversity as an apprentice to inspire budding EFL footballers.

He pauses, occasionally, as he relives the moments that destroyed his childhood dream. Blackpool's youngsters shuffle in their seats as they take in every word that leaves his mouth. "You have the world at your feet. It won't be plain sailing. There will be times when you have to dig in, as I did..." he tails off.

Rewind to the turn of the century and young Peter Mitchell is a player tipped to achieve big things at Leeds United Football Club, having moved across to England from his home in Northern Ireland two years prior. The Yorkshire club, back then, were challenging at the top end of the Premier League and making Champions League semi-finals, so the fact that Peter was beginning to impress the first-team coaching staff highlighted just how much talent he possessed as a youngster. "I was a hard-working right back, who liked to get stuck in. I worked incredibly hard on the training pitch, every single day, to get to that position. Nobody worked as hard as me to get that opportunity at Leeds. I had a handful of sessions with the first team - smashing Alan Smith one day and scoring past England international Nigel Martyn the next. I just remember thinking, 'this is it; I'm going to be a professional footballer, nothing can stop me now.'"

However, Peter's career was stopped, and in the cruellest of ways. Travelling in the backseat of a teammate's car, Peter was involved in a serious single-vehicle collision which left him with a broken spine and, consequently, in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. "We had driven down that road hundreds of times before, and even on the very morning of the accident. They had been asking me to go for food, but I never wanted to go. They convinced me to get in the car, and after some time, I went with them." ▶



“We approached a bend and unfortunately we were going too fast. We ended up on a golf course. It felt like the longest few seconds of my life as we went through the air. Straight away I knew I was in trouble.

“I wasn’t wearing my seatbelt and I was clinging to the front seat, for what felt like forever. I was sandwiched in between the front seat and the back seat. I couldn’t move my legs. As I lay there, I started thinking about my family back home.”

Fractured ribs, a broken collarbone and a broken sternum were just a few of the injuries Peter suffered. But it was the damage to Peter’s spine that would change his life forever.

“With the injuries I had, they told me that I would never walk again, and, at the time, that was soul-destroying. I couldn’t process the news for a long time. Why me? That’s all I kept thinking. Why me?”

The weeks, months and years that followed were tough. Peter was lost. Up to that point, football was all he ever knew. “I wouldn’t leave my room some days. I didn’t know what I was going to do with my life. Football was my first love. When I left Northern Ireland for England, I never thought I would ever go back. But, just three years later, there I was, returning in a wheelchair with this new identity.”

Moving away from his hometown gave ‘Mitch’, as he is known by his loved ones, the lift he so desperately needed - the chance to reinvent himself and get away from the identity that had followed him around since losing the use of his legs. “I was known as the young footballer who was in a terrible car accident,” he explains. “That was difficult, and I desperately needed to get away from that to move forwards with my life.”

Spool forward to the present day and his revival, from where he was to where he is today, will warm the hearts of those that watched his world fall apart in 2002. His passion for his work; his love for his wife and daughter and his contented demeanour.

It was a career in acting that provided a new focus for Peter, who has since gone on to appear in some of the UK’s most popular TV soaps, such as Hollyoaks and Coronation Street. Understandably, with no previous experience, people would voice their doubts over Peter’s capabilities at the beginning of his acting career - even his own mother questioned his decision when he revealed he was auditioning for a part in a television show. But through force of character, determination, and that inner drive to prove people wrong, Mitch thrived when the cameras turned to him. When the chips were down, Peter picked himself up and dug in. It is who he is.



‘Mentality’ and ‘resilience’ are words he uses frequently during his presentations – perhaps because it is his mind that was, and still is, his greatest asset of all. Perseverance and bouncing back from setbacks are credentials that LFE teach through Life Skills, Personal Development and SEP programmes, and Peter is the embodiment of those qualities.

“I was lying in the hospital and the nurses would come over and say that I wouldn’t be home for a year, and I wouldn’t be back for Christmas. ‘You have to take things slow,’ they would tell me. But I refused to accept that. It was almost as if I had to prove them all wrong. I saw it as a challenge, and it was the same when I was playing football, I didn’t accept it when someone said I couldn’t achieve something.”

Those characteristics that made him stand out as a future prospect at Elland Road are the same ones that got him out of hospital early, back to his family in Northern Ireland, against all odds, and are the same ones that drive him on as an actor and when representing his country in wheelchair basketball.

“My mind often races back to a cold Saturday morning when we were losing 5-0. It was terrible. We had never played so badly before. It wasn’t in me to roll over and give up, so I continued to get around the pitch and when I saw an opportunity to lift someone, I did. I put someone into the water bottles at the side of the pitch, and after the game, the manager praised me in front of everyone because I never gave up. Two days later I was playing for the reserve team. It just proved that you didn’t have to spray passes around or score a hat-trick every week, it was your attitude and application that was valued most. It was how you reacted when things weren’t going your way.”

Morecambe’s Head of Education Gary Kelly shared his opinion on the positive impact that Peter is having on apprentices, following his delivery at the beginning of November.

“The talk provided apprentices with the opportunity to recognise that life can change at any moment,” he says. “As Peter highlights, if you can look at yourself and say you have given everything you have, it can provide you with great inner satisfaction, no matter how things turn out.”

Again, Peter scans the room at Blackpool and Fylde College, looking into the eyes of those that sit opposite him. “All my life I have been told I can’t do this; I can’t do that. I use that as a motivator to go and prove those people wrong.”

He is using his unique story to educate the next generation of footballers. But why does he do it? “I’ve been working with LFE for six years now because I want to inspire the young players and teach them to train and play like it is their last ever match. You never know what is around the corner.”

And while the question of whether Peter could have ever gone on to become a Premier League superstar will remain unanswered, the love he has for his wife and daughter is everything he could ever wish for.

“I don’t have any regrets. Not one. I gave it absolutely everything I had during those two years because that’s what makes it so easy now when I look back. I know I gave my all, every single day.

“If we were to rewind time and go back to that split decision of whether to get in that car or not, I would get in it. I have everything I could ever want in life and I’m not sure I would be the person I am today if I hadn’t been in that car.” ■



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YOUR REPUTATION

YOUR RESPONSIBILITY

YOUR CAREER

BIG APPLE

Bouncing back from rejection, former LFE apprentices James Beeston and Matt Needham have come together to establish a supplemental one-to-one coaching company on the outskirts of New York.

In the summer of 2010, LFE apprentice James Beeston was released from Port Vale Football Club, the team he had supported his entire life. On New Year's Eve 2011, Chesterfield academy graduate Matt Needham was the recipient of similar news, departing the then League Two club after his six-month professional contract came to an end.

But as the duo dealt with the emotions that come with rejection, an offer of a four-year USA Scholarship at Siena College arrived through their letterboxes. Although they didn't realise it back then, it was a decision that would go on to shape their lives today.

A decade on, LFE catches up with the pair to understand how they are using their footballing experiences to educate the next generation of American talent.

Ever since he could walk, Beeston had dreamt of playing for his beloved Port Vale. It was a dream that edged closer towards reality as he climbed from one age group to the next. In 2008, he was offered an apprenticeship at Vale Park, during which he would compete with current Ipswich Town midfielder Sam Morsy for a professional contract.

Beeston excelled on the pitch during those two years, but even more so in the classroom, where his efforts earned him the 2009 Apprentice of the Year accolade at the Learn More Awards.

In the end, though, the contract decision swayed in Morsy's favour due to Beeston's late physical development.

"I was gutted and it was difficult to take, but I kind of braced myself for it because 'Morsy' was training with the first team a lot," Beeston admits, as he casts his mind back to that Friday morning. ▶





“ Before the FA Level Two Coaching course, I hadn’t coached before. I think that was the moment when I realised how much I enjoyed it. I would never have discovered how passionate I was if I hadn’t done that at such a young age.

JAMES BEESTON



“I remember it like yesterday. I was the first one to be told. The assistant Mark Grew came into the changing room and said that the manager Micky Adams wanted to see me. He told me that ‘if we were a more financially established club, we could offer you a deal and let you develop a little bit more because technically you are there, but we don’t think you can compete physically’. I understood that.”

Physicality was no issue for Needham, however, but it was his rather unorthodox route into academy football that made it difficult to adapt.

The tall, commanding defender joined Chesterfield at the age of 16 after impressing for his local non-league side. During that year, he was one of 25 local players to be signed during a period of experimentation for Chesterfield’s academy, who had chosen to let go of all their Under-16s and instead recruit Chesterfield-based youngsters through open trials and newspaper adverts.

“From being the star of the local team, it was a shock to the system going straight into an

apprenticeship and getting hammered in training for doing something wrong,” Needham laughs.

“Looking back, was I good enough? Probably not. I always suspected that, because I got picked up so late, I wasn’t going to be quite good enough.

“I was always good at school and had outside pressure to continue with my education. I was different to the other lads that got released. Of course, I was disappointed, but I always thought ‘OK, maybe this isn’t for me – what’s next?’”

The traditional route for an apprentice or a first-year professional securing a USA Scholarship is through assessment trials, which run at the end of every season and give players another opportunity to showcase their ability to coaches and scouts from around the world.

Another is via LFE’s partnership with FirstPoint USA. But in both cases, it was ‘luck’ that helped them land a four-year scholarship offer at New York’s private liberal arts institution, Siena College.

“It was strange how it came about,” Beeston explains. “When I got released, Port Vale offered me a job as a Technical Skills Coach.

“The weekend before I was due to accept the offer, my old P.E teacher got in touch and asked whether I’d be interested in going out to the States, as there had been some interest from Siena College through his friend. We had some skype sessions and it went from there.”

An American scholarship provides apprentices with a unique opportunity to gain a degree, experience a different culture and meet new people, but also expand their footballing skill set, which for some, has led to a professional soccer career in the MLS. For many others, though, it has been the start of a new beginning across the pond. That was how Matt Needham viewed it.

“I was different to James because I had almost given up on my dream of making it as a professional. When I arrived in Siena, I realised that I wanted to go down a different route. I had a good understanding that I wasn’t good enough to play professionally.

“I’m not even half the player that James is – but don’t tell him I said that!” Needham jokes.

“It massively helps to be out there with other

English students and former apprentices who have been through what you have,” he adds.

Over the next four years, as technically gifted James and tough-tackling Matt mastered the art of juggling their education and soccer commitments, opportunities to coach began to arise.

As part of the LFE apprenticeship, players are given their first taste of coaching, which Beeston remains grateful for.

“Before the FA Level Two Coaching course, I hadn’t coached before. I think that was the moment when I realised how much I enjoyed it. I would never have discovered how passionate I was if I hadn’t done that at such a young age.

“Through the PFA, I went on to do my UEFA B licence, which boosted my confidence. People would come up to me and say, ‘you are ok at this!’”

In Matt’s case, it took a little bit longer for him to figure out where his future lay.

“I was always interested in numbers and business,” the former Spireite explains. ▶

“Football is a bubble. It is an enclosed space, and it is not until you try something different that you realise there is so much out there.”

MATT NEEDHAM

“I went and got a job as an Accountant at a finance company after graduating with a Double Major in Economics and Management. I did it for two years and hated every second of it. I would never change it because it gave me lots of experience. I just couldn’t stand sitting behind a desk all day.”

“Beest’ invited me in for a week and I knew I’d never go back to finance again after that.”

Beestera Soccer Training is now approaching its seventh year as a business and, at the time of publication, has over 50,000 followers across its social media platforms, illustrating its popularity amongst players, coaches and American soccer fans alike. The detailed one-to-one training is what separates it from the crowd.

“I have definitely taken elements of my apprenticeship into what I do now,” Beeston says. “Looking back at those years, it was extremely demanding, and, at the time, it brought something out in you. You knew you had to perform on the pitch and we were being put under pressure from a young age. There is probably some value to that, but in terms of actually teaching and developing each individual, it can’t just be a cookie-cutter approach.”

Needham shares this philosophy. For two players who possessed contrasting attributes on the field, their values are well aligned when it comes to equal opportunity and personal development.

“We care about the player, but also the person,” Needham says.



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“Because of our background and experiences, what we have been through, we don’t want to just cater to the best player, we want to cater to all players. Great players and better people is our mission,” he adds.

Since the pair set up the company, with the help of American partner Mike Matera, growth has been steady and consistent. But after recently teaming up with Nike for their soccer camps, launching a phone app and delivering online courses, Beestera is reaching new heights.

The journey from closing the managers’ doors at Port Vale and Chesterfield, to owning a high-flying coaching company in America has been an extraordinary ride.

“To get offered a pro contract at Vale would have been a dream come true...” Beeston admits, “but I wouldn’t have had longevity in my playing career. I’m confident of that. I think it would’ve been a short-term win, but my decision to come over to the States has really helped me in terms of the long-term plan.

“The places I have been able to travel to, the cultures that I have been able to interact with, the people I have met and the standard of education that I have been a part of, I know that I would not have been able to experience that anywhere else.”

Needham has no regrets either.

“Moving out here is the best thing I’ve ever done,” he says with confidence.

“Was it a scary decision to make at 18?”

Absolutely, but I felt prepared for it. Everything that you do during your apprenticeship preps you for life after football. For that, I have got to give credit to my parents for being so encouraging. Also, although not something I felt at the time, my youth team manager David Bentley and his assistant Mark Jules for always holding us accountable and allowing us to live in an adult world.

“Football is a bubble. It is an enclosed space, and it is not until you try something different that you realise there is so much out there.”

Beeston is jotting some ideas down for his afternoon group session and as the conversation draws to a close, the former midfielder offers some advice to any young player experiencing the emotions that he did twelve years ago.

“When you are younger and you are dealing with that kind of rejection, where for so long you have been building towards something and telling yourself you are going to become a professional footballer, for it not to happen you feel as though your world has just come crashing down. But, on reflection and looking at the bigger picture, you are still so young.”

“If you have an opportunity to gain a degree and resume playing, I would say ‘take it’ every time.” ■

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON USA SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, VISIT www.lfe.org.uk/usa-scholarships/

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Having transitioned away from professional football in May 2015, following 12 months at Mansfield Town, former Oxford United apprentice Drew Ricketts is now protecting his local community as a firefighter with Green Watch at Solihull Fire Station.

DREW RICKETTS SAVING A LIFE

The defender's career path since his contract expired at the end of the 2014/15 season has been a fascinating one. From working in Bannatynes Health Club as a Personal Trainer to owning his own football coaching company, Ricketts is now thriving in the job he had dreamt of doing as a child.

"My only two hopes in life were to become a professional footballer or a firefighter," Ricketts tells LFE. "I feel very fortunate to say I have done both."

Since he successfully made it through the fire service's gruelling 18-month recruitment process - which consists of multiple interviews, tests and physical assessments - Ricketts has grown accustomed to the high-pressure situations that come with the job. But what happened on the evening of November 1, 2020, while he was off duty, will live long in his and many others memory.

"It was just an ordinary night. Me and my partner were on the way to drop a parcel off at her friend's house and as we came out of a petrol station in Billesley, I could see a woman standing in the middle of the road turning people around," Ricketts explains.

"Initially I didn't think much of it but as I took another look, I could see that there was a car with the windscreen caved in. Someone was calling for help and people looked distressed, so I grabbed my gloves and mask out of the glove box - which I carry around with me in case of an emergency - and I ran over to help."

As Ricketts approached the casualty, who was lying face down and was unresponsive, he quickly realised the severity of the situation.

"A woman told me that there had been an accident involving a man and that he wasn't breathing," he says. "Another woman was kneeling next to him in silence, which I knew was a sign of shock."

"It was clear that the gentleman had suffered significant injuries; he had multiple wounds to his head and there was no pulse."

"In the fire service, we call those situations a Category One incident, which means that it is an incident involving life-threatening injuries. For most people, running into that and being told that somebody isn't breathing could have been overwhelming, but because of my job, I have been trained to control my emotions in those types of environments. It was almost second nature."

"Because he had multiple open wounds, I had to try to mitigate the bleeding before initiating CPR. Luckily, I had my football bag in the back of my car, so my partner got a towel out and that helped."

As Ricketts carried out chest compressions, he was also on the phone to the emergency services. His partner counted each compression, while he informed the ambulance crew of the situation, how many crew members were needed and the location of the incident.

"I went into work mode. You can't explain it to somebody that hasn't had that experience, but when I was providing treatment, it was like I was back in training school and my tutor was telling me what to do. Everything just came flooding back to me."

After two rounds of CPR, there was still no sign of life. For each second that passed, the tension grew. ▶



"We do a Level Three first aid course at work, which is basic life support," Ricketts says. "You learn about techniques and signs. After two sets, I had no response; but on the third set, on the twentieth compression, he gave me a breath and a painful groan. That told me that he was reacting to what I was doing.

"He lost consciousness again shortly after, but there was a faint pulse there. I put him into the recovery position and it was at that point that I saw the blue flashing lights and the ambulance crew arrive."

Months went by without Ricketts knowing whether the victim had survived. He had returned to his everyday life, wondering whether the man recovered. One day, someone reached out to him.

"It was the man's family member. They told me that he had been in a coma for three weeks, had punctured both lungs, broke every limb in his body, but was back at home recovering," Ricketts says with relief.

"With my job, I don't really know what happens after they go to the hospital, but on this occasion, they found out where I worked, what station I work on and last Christmas they sent me some chocolates and a voucher to say thank you."

Ricketts' decisiveness saved a man's life. It also resulted in a nomination for a Pride of Britain Award, after his name was put forward by the man's family. The Pride of Britain Award was devised in 1999 and exists to honour British citizens who have acted bravely or extraordinarily in challenging situations. The pride Ricketts felt when discovering the news is a moment he will treasure.

"It was on 27th May 2021 - two days after my birthday," he says. "I went into work and the gentleman's family had left me a card with a fire angel teddy bear, and in the card, they expressed how they can't thank me enough and how they wouldn't ever be able to repay me for what I did. It was then that they mentioned that I had been nominated for the Pride of Britain and Pride of Birmingham Award. It was surreal. I didn't know how to take it.

"Unfortunately, I didn't win it but that wasn't why I did it. I wasn't trying to be a hero. It is just who I am as a person. I am willing to help anybody and luckily I was the right person, in the right place, at the right time."

Since the nomination, Ricketts has rediscovered his passion for football, having fallen out of love with it after exiting Mansfield Town.



"When he is not working, he plays for local non-league teams on a Saturday and Sunday, as well as managing his own coaching business. Despite temporarily turning his back on the game, he has always treasured the memories made during his apprenticeship at The U's.

"When I left Oxford, I found it difficult moving around, being away from home and not knowing where I was going to be from one season to the next," Ricketts admits. "I took some time away from it and it was just what I needed.

"Through coaching, I have found my love for football again. I got my Level Two coaching badge through my apprenticeship and that really helped me with the coaching side of things. It's my way of passing on my football experiences. I get a lot of enjoyment out of watching players learn.

"With my actual football, I have thought about giving it a go again, but it's difficult to commit with work. I am just enjoying playing again.

"I have such great memories of my time at Oxford. Those years stay with you. I think I saw more of my teammates and coaches than I did my family.

"My old coach Leon Blackmore-Such actually messaged me after he heard about the Pride of Britain nomination; that was nice to hear from him."

With support from the PFA, Ricketts also completed a fitness instructor course, which helped him land his first job after football. He believes the skills and qualifications gained during the LFE apprenticeship programme have helped over the past five years.

"You don't realise it at the time, but the whole experience helps you - not just in football, but away from it too. Even today, the skills I use at work are all things I learned at Oxford.

"I moved away from home at 16 and went straight into working in a team environment. The camaraderie you get in a dressing room is very similar to the fire service. Our lives are in the hands of each other and, in a sense, football is the same.

"Respecting authority is another transferable skill that not many talk about. I think it is extremely important and something that you learn from a young age in football. You have to respect and listen to seniority, whether that be your manager, captain or an experienced player. That is massive in the fire service because you have to respect each rank." ■



YOU DON'T REALISE IT AT THE TIME, BUT THE WHOLE EXPERIENCE HELPS YOU - NOT JUST IN FOOTBALL, BUT AWAY FROM IT TOO. EVEN TODAY, THE SKILLS I USE AT WORK ARE ALL THINGS I LEARNED AT OXFORD.

DEBUTANTS

At the end of January 2022, 62 LFE apprentices had made their first-team debuts during the 2021/22 season. Here is a selection of clubs handing out opportunities to young players:

Joe Ackroyd

Barnsley

Joe Ackroyd has been a Barnsley player since the age of 10, and his dream of playing for the senior side came true when he was brought on in the 106th minute in a thrilling Emirates FA Cup victory over Barrow AFC.



Ayman Benarous

Bristol City

18-year-old midfielder Ayman Benarous made his first-team debut as a second-half substitute for Bristol City, helping his hometown club defeat Barnsley 2-1 at Ashton Gate. His appearance came just weeks after netting an impressive hat-trick for the Development squad.



Jobe Bellingham, Jordan James & George Hall

Birmingham City

Following in the footsteps of his older brother Jude, Jobe Bellingham got Birmingham City supporters off their seats when he was brought on in the club's FA Cup extra-time defeat to Plymouth Argyle. The young midfielder's debut arrived at the age of 16 years and 107 days – just 69 days older than when Jude made his Blues debut. Academy duo Jordan James and George Hall, both aged 17, also made their first-team bows in the same month.



Zac Lovelace, Nana Boateng, Tyler Burey, Danny McNamara & Billy Mitchell

Millwall

At 15 years and 340 days old, Zac Lovelace became Millwall's second youngest-ever player when he was brought on by Gary Rowett in the club's 1-0 victory over Coventry.

To feature, the club had to gain permission from Lovelace's school and allow him to do homework on the team bus!

Second-year apprentice Nana Boateng joined academy trio, Tyler Burey, Danny McNamara, and Billy Mitchell, to make a memorable first-team debut against fierce South London rivals Crystal Palace earlier this year.



Josh Hallard, Quaine Bartley, Isaac Olaniyan, Luke Jenkins, Ethan Sutcliffe, Marcel Campbell & Aron Sasu

AFC Wimbledon

The Dons have formed a reputation for using the Papa John's Trophy competition to give opportunities to their young guns, and boss Mark Robinson saw an opportunity to hand out seven senior debuts for the visit of Crystal Palace Under-21's earlier in the campaign. Second-year apprentices Josh Hallard and Quaine Bartley were given the nod to start the game, along with Isaac Olaniyan and Luke Jenkins. In the second half, Ethan Sutcliffe, Marcel Campbell and Aron Sasu were brought on to put the cherry on top of a memorable evening for everyone associated with the Academy.

Will Armitage, Felix Miles, Joel Hunt, Zak Guinan & Grant Horton

Cheltenham Town

By featuring against Exeter City on 5th October, first-year apprentice Will Armitage officially became Cheltenham Town's youngest ever player at the age of 16 years and 213 days. Apprentices Felix Miles, Joel Hunt, Zak Guinan and academy graduate Grant Horton, also made their senior debuts under Michael Duff, this time in the club's 0-0 draw with Chelsea under-21's.



Mason Burstow, Nazir Bakrin, Richard Chin & Ryan Viggars

Charlton Athletic

As far as debuts go, they don't get much better than Mason Burstow's, who scored with his first touch in professional football against Crawley Town. The talented trio, Nazir Bakrin, Richard Chin and Ryan Viggars also made their debuts against Leyton Orient.



Joel Tabiner, Joe Robbins & Tyreece Onyenka

Crewe Alexandra

The League One club are renowned for nurturing some of the country's most talented young players, and three more apprentices have been given the chance to showcase their talent this season. Joel Tabiner, 18, made his professional debut against Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Papa John's Trophy in November, while midfielder Joe Robbins also featured and even went on to grab the third goal in a convincing 3-0 victory at Gresty Road. Young forward Tyreece Onyenka replaced Chris Long in the final minutes of a home game against Shrewsbury Town.

DEBUTANTS

Dylan Boyle, Sam Bird & Cian Hayes

Fleetwood Town

Former youth team skipper Dylan Boyle, and second-year apprentices' Sam Bird and Cian Hayes made their debuts against Bolton Wanderers in the Papa John's Trophy in November 2021. The game ended 1-0 to Wanderers, but all three were praised by Head Coach Stephen Crainey for their performances.



Marcel McIntosh & Murphy Bennett

Forest Green Rovers

17-year-old Marcel McIntosh and 16-year-old Murphy Bennett were handed their professional debuts against Brighton & Hove Albion U21s in the Papa John's Trophy. Manager Rob Edwards was full of praise for the duo.

Emmanuel Ilesanmi, Brad Williams & Ben Tweed

Harrogate Town

Striker Emmanuel Ilesanmi made history when he became the first graduate of Town's academy – which was only launched last summer – to appear for the first team, replacing Jack Muldoon on 83 minutes. He was later followed on to the pitch by midfield academy duo Brad Williams and Ben Tweed.



Aneurin Livermore

Newport County

Second-year scholar Aneurin Livermore made his full League Two debut in September 2021 and played a part in helping his team to a 2-2 draw against Leyton Orient.

Benny Couto, Isaac Modi & Trey Turner

Oldham Athletic

For League Two strugglers Oldham Athletic, this season has been the breakthrough year for full-back Benny Couto, who has gone on to make 21 appearances since his debut in August, scoring one goal. Isaac Modi and Trey Turner have also been given first-team minutes recently.



Ellis Jones & Eden Bailey

Port Vale

Youth team captain Ellis Jones was handed his first-team debut against Rochdale in the Papa John's Trophy this season, coming off the bench to play in the centre of midfield, despite playing most of his academy football at centre back. Young, energetic striker Eden Bailey has also been given a runout, making his league debut in a 2-1 defeat at Newport County in December.

Harry Lewis

Scunthorpe United

LFE apprentice Harry Lewis made a dream start to 2022, by making his League Two debut against Carlisle United on New Year's Day and signing pro terms shortly after. His opportunity arrived two weeks after scoring in the Under-18s' historic FA Youth Cup Third Round tie against Manchester United at Old Trafford.



Owen Cochrane & Sam Tinubu

Stevenage

First-year apprentice Owen Cochrane was handed an opportunity at full-back in Stevenage's League Two fixture against Salford City in December. While Sam Tinubu made the headlines for becoming the club's youngest ever appearance maker at 17 years and 18 days old.

AHEAD OF THE GAME



Studying alongside your football commitments can offer a healthy distraction and give you something to focus on away from the pressures of a changing room. It can also help you plan for life after football, whether that be at 18 or 35, making the transition into everyday life a much smoother process.

Here are four professionals who are currently in Higher Education alongside their football:

Matt Smith

Salford City | League Two
Striker | Age 32
Apprenticeship | Cheltenham Town



1. What are you studying?

I am studying for an MBA (Masters in Business Administration) from the University of Manchester.

2. Did you get help from the PFA with this?

Yes, absolutely. It's an advanced degree, so it costs a little more than your conventional masters degree so at £42,000 (20% discount because I graduated from Manchester with a Bachelors before playing football) the PFA contributed £10,000 to help me out. The rest was self-funded.

3. What was the reason behind your decision to study and why did you choose this qualification?

I wanted to use my downtime more productively as I got later into my career. I'm keen to move into the business world post-football and so felt a top-end masters degree would equip me with a greater skill set for my next chapter and be a beneficial use of my downtime.

4. Does it provide you with a healthy distraction, away from football?

Absolutely. It also provides me with an additional focus away from football. I would say it is a nice element of escapism from the mental rigours of professional sport.

5. What would you say the challenges are when juggling education and football?

The volume of work has been quite overwhelming at times. I've worked late into the night and on my days off, so alongside a tiring football schedule and family commitments it can be quite taxing. But as long as you plan your time accordingly and work out a schedule and stick to it, it's fine.

6. What would your advice be to footballers who are thinking of enrolling on a higher education course alongside their football?

Do it! Don't think too much about it as you can talk yourself out of it. But do it! Football is a short career and there's a lot of life to live after. Equip yourself with the best skill set possible, relevant to what industry or area you'd like to move into. As players, we have a lot of additional time in our day to put our minds to something extra-curricular and it's best to start spinning plates sooner rather than later. You don't want to get to the end of your career and think 'now-what?'

7. And, finally, looking ahead to life after football, do you think that what you are doing now will help and what career do you see yourself going into?

I'd love to stay in football but in a more business-related capacity to compliment my business acumen. Football has been and will always be my network, so whether that's starting my own business (in the field of sport) or working at a more senior level in a football club, it's something I'd like to do in my next chapter.

Jamie Proctor

Port Vale | League Two
Striker | Age 29
Apprenticeship | Preston North End

1. What are you studying?

I am currently studying for my Financial Planning Diploma and hoping to go into Financial Advice once football comes to an end. Below is a list of just some of the qualifications I have worked towards throughout my career. I first started studying aged 19, this was a business degree and accounting degree. I achieved a First Class in Sports Journalism & Broadcasting degree. I am coming to the closing stages of my PGCE teaching qualification.

I am partway through my CII Financial Advisor exams. I've spent time in a board room environment studying Corporate Governance qualifications.

I have completed various modules through the Open University including Duty of Care, Coaching Principles, Depression in Sport, Communication in Sport, Exploring Anxiety.

2. Did you get help from the PFA with this?

The PFA has been great in helping me with my education. They part-funded my journalism degree as it is one of their leading qualifications which they push onto players. Any other study materials I have needed have been subsidised alongside exam fees etc.

3. What was the reason behind your decision to study and why did you choose this qualification?

I always enjoyed school and regardless of my sporting success at a young age I continued to work hard and study for my own personal pride. I left high school with 11 GCSEs, six of them A or above. Not every young player feels this way, it is so easy to get caught up in the emotion of 'I want to be a footballer' or 'I have a professional contract, I am all set for the future now'.

4. Does it provide you with a healthy distraction, away from football?

My argument is that studying and education, in general, gives me purpose. It aids as a distraction when football isn't going too well. I don't buy into the 'I am just a footballer' nonsense, I don't like the umbrella term, I don't like the stereotypes and I hate the fact footballers are categorised because of their job description. Your football career will come to an end no matter what. You need to wake up every day knowing who you are as a person, your job does not define you, you need to have an identity that isn't wrapped around one thing, in this case, football.

5. What would you say the challenges are when juggling education and football?

Studying whilst maintaining a full-time football career is difficult. I was told at many clubs to concentrate on my football and forget everything else. As much as it pains me, I can understand this argument. Managers want you to be fully focused on the here and now as they have vested interests in the on-field results. Others would say that you are studying due to a lack of belief in your ability to prosper as a player and that is why you study, with the latter also becoming a major hindrance.

6. What would your advice be to footballers who are thinking of enrolling on a higher education course alongside their football?

Do something, do anything. You will find another passion. This is where it becomes difficult for players, you have absolutely no idea what career you want to go into when all you have known is football. My advice is to be proactive. As athletes, we have a huge number of transferable skills. Teamwork, resilience, competitiveness, professionalism, belief, and a proven track record of success.

7. And, finally, looking ahead to life after football, do you think that what you are doing now will help and what career do you see yourself going into?

When I am asked about my plans for the future it can be a difficult question to answer. I love the idea of helping individuals, particularly the younger generation. I want to inspire and motivate people to succeed. This was the reasoning behind the decision to complete my PGCE with the aim of working in schools. Despite this, I am a firm believer in creating your own success and being time rich. The finance industry has always intrigued me, the combination of helping secure other people's futures whilst building up a successful one of my own is a fascinating blend. My intentions for the future have always been to forge a career that gives me elements that professional football hasn't. The one aspect that will stay constant though is that I want to be in control of my own success, the harder I work the more successful I will be. This rings true in financial advice. My message? Study and prepare for a future that culminates in what is most important for you. It might be money, it might be an identity, it might be self-worth and pride, it could well be a combination of things. For me, it is to make my family proud and work towards a second career that allows me to be time rich whilst helping others.

Charlie Raglan

Cheltenham | League One
Defender | Age 28
Apprenticeship | Port Vale



1. What are you studying?

Sport and Exercise Science at Manchester Metropolitan.

2. Did you get help from the PFA with this?

I got advice and spoke to other players too. I also spoke to people who aren't footballers who have done this course. I get a bursary every year. It's not as much as it used to be by all accounts, but it does help.

3. What was the reason behind your decision to study and why did you choose this qualification?

It was a case of having a qualification at the end of my career. Football, as we know, can be quite precarious and at the time of commencing my studies, I knew I'd be 30 by the time I completed the course if all goes as planned. Imagining myself at that stage in my life and career with and without the qualification was the biggest factor in my going ahead with it. The aim, I suppose, is to be more attractive to future employers and since it's a subject I'm interested in and around a lot of the time, it may be very useful knowing I'd ultimately like to do something relating to the game I've played all my life.

4. Does it provide you with a healthy distraction, away from football?

It used to! I've recently become a father to twins so I'm distracted as it is! On a serious note, I think we know that as footballers in general we get a bit more time to ourselves than the average person who works 9-5 Monday to Friday. So, I certainly see it as better use of the time we do get. It doesn't necessarily have to be a degree, but I'd say doing something away from football, something that you can chip away at with an eye on the future can only be a good thing.

5. What would you say the challenges are when juggling education and football?

The biggest challenge for me now is time. Before, it was motivation to use that time effectively. We all have moments when those couple of hours assigned for reading or studying become watching a series you've not seen for a while. Or it could be a case of needing to find when you work best. I know I work better in the morning and don't mind waking up a bit earlier to do the work. Because I know I won't feel like it later in the day. Others are different obviously. And that's still a challenge that needs to be worked on.

6. What would your advice be to footballers who are thinking of enrolling on a higher education course alongside their football?

I'd say to do your research. Ask other players you know because you will probably have similar schedules and that can be a big factor as to how you're going to organise your life ultimately. Get the right subject too. It sounds obvious but knows that you're committing to this subject for the next 3/5 years, so you want to get that right. And it's not for everyone, we know that. My biggest advice would be to just have a think about the future. Ask yourself what is out there; use the PFA, LFE etc. I think most players will want to get to the end of their careers and not be panicking about what they're going to do. Things like this will help so it's certainly worth thinking about.

7. And, finally, looking ahead to life after football, do you think that what you are doing now will help and what career do you see yourself going into?

For me, I hope this will help! Looking ahead to CVs, it looks much healthier with an undergraduate degree on it. The subject opens different pathways throughout the sports science world. It might not be for me, but I feel I'll look back and think that what I did was the right thing for me, and the time and the alternatives were either not for me or it was a case of doing nothing. It was always with an eye on the future, that's the main thing.

Nathan Thompson

Peterborough United | Championship
Midfielder | Age 31
Apprenticeship | Swindon Town

1. What are you studying?

I'm currently working towards a Masters in Sports Directorship. The course is based out of the Etihad campus and is through VSI in association with UCFB and East London University.

2. Did you get help from the PFA with this?

Yeah, the PFA were able to contribute 50% towards the course fee, which with the cost of education, I'm extremely grateful for. As players, we really should be making use of this incentive.

3. What was the reason behind your decision to study and why did you choose this qualification?

The business aspect of football has always interested me, however with a lack of experience within the decision-making aspects of the sport, I thought it would be very difficult to transition into similar sorts of roles. This qualification has given me the opportunity to step outside my comfort zone and enhance skills I have neglected since leaving school. In addition, it's also allowed me to network and connect with like-minded individuals, which also helps me improve.

4. Does it provide you with a healthy distraction, away from football?

This has been one of the biggest unforeseen benefits of the course. Although I have always argued for the advantages of studying, having a focus like an assignment has allowed me to keep perspective on what is happening on the pitch. Striving for promotion at the back end of last season, the games felt highly pressured, having a release that allowed me to completely switch off from football was extremely beneficial, whilst also understanding it was helping me towards a better future.

5. What would you say the challenges are when juggling education and football?

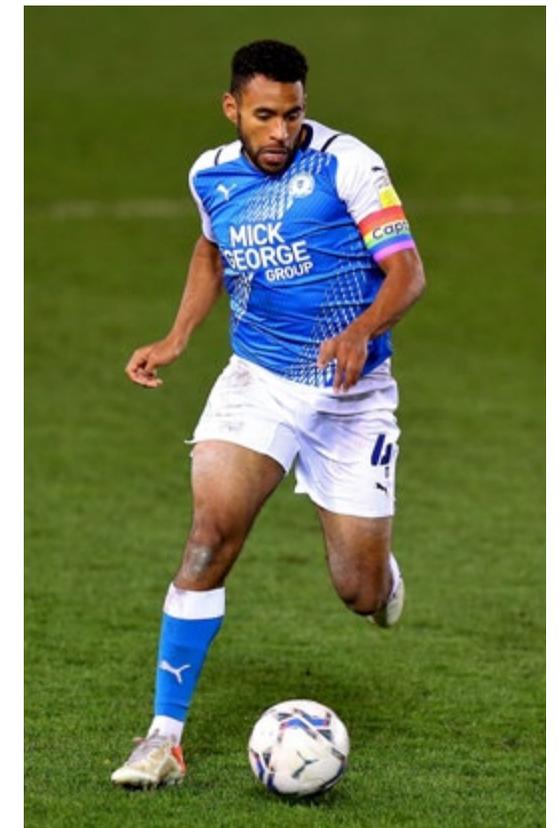
Whenever players have interests away from football – whether that's education, businesses or something similar, they are held to a higher standing. By this I mean, whenever a player has a bad game whilst having additional interests away from the pitch, people assume that is the reason behind poor performance. Although as players we expect that from the press and public, it can be harder to accept from those in positions of authority like coaching staff and management. This can be a reason why many are reluctant to start and ultimately makes the transition post-football that much more difficult.

6. What would your advice be to footballers who are thinking of enrolling on a higher education course alongside their football?

Give it a go, try to enrol in a course that provides support throughout so that you are not left on your own with just workbooks. This can be demoralising and unmotivating. As players, we are a long time retired and if we can set the wheels in motion prior to our retirement, it could help with that transition that many struggle with. Also, with the spare time we have on our hands, there is no better time to start.

7. And, finally, looking ahead to life after football, do you think that what you are doing now will help and what career do you see yourself going into?

I certainly hope so. What I have to come to realise is that it may not be directly the avenue I aim to go down once I retire, however, the skills that the course has taught me, will forever hold me in better stead. I am therefore forever grateful for taking the plunge and enrolling in higher education.

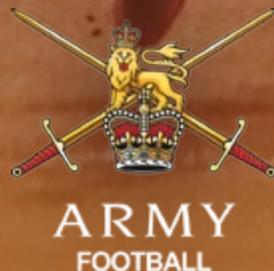


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OLDHAM

YOUNG

ATHLETIC



This season, six youngsters have put pen to paper on their first professional contracts, while three apprentices have made their first-team debuts.

Last month, 18-year-old Kane Badby joined fellow young guns Benny Couto, Harry Vaughan, Junior Luamba, Vani Da Silva, and Will Sutton, in realising his dream of turning professional.

Those deals, along with Couto, Trey Turner and Isaac Modi's debuts, shine a light on the hard work that is happening behind the scenes at Boundary Park, from Head of Academy Conor Marlin to Phil Arbelo-Dolan, who heads up the education within the academy.

The League Two club currently sit at the base of the football league pyramid and have recently reappointed former Latics player and manager John Sheridan as Head Coach to, hopefully, turn their season around. While results haven't necessarily gone their way, the opportunities

presented to youth stars such as Couto and Vaughan have been a huge positive for Latics fans and everyone associated with the academy. It is a testament to not only the recent interim boss Selim Benachour and former managers Keith Curle and Harry Kewell for placing their faith in young players, but also the quality being produced from under-9s to under-18s.

Arbelo-Dolan shared his delight at seeing the progression of the academy players, some of which have progressed all the way through the age groups:

"As an academy, we are extremely proud. To watch the likes of Harry [Vaughan] come through under Harry Kewell and establish himself in the first team has been superb. Keith Curle came in and gave the youth a chance, which, again, for us involved in the academy is brilliant.

"Benny [Couto] has taken his chance at wing-back and made

the position his own. Trey Turner has recently made his debut, along with Isaac Modi. We've had both apprentice keepers on the bench and on some days had five academy players involved in the matchday squad. At League Two level I think that is unheard of.

"There has been a real progression in how many players we are getting through. That is what pleases us most. Last year we had four players turn pro. The year before that we had zero, so you can see that something has changed and there is now an investment in the future.

"Being an Oldham Athletic fan, as well as the Head of Education, it is great to see."

Managing the educational side of the LFE apprenticeship programme falls under Arbelo-Dolan's remit, which requires meticulous planning and an enhanced understanding when his learners are advancing into a first-team environment.



Conor Marlin, Head of Academy



Benny Couto



George Edmundson

Introducing the new SEP programme, maintaining high BTEC grades and engaging in local community initiatives are just a few of the challenges he faces, but he has been pleased with how the group has adapted.

“It’s difficult because the educational side of things has changed immensely,” Arbelo-Dolan says.

“Now that a lot of them are involved with the first team, they are doing a lot of travelling, training commitments have increased and there is more pressure on them to perform on the pitch. They might have an away game on a Tuesday and then be back in for education on a Wednesday.

“To cater for those demands we have had to change our education sessions to work around the players who are involved with the first team.

“The way they have dealt with it has been great and we are confident that we will get them all through both the BTEC and SEP programmes.”

It isn’t unusual to see so many talented teens in a Latics first team. In fact, the supporters will have grown accustomed to the club’s best youngsters being given opportunities on the big stage, with many academy graduates making a name for themselves.

EFL enthusiasts will remember George Edmundson’s gradual rise from youth level to first-team football and how seamless

the transition appeared. Having earned the trust of manager Darren Kelly, the defender debuted against Shrewsbury Town in the Football League Trophy and went on to make a further 78 appearances before Scottish powerhouse Rangers FC snapped him up for an undisclosed fee. In 2019, forward Zak Emmerson played three games while only 15 years old, before moving to Premier League outfit Brighton & Hove Albion a year later. Chelsea successfully tempted Danny Philliskirk into a move to Cobham, Tom Eaves was bought by Bolton Wanderers after 15 senior appearances, and Joel Coleman moved up to the Championship with Huddersfield Town following his impressive breakthrough season in 2015.

For Marlin, who joined the Latics academy almost six years ago from the Irish Football Association, his work as Head of Academy is heavily based around player development, quality of coaching and ensuring that the day-to-day operations within the academy are running as smoothly as possible, while also working with the first-team manager to ensure there is a clear pathway for the young gems.

Since stepping into his current role at the beginning of the season, Oldham have not only started to produce talent good enough for League Two level but who are also attracting attention from clubs higher up the pyramid.



Harry Vaughan



Junior Luamba



Vani Da Silva

“Everybody needs an opportunity. Without that, you will never know how good a player can be,” Marlin says. “The youngsters have certainly stepped up to the plate and it’s exciting to know that there are more coming up behind them. Their debuts and professional contracts should inspire everyone else in the academy.

By building a reputation for giving young players opportunities, Marlin is hoping it can help from a recruitment standpoint:

“I would like to hope that what we are doing is being spoken about. Zak Emmerson at 15, Harry Vaughan at 16 - within the last three years, we’ve seen a lot of youngsters come through.

“We try to play the right way and we are a place of opportunity, so, hopefully, players want to come here.”

What most don’t see is the work that goes into developing the

psychological aspects of young footballers to ensure they are equipped with the tools to cope inside such a high-pressured environment.

Through a unique personal development programme, LFE work with apprentices around the country to enhance their understanding in areas such as identity, performance, wellbeing and transition.

And throughout the 2021/22 campaign, former professional footballer and mentor Mark Roberts has been working closely with Oldham Athletics’ youth team, passing on his extensive knowledge and experience in the industry, and delving into the challenges young players may face.

“I have enjoyed working with the group this year. Stepping up into the first team environment presents a fantastic opportunity for these individuals, but it can also be a difficult transition

and a real challenge for young players,” Roberts explains.

“An area we look at in our personal development sessions is how sometimes transitions can be positive, where we step out of our comfort zone and we thrive, but sometimes those transitions don’t work out how we want them to.

“Players might find themselves having to take a step back and drop back down to the youth team. The question we ask is ‘how is that going to affect us as an individual?’

“Sometimes those circumstances are out of your control. There might be three or four players playing in your position, or the player you replaced is back from injury. In a first-team environment, a lot is going on, so often those things aren’t explained. The work that I do acts as a support mechanism in the difficult times, as well as the good ones.”

“THE YOUNGSTERS HAVE CERTAINLY STEPPED UP TO THE PLATE AND IT’S EXCITING TO KNOW THAT THERE ARE MORE COMING UP BEHIND THEM. THEIR DEBUTS AND PROFESSIONAL CONTRACTS SHOULD INSPIRE EVERYONE ELSE IN THE ACADEMY.”

LFE Apprentices Journey

1 Offer of an Apprenticeship – LFE welcomes you to the two-year Apprenticeship Programme.

2 Apprentice Support – LFE Regional Officers provide ongoing support to apprentices. They conduct one-to-one progress reviews at regular intervals throughout the apprenticeship programme and offer advice and guidance on a range of areas. The PFA also support apprentices with contractual assistance, accident insurance, player management and representation and post-18 education grants, as well as providing an online safety net.

3 Initial Assessment - An Initial Assessment is carried out with every player that starts the apprenticeship programme to establish academic ability. This is undertaken with parents/guardians, club staff, college staff and regional officers. Apprentices will be expected to provide their GCSE results to their regional officer. All apprentices will undertake an online bksb assessment as part of the Initial Assessment process.

4 Induction - An Induction will take place at the start of the apprenticeship programme. LFE provides each club with a set of standard induction units that includes Safeguarding, Apprenticeship Programme, Employment Rights & Responsibilities, Rules & Regulations, Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Drugs Awareness, Well-being.

5 Football Player Development - Apprentices will follow their club's specific coaching programme and philosophy over the next two years. Training is likely to include work on technical and tactical skills, physical conditioning and psychology. Apprentices will be evaluated on technical ability, teamwork, character and physical condition.

6 Education Programme - The educational programme has been specifically designed for elite athletes and is geared towards nationally recognised qualifications. The educational programme will consist of the following elements: Sporting Excellence Professional (Level 3), BTEC Sporting Excellence and Performance (Level 3), Functional Skills (Level 2), Certificate in Coaching (UEFA C). There are three BTEC qualification sizes: BTEC National Extended Certificate | 360 Guided Learning Hours (equivalent to 1 A-Level), BTEC National Diploma | 720 Guided Learning Hours (equivalent to 2 A-Levels), BTEC National Extended Diploma | 1080 Guided Learning Hours (equivalent to 3 A-Levels).

7 Personal Development and Life Skills - League Football Education provide information, advice and guidance for personal development. Through face-to-face delivery and resources, apprentices receive opportunities to support their performance, well-being, and transition. LFE's Personal Development Model provides a framework for club staff and apprentices to understand the supportive outcomes and process for wider development. While LFE's Life Skills programme aims to raise awareness and empower apprentices with knowledge and skills to deal with the demands of football and life.

8 Reviewing Apprentice Progress - Apprentice reviews are conducted with LFE Regional Officers and are recorded on an e-learning platform. This process is to ensure that all apprentices can fulfil their true potential. Reviews take place at regular intervals throughout the apprenticeship. LFE celebrates the academic, football and wider achievements of apprentices throughout the two-year programme. Nominations for 'The 11' and 'LFE Apprentice of the Year' are largely based on information gathered from the review process.

9 End Point Assessment - Towards the end of the Sporting Excellence Professional Apprenticeship Standard, apprentices will be required to complete an End Point Assessment which consists of a knowledge test, a practical observation and a professional interview supported by a portfolio of evidence.

10 Decision Time - In the second half of year two of the apprenticeship, clubs will reach a decision on which apprentices they wish to offer professional contracts to. Whatever the decision, it is crucial that apprentices continue with both their football and education to give them the best possible chance to succeed at the end of their apprenticeship.

11 Transition - League Football Education defines 'Transition' as the ability to deal with and move through life challenges, including career pathways in and out of football. LFE is fully committed to supporting that journey, offering transition information through a qualified Transition Officer, USA Scholarships, Erasmus, Assessment Trials, Higher Education and signposting other career opportunities.



TAKING OWNERSHIP



AFC Wimbledon's unique player-led strategy has been yielding impressive results since it was introduced by former Academy Manager and current first-team boss Mark Robison.

Last season, The Dons youth team defeated Rotherham United to lift the EFL Youth Alliance Cup. They have continued their dominance this season too, winning the EFL Youth Alliance South East with three games to go and matching an academy record for the highest ever win in the FA Youth Cup. There have been plenty of first-team opportunities handed out too, with the Papa John's Trophy frequently utilised as a stage for youngsters to stake their claim for professional contacts.

Since the academy was formed in 2011, Robison has played a pivotal role in helping Will Nightingale, Anthony Hartigan, Paul Osew, Jack Rudoni and Paul Kalambayi progress into the first team. All in all, over 378 league appearances have been made by AFC Wimbledon academy players in that time. Now striving for more success, the Category Three academy is seeking new ways to develop players and the conception of the innovative player-led programme is evidence of their desire to take things to the next level.

But how has the programme been formed and what purpose does it serve?

"As an academy, we've always done stuff unconsciously, without it actually being structured or formulated into the programme," Academy Manager Michael Hamilton tells LFE, "but regarding the actual player-led programme, the tipping point was Mark Robison when he was the Under-18s manager.

"Mark came away from the Advanced Youth Award and began exploring different ways to give more ownership and responsibility to the players. One day he said, 'I want to send the apprentices to a game with no coaches and I want them to lead it'.

"At first, of course, it could have gone either way. We didn't know whether it was going to be a success or a failure. We had to map it out and make sure that we looked at all eventualities. And it's worth noting that isn't something we introduced overnight, we built up to where we are today over a period of time.

"The reaction has been brilliant. The players don't get it right every time, but we are big on that, learning from mistakes and embracing the chaos. Throughout the academy, we encourage players to get comfortable being uncomfortable and our player-led programme places a lot of emphasis on that."

Second-year apprentice Ben Mason has been wearing the armband this year and in turn, been given the added responsibility of organising his teammates during a player-led fixture. Having that extra weight on his shoulders hasn't fazed the young full-back, who has recently spent time away with Ireland Under-19s.

"As captain and as a group, we enjoy the challenge of a player-led game. It's definitely boosted our ownership and made us more accountable. I think, as well, it's opened our eyes as to how good we can be without relying on a coach or a sports scientist.

"We are very player-led anyway, so I think we have taken to it quite naturally.

"For example, I get in the morning and see the first-team coaching staff to see what they need for the day ahead, whether it be poles, the goals put in a certain place. We all have to chip in and manage the jobs around the training ground, and if something is wrong or one of us doesn't do our job properly then we are held accountable.

"I think it's a good environment to work in because it prepares you for the future. The teamwork side of it especially. The higher up you go, the less reliant you have to become on others. Doing this now, at this stage in our careers, can only help."

Leading up to a self-managed game, the players are tasked with running their own team meetings and presentations and even plan their own training sessions on a Friday.

"We usually sit down before training to discuss the session and our shape, and then afterwards we do our set-pieces

and opposition presentation," Mason reveals.

"The injured players play a huge part on the matchday. Ultimately, they are the coaches. They will be the ones standing on the sidelines, greeting the referee and officials before the game, speaking to the opposition coaches and getting the changing rooms ready."

There is one specific player-led game that stands out in Mason's mind, not only because he scored two goals from right-back, but because of the mentality that he and his teammates showed to come back from a two-goal deficit to claim three points.

"I won't forget the [Leyton] Orient game any time soon," he says.

"The biggest challenge was actually in the morning. None of the coaches were in and the game was called off because of a waterlogged pitch. We did everything we could to get it on. We used the spikes at the

bottom of poles and mannequins to stab holes into the pitch and drain the water. We brushed the water off with brushes from the cupboard. It took us about 45 minutes.

"Then in the actual game, we got off to a terrible start. Funnily enough, the day before, we had a meeting and talked through different scenarios. Just so that we could mentally prepare for any situation and think about how we would cope with it. Somebody wrote 2-0 down on the board and within 20 minutes, we were 2-0 down.

"We ended up coming back to win the game 4-2. It showed how high our standards are; to make changes, sacrifice certain players at half-time, change our formation, and fight back the way we did.

"I think that game just proved how good we can be when we take ownership, make our own decisions and stop relying on others."

"THE PLAYERS DON'T GET IT RIGHT EVERY TIME, BUT WE ARE BIG ON THAT, LEARNING FROM MISTAKES AND EMBRACING THE CHAOS." MICHAEL HAMILTON
ACADEMY MANAGER
AFC WIMBLEDON



YOUR ATHLETIC IDENTITY

As you grow older, move to different places and meet new people, 'Who am I?' is a question you may ask yourself. At any age and in any career, people fulfil a series of roles or 'identities' in life.

What are your roles or identities? While your friends know you by your social identity, relatives see your family identity and school friends will remember your academic identity.

On top of this, footballers will also form an athletic identity. This is the way you perceive and feel about your sporting role, which comprises your goals, values, thoughts, and sensations related to your sport. It is the image you have in your head when you think about yourself as a footballer.

The other side of the athletic identity is how you wish to be seen by others. Without being aware of it, both will influence how you act and behave in different situations, such as when you are seeing friends, visiting grandparents, and talking to your coach.

You have both a private view of yourself that is often kept hidden and a public view that reinforces the way you wish to be seen by others. For some, these two versions – the private and the public – are the same. Whereas, for others, they are very different.

These private and public identities shape your behaviour in a range of situations. Sometimes you may present yourself differently from how you see yourself, either because of pressure to be a particular type of person to fit in, or maybe because you are presenting yourself in a way that is more favourable to a situation.

People may only talk to you and treat you in a way that coincides with how you publicly present yourself. A potential difficulty arises when you present yourself to others in a different way to how you see yourself and furthermore, when dealing with career transitions and challenges.

Career transitions and challenges:

- You are dropped from the starting line-up
- Your coach makes a comment about your performance
- You score a winning goal or save a penalty
- You are receiving a contract decision
- You suffer from an injury or illness

These transitions can affect your athletic identity. How you interpret these challenges, how you respond to career transitions and how you receive feedback to understand your value, is all influenced by your athletic identity. This directly affects your self-esteem, your level of motivation and your emotions which then becomes a problem if your athletic identity is exclusive and the only way in which you view yourself and your success.

While having strong self-awareness of your athletic identity is important, finding the right balance ensures that you are not over-committing to the role of an athlete.

Through LFE's Personal Development and Life Skills workshops, you are encouraged to consider who you are as a person. Establishing a clearer understanding of who you are, pursuing other interests and embracing different roles and identities in life can help to support performance, well-being, and transition.

An example of an athlete who has a broad identity is Marcus Rashford. Despite on-the-field success, Rashford is committed to supporting the community, campaigning, and writing children's books, all while maintaining full dedication towards his football career. By pursuing other interests, he is able to develop transferable skills and find the right balance.

If you would like further information and support about identity and personal development, you can contact a member of club staff or LFE via your Regional Officer.



10 TIPS FROM MANAGING YOUR MONEY

Since 2014, Red Star Education has been delivering financial literacy workshops to apprentices and young professionals as part of LFE's Life Skills Programme.

Combining their experience in independent financial advising and higher education teaching, company directors Kristen and Nick Cunliffe tailor each session specifically for apprentices. Learners can use Red Star Education for advice on money management, income tax, car insurance, credit & debt and future planning.



Here are their top 10 tips for young footballers looking to make the best of their income.

1 BUDGET

This might seem like the most boring exercise ever but by making a budget – and sticking to it – you will not only know where your money is going but also allow yourself to project into the future and achieve your financial goals.

2 SET A FINANCIAL GOAL

Avoid finishing your apprenticeship with nothing to show for it. Whether it is a car, holiday or just some savings in the bank - set a financial goal, work out how much to save each month and build it into your budget.

3 WATCH OUT FOR INVISIBLE SPENDING

Small contactless payments or online subscriptions can add up to over £21 per week on average – that's over £1000 a year. Check your bank statements to see exactly what you are spending and where – then cut back if you can.

4 DON'T SAY YOU'RE A STUDENT ON YOUR CAR INSURANCE

Insurance companies consider you to have occupation if you are in an academy, so don't assume you can claim to be a student. Our advice is to speak to an independent insurance broker for guidance to ensure your policy is valid.

5 CAR INSURANCE PREMIUMS WILL BE MORE EXPENSIVE FOR PROFESSIONAL SPORTS PLAYERS

This is mainly because drivers whose income is dependent on physical fitness are more likely to be entitled to high compensation payments if they are injured in a car accident. This would be a very high payout for a professional footballer on a high income. Make sure to check out the cost of car insurance BEFORE you buy or lease a car to make sure you can afford it.

6 BE PREPARED FOR INCOME TAX

You will pay tax once your annual income is over £12,570 so whatever your income is now, or in the future, do not forget that if it is more than this per year you will pay Income Tax. You will pay National Insurance too when you earn more than £184 per week, so don't expect to receive your full wages. The basic rate tax is 20% and National Insurance is 12%. Your budget should always be based on your NET income (after tax and other deductions).

7 SAVE – FOR SAVING'S SAKE

Even if you have no specific financial goal, or you have much more income than you need, save as much as you can. As a guide, you should aim to save at least 20% of your net income (if you earn £150 per week that would be £30).

8 BEWARE OF SCAMS AND GET RICH QUICK SCHEMES

There are lots of scams around, ones that even claim to be from HMRC (the tax office) trying to get your bank or other personal details. Be hyper-aware of where you send your personal details, especially online and on your phone. Also, be wary of schemes (often crypto currency or Forex trading) that claim they can make massive profits quickly. These are usually false claims and are designed to take your money off you.

9 USE YOUR PENSION

We know that old age is a long way off BUT as potentially high earners at a young age do not overlook the advantages of building up your pension funds while you are still young. As well as a generous £6000 per year contribution from the PFA as a professional player, if you add to your own pension, the Government will give you tax relief. If you pay £50 into a pension, the Government adds £12.50. Whilst there are some restrictions on how much you can pay in, there are some fabulous benefits for building up pension funds and these should not be discounted because old age seems too far in the future.

10 BE CAREFUL WHERE YOU GET YOUR ADVICE

We know that as your career develops you might want an agent, manager, accountant, lawyer, or financial adviser. You might want one of each. Remember that whoever you work with will charge you fees (none of these professionals work for free) and therefore you should know how much you are paying and what services you will receive. Your relationship with advisers should be one you trust and all information about you and your finances should be treated with the strictest confidence. Remember always to ask questions before making any financial decision – a good adviser will always make sure you understand everything you are signing up for before you proceed.



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GOAL OF THE MONTH

LFE's Goal of the Month competition recognises the best strikes from across the Academy Leagues.

From individual moments of brilliance to excellent team goals, last year was filled with memorable strikes.

Here are the winners so far:



AUGUST

Jeffrey Forkuo

Plymouth Argyle's Jeffrey Forkuo scooped the first Goal of the Month award for the 2021/22 season with an excellent long-distance strike against Oxford United.

The midfielder beat Sheffield Wednesday's Leajo Davidson to the trophy by just 2% of the votes.



SEPTEMBER

Will Jenkins-Davies

Forkuo's midfield partner Will Jenkins-Davies claimed 40% of September's vote, thanks to his stunning 20-yard free-kick that helped his side defeat AFC Bournemouth Under-18s. The midfielder has since penned his first professional contract and made his league debut as a late substitute in a 4-1 away victory to Accrington Stanley.



OCTOBER

Rhys Shirley

Rhys Shirley's goal against Portsmouth Under-18s made it three awards in a row for Argyle. The second-year apprentice rounded off some terrific footwork with a tidy finish from just inside the 18-yard box. The striker scored his first professional goal against Swansea City in the League Cup just two months before.



NOVEMBER

Oisín Gallagher

Lincoln City's first-year apprentice Oisín Gallagher claimed a mighty 47% of votes during November's Goal of the Month competition. The first-year apprentice found the net with an impressive long-range free-kick in the Under-18s' FA Youth Cup penalty shootout defeat to Aylestone Park.



DECEMBER

Bailey Cadamarteri

Bailey Cadamarteri's excellent finish for Sheffield Wednesday was enough to send December's Goal of the Month trophy his way. Son of former Everton striker Danny, Cadamarteri netted the only goal of the game in a memorable FA Youth Cup win at Southampton.



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Joe Thompson @IAmJoeThompson
As a mentor it's my job to lay the foundations to allow these young men to thrive. But sometimes they energise me 🙌 An unbelievable this morning with @WednesdayYouth

A real credit to @swfc
Lots of great ideas thrown about! Now it's time to put it into action. @LFEonline ⚽



League Football Education @LFEonline
The Premier League, The FA, EFL, LMA and PFA have come together to launch the Coach Index, a self-registration system providing black, Asian, mixed heritage and female coaches with information about employment opportunities in professional football.

Port Vale FC @OfficialPVFC
Before today's match @PVFCacademy players Ellis Jones and Eden Bailey were presented with signed shirts to commemorate their first professional appearances.



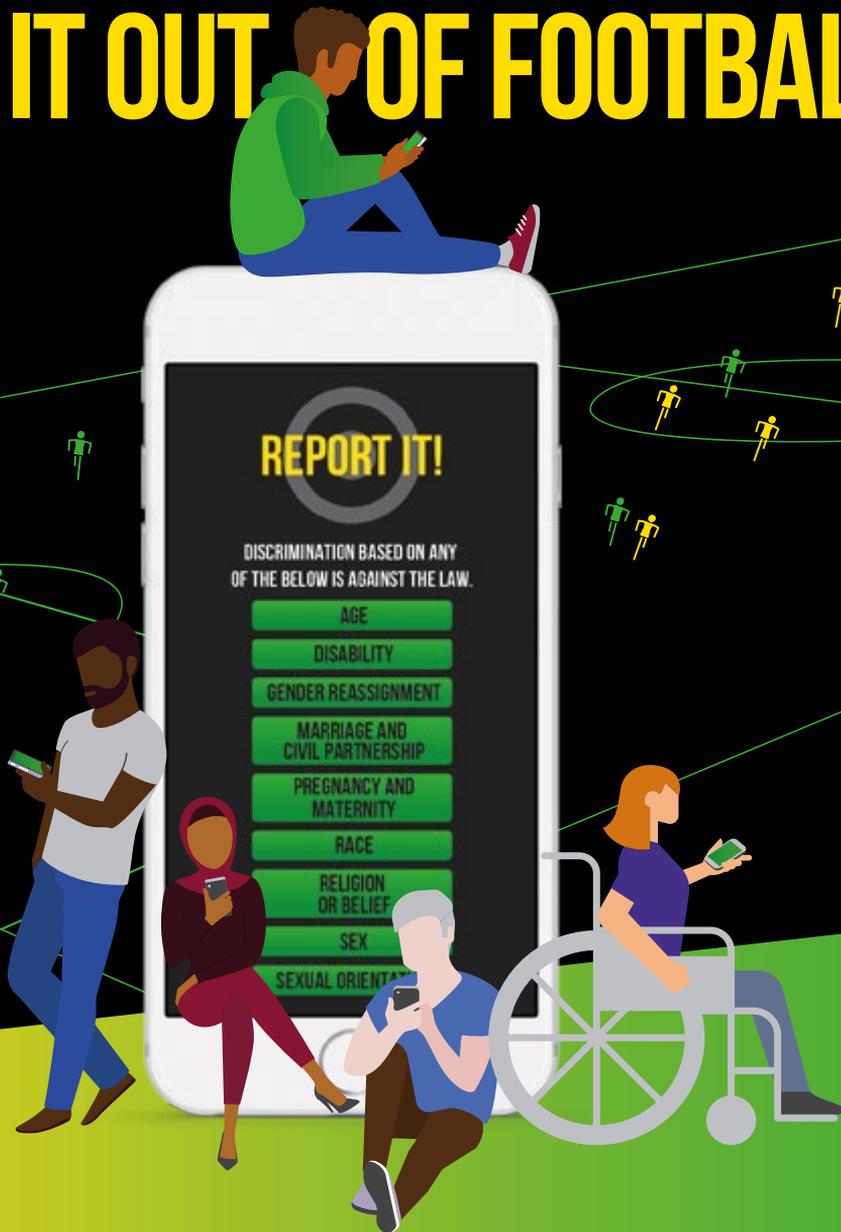
League Football Education @LFEonline
LFE would like to warn apprentices of a potential online extortion scam involving an under-18 player and a club staff member.

If any apprentice has been the target of attempted blackmail, please report it to a club staff member or your club's designated Safeguarding Officer.

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