THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE

EFL MAGAZINE

ISSUE SEVEN // WINTER 2022

INSIDE



STEVEN SCHUMACHER
Taking the wheel at Plymouth Argyle

IN GOOD KOMPANY

VINCENT KOMPANY IS FAST BECOMING ONE OF ENGLISH FOOTBALL'S MOST TALKED ABOUT UP-AND-COMING MANAGERS

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[EFL COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR]

WELCOME...

... to the Winter 2022 edition of the EFL Magazine, which marks the end of an exciting and eventful year for the EFL and its Clubs, both on and off the pitch.

Some of the most memorable stories and successes over the past 12 months are celebrated in this issue, while many of the important issues and challenges that lie ahead are discussed.

In the summer, Burnley made a statement appointment when naming four-time Premier League winner Vincent Kompany as their new manager. The former Manchester City player features in this edition of the magazine, discussing his decision to take on the challenge of trying to get Burnley promoted from the Sky Bet Championship, as well as reminiscing about his longstanding relationship with the Carabao Cup, a competition he won four times.

Another manager enjoying success so far this season is Plymouth Argyle boss Steven Schumacher, who talks about his step up from being an assistant manager and overseeing the Pilgrims' run to the top of Sky Bet League One.

There's also an interview with Bristol City starlet Alex Scott, reflecting on his rise in the game, while the overall impact the EFL has on bringing young players into the game is put into focus with memories from former Kids and Girls Cup participants Will Hughes and Adam Wharton, as well as a deep dive into the benefits the Papa Johns Trophy provides for youth development.

The future of broadcasting is a pressing issue for the EFL, and Chief Commercial Officer Ben Wright discusses the rationale for the recent Request for Proposal and the possible outcomes for the League.

The potential impact of the Fan-Led Review is assessed, with three politicians from across the political spectrum, including



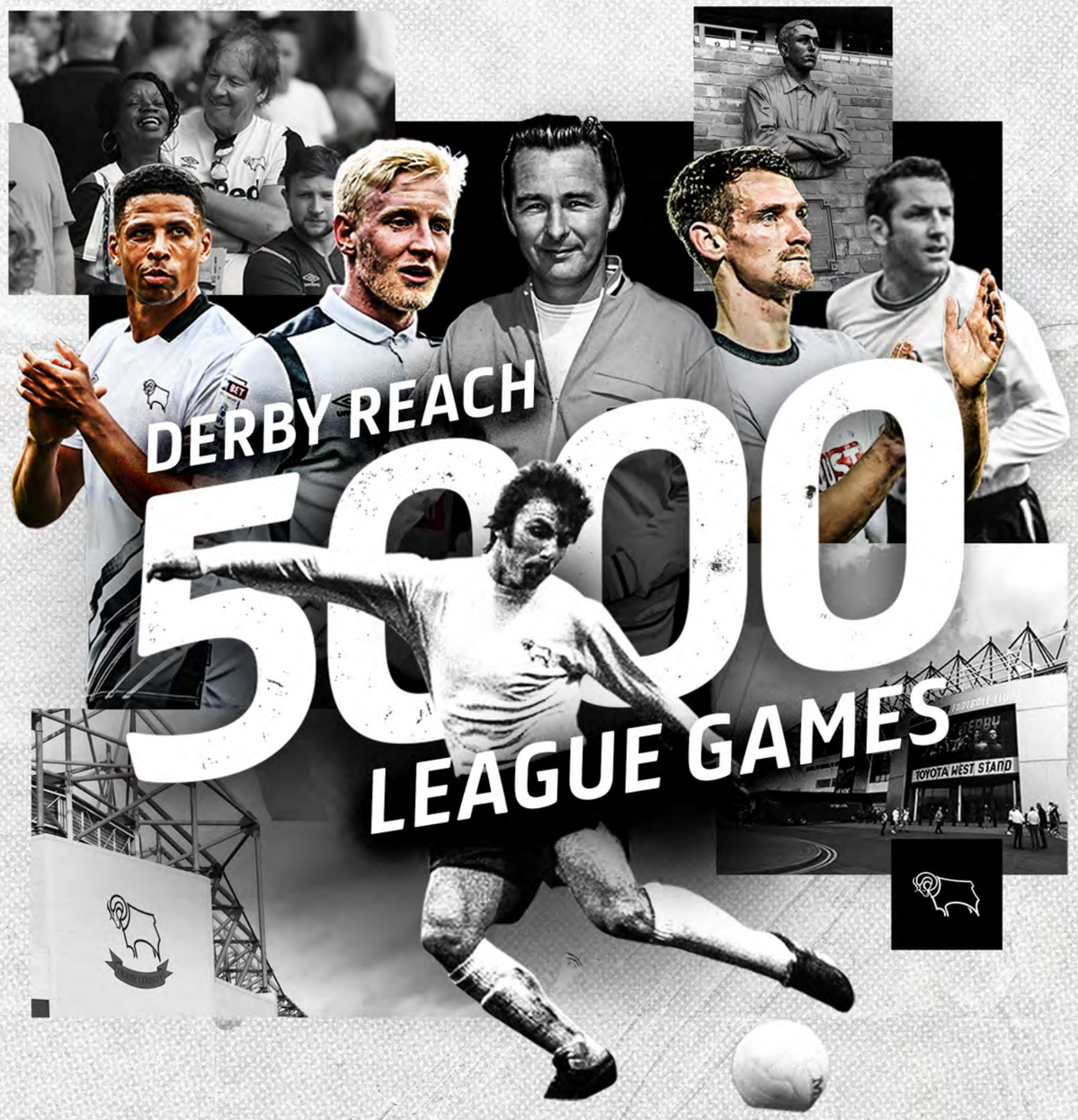
Tracey Crouch CBE MP, looking at the status of the report, 12 months after she initially oversaw its release, while there is also a detailing of the League's approach to addressing crowd behaviour issues.

This edition of the magazine will take you behind the scenes of the EFL, with an introduction to the new Club Financial Reporting Unit and a breakdown of the responsibilities of the Football Services Team.

And finally, there is a look at the excellent work Clubs do off the pitch across multiple areas, including community, fan experiences and the LFE Personal Development Programme.

Please enjoy the stories we have captured here.

MARK ROWAN
EFL Communications Director







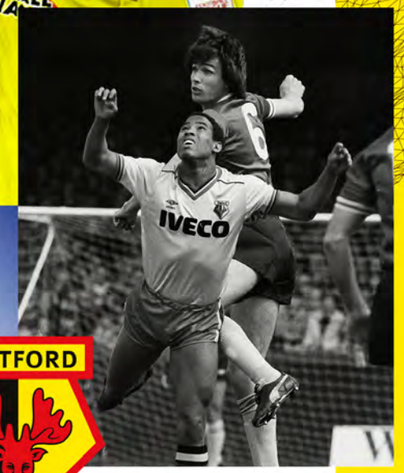
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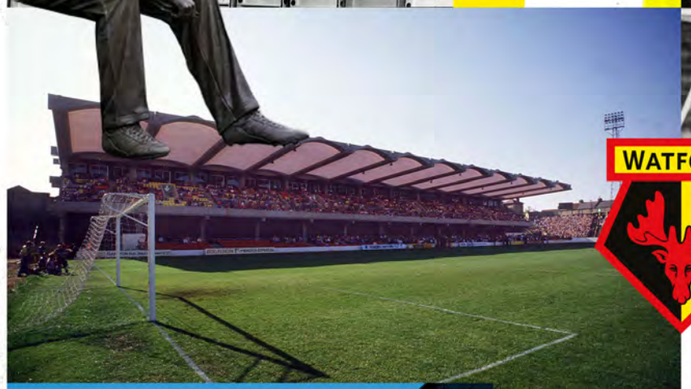
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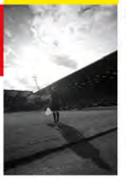




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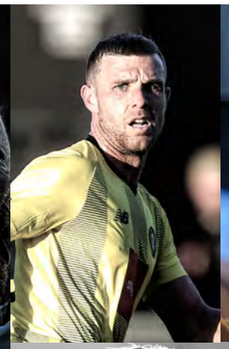




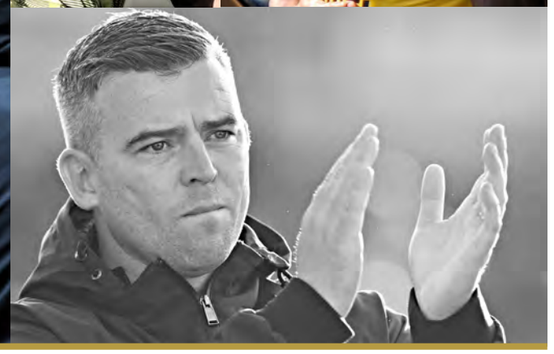












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HUGH WOOZENCROFT

A view from the studio...



SO FAR, IT'S BEEN A REALLY ENTERTAINING SEASON. THE QUALITY OF FOOTBALL IS AS GOOD AS IT HAS EVER BEEN, WE'RE SEEING LOTS OF EXCITING YOUNG PLAYERS MAKE THEIR MARK AND THE FOOTBALL ON SHOW PROVIDES PLENTY OF ENTERTAINMENT EACH WEEK. THAT SHOWS HOW GOOD A PRODUCT WE HAVE HERE AND HOW SPECIAL IT IS.

I see presenting the highlights show on ITV each week as a huge responsibility. EFL fans up and down the country will know how busy Saturdays are, but it's really enjoyable and I'm lucky to be covering it.

Last season, we welcomed fans back properly and it's clear that is continuing into this season. Across the entire EFL this season, the fans and attendances have been amazing. José Mourinho once said that attendances are the reason England is the 'home of football', and he was right.

Everyone talks about the Premier League being great, which of course it is, but actually, you go down to the fourth tier in England and you see 20,000 fans at Bradford City in League Two every week or 30,000 at Derby County in League One and it's just remarkable. You wouldn't get attendances like that in the third and fourth tier anywhere else in the world and that's a reminder to people just how special it is and how much football is incredibly loved in this country. It's what makes it so unique and I'm reminded of that every week when I'm working on the highlights show. It underlines the responsibility that we have when covering the EFL to showcase just how special it is.

It's always a massive cliché to say that anyone can beat anyone, but in the EFL that is literally true.

When you look at the Championship and you look at the teams that came down from the Premier League, they aren't running away with the league like others have perhaps done in previous seasons and it sets it up really nicely.

So far, it's been really entertaining. We've seen such a mix of results and, although there's a long way to go, I think the unpredictability and inconsistency of results in the Championship this season means we're going to have a really tight title race and a really tight top six.

A couple of Clubs have stood out for me. I've been really impressed with Birmingham City and the job John Eustace has done. At the start of the season, I think a few people feared for them, but he's done a great job. The young players that have come in and made an impact have been really impressive and, combined with the experienced players in Scott Hogan, John Ruddy and Troy Deeney, they're doing well. It's all credit to the recruitment and the management, and again just highlights the unpredictability of the Championship as a division.

Burnley are obviously making the headlines at the moment by being top of the table and having Vincent Kompany as manager – I can see them being the team to beat in terms of overall quality. I've been really impressed with the job Kompany has done, his recruitment process and the style of football he's got his side playing. It's great to see such a great former player managing in the EFL and I also look forward to seeing the rise of Michael Carrick as a manager in the Championship after joining Middlesbrough; again, another young manager cutting his teeth in the EFL.

In League One, Plymouth Argyle of course stand out – they've just been fantastic. Since stepping up to his managerial role, Steven Schumacher has done a hell of a job, not only in terms of the quality of football his side play, but in terms of how he is developing his players. They've got such great attacking quality in their side, and young, attacking quality too. Players like Bali Mumba and Finn Azaz are proof of the role the EFL plays in a player's development.

Kieran McKenna at Ipswich Town has also caught the eye in League One. He's another young manager fighting it out at the top of the league in his first senior managerial role, which also shows you that the EFL as a whole generates very good, young coaches and is a fantastic breeding ground to develop in the dugout, just as players do on the pitch.

In League Two, I really like the job Mark Hughes is doing at Bradford City. Now he's settled and got his own squad, I think they're turning into a side that have a real chance at promotion. It's great to have someone of his stature in the division. We welcomed back Stockport County to the EFL, another Club with an excellent fanbase, and although they had a tough start, they're starting to look like a side who are finding their feet and will be real competitors in the future.

Off the pitch, there continues to be plenty to talk about. Each week, we're fortunate enough to showcase Clubs' work in the community on the highlights show and it's a stark visual reminder of the tireless work Clubs do to support not only their own fans, but everyone in their local communities.

That could be across anything from helping those that are under-privileged to supporting the LGBTQ+ community, supporting children or veterans and delivering programmes to tackle mental health and loneliness. It's tough out there at the moment and it's fantastic that all these Football Clubs are avenues for local people to get help. It's important that we showcase that.

We're lucky enough working for ITV on the EFL to service thousands of fans up and down the country and we want to do it justice, giving it the coverage it deserves. All EFL Clubs represent something different to different people and hopefully that comes across in our coverage. It's a huge responsibility, but an equally enjoyable one and I look forward to the second half of the season.

The future of broadcasting in the EFL

October saw the EFL issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for its broadcasting rights from the beginning of the 2024/25 season, following the conclusion of the current five-year agreement with Sky Sports, which ends at the completion of the 2024 season.

All 1,891 matches across the EFL, Carabao Cup, Papa Johns Trophy and the EFL Play-Offs are available for prospective bidders, with the EFL taking an innovative approach to its broadcasting future.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

The EFL's Chief Commercial Officer, Ben Wright, spoke to the EFL magazine to discuss the reasons behind the RFP and possible outcomes for the League.

"Broadcasting is a crucial area for the EFL and its Member Clubs," Wright says.

"It's not only crucial as a source of income, but also from an exposure and engagement perspective. Given those factors, we want to ensure that we look at all possible options and, as such, the timing takes all of those factors into account.

"With our current agreements both in the UK and overseas expiring in the summer of 2024, we issued a fairly wide Request For Proposal, mainly because we don't want to be prescriptive to the market or potential partners at this stage. Instead, we want to understand and explore the various opportunities that may be available to the EFL and our Clubs."

Wright says the League is taking a "fresh and new approach" to the latest rights cycle and has therefore invited proposals that embrace innovation and cater for the changing audience habits.

With 54% of the UK watching EFL football on television each year and a global audience of more than 404 million, the appetite for EFL football remains stronger than ever, with the aim now to grow the audience even further and further enhance the EFL's offering.

"We are fully aware and cognisant of the fact that the EFL audience is made up of those supporters who attend matches and also those supporters that watch matches," Wright continues.

"Our objective is to grow our collective offering, therefore improving Clubs' overall economic position. Alongside that, we want to be innovative and modernise our approach to streaming.

"There are a number of factors that are influencing consumption trends, not least the pandemic and how people engaged with content during that period, but also the fast-paced advance of technology and how content can be made available. We very much want to explore those opportunities, ensuring we look to cater for as wide an audience as possible."

Alongside the EFL's rich tradition and distinguished history, there continues to be a desire to evolve, grow and innovate. In 2017, the EFL became the first UK domestic sports organisation to launch its own direct-to-consumer streaming platform, iFollow, connecting fans with their Club wherever they are in the world.

History continued to be made in the 2018/19 season when all EFL midweek fixtures were live-streamed in the UK for the first time and in the EFL's recent Supporters Survey, 90% of fans said they would watch more EFL matches if more were made available.

Wright adds: "We know from our own experience that streaming is one way of achieving our overall objective for Clubs, but it is not the only way, so we want to explore the various options, including both live and non-live offerings.

"It's really important that EFL Clubs are able to offer content in a manner which keeps audiences engaged, both in terms of attending live matches and watching or consuming their Clubs. Innovation is a really important part of that. It could be either the way we make content available or how we provide content. For example, improved cameras or match footage, better access to managers and players or different options on how to view and how to watch. It all plays a part."

One of the drivers behind the desire for change and innovation comes from the experience Clubs had during the pandemic when fixtures were played behind closed doors, leaving all matches available to stream and broadcast, resulting in large revenues for Clubs.

With EFL fixtures currently available for broadcast on Sky Sports, the highlights show aired live on ITV each week and Clubs able to stream matches on iFollow or their equivalent streaming platform, content is made available to a huge audience worldwide and Wright says the continuation of a 'hybrid' model is the preference.

"To an extent, that's a model that we already have," he explains. "It is possible that we will look to work with more than one partner or method of distribution again, and that's really what a hybrid model is.

"At present, there is actually a fairly limited amount of content available live in the UK on an average weekend. It's only around 5% of our total output and that probably needs to change, so how we do that is an important consideration.

"Free-to-air could be an important part of what we look to achieve. Clearly, free-to-air can reach large numbers of people, ensuring that the EFL and Member Clubs reach wider audiences. This also has wider commercial benefit for Club sponsors and more. We have seen a bit of a renaissance period for free-to-air TV in the UK in terms of sports, and we want to understand what opportunities exist out there for the EFL."

So, what is the best outcome for the EFL and its Clubs beyond 2024?

"At this stage, that's a difficult question to answer," Wright concludes. "It really comes back to our objectives, which are to improve the overall commercial outcome and benefit for our Member Clubs, as well as ensure that the approach is contemporary and relevant. We've got confidence in our own product, and I think research shows that there is a demand there."



"WE WANT TO BE INNOVATIVE AND MODERNISE OUR APPROACH TO STREAMING. WE'VE GOT CONFIDENCE IN OUR OWN PRODUCT, AND I THINK RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THERE IS A DEMAND THERE"

BEN WRIGHT
EFL CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER

53m
PEOPLE LIVE WITHIN 15 MILES OF AN EFL CLUB

404m
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54%
OF THE POPULATION WATCH EFL FOOTBALL ON TV

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GREAT SCOTT!

It's hard to believe that there was a time when one of the EFL's brightest starlets and European champion Alex Scott was weighing up whether football was for him.

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

The Bristol City youngster, who spent time in the Southampton Academy setup before moving on to Bournemouth for a spell following his release, spent a large chunk of his childhood airborne, travelling to training and games before it eventually took its toll.

"It was costing my parents so much money as well, and if it's costing them too much money and I'm not enjoying it, then what's the point?" the 19-year-old admits. "It was at a point where I wasn't really enjoying the football anymore. I just wanted to be back home with my friends I knew from when I was younger.

"One of the best decisions I made was to stop playing football at the time and just going home to enjoy my football. That's where it almost brought the love back for the game for me."

From the age of eight to 12, Scott, the young boy who would wear his football kit to bed, would spend every weekend flying over from the small island of Guernsey to the south coast to try and make his dream of becoming a professional footballer come true.

"Luckily, there was another lad that was doing the same thing who is at Bristol City now called Ben Acey, so we built up a good relationship and our families are very close," he adds. "Most of the time, it was me, him and our parents in a hotel every week."

After settling back into life at home, he signed for local non-league outfit Guernsey and after impressing in a handful of games, caught the eye of Bristol City.

"I'm grateful for the coaches that I had when I went back home that made me enjoy football again," he explains. "When I started feeling good about myself again and playing well, that's when I was more serious about wanting to get back into it."

He linked up with the Robins' Under-18s before making the step up to the Under-23s when the UK emerged from a COVID-enforced lockdown, putting him on the brink of the first team.

Shortly after celebrating his 18th birthday in August 2021, Scott signed his first professional deal with the Club.

He says: "Just after, I got my first call-up for England, so it all happened quickly; lots of key moments happened in quick succession. Not long after, I made my debut for Bristol City. It was a really good couple of months."

Little did he know what that call-up would eventually lead to. In the summer, Scott was summoned by Ian Foster for the Under-19 European Championship, which England went on to win, as the young midfielder lifted his first piece of silverware.

He played his part in helping the Three Lions reach the Final, coming off the bench in the second half of the Semi-Final showdown, trailing Italy 1-0, to score the equaliser and inspire a rousing revival.

England flipped the scoreline on its head, running out 2-1 victors and booking their place in the Final.

"It was my first goal for my country," he remembers fondly. "It almost sparked the comeback. It brought a bit of confidence to the lads and from there on, we went on to win the game."

Israel awaited in the Final and so did a place in the starting line-up for Scott, who didn't underestimate England's opponents.

"We knew how good a side they were because we played them in the Groups as well and just about beat them 1-0," he recalls.



"The emotions were all over the place. I got taken off after 75 minutes or so, and I think it's tougher when you're on the bench watching on because it makes you even more nervous, but running on the pitch with all the lads celebrating, we had a great time that night.

"It was a crazy experience the whole year. It just topped it off in the summer to go there in Slovakia and win it."

Five months on, the 19-year-old still hasn't got around to framing his shirt and winners' medal, yet to take pride of place in his and team-mate Tommy Conway's shared digs, but insists it's on his to-do list.

Within weeks, he was back in training with the Sky Bet Championship team and it was all systems go again, but it was that experience of the previous

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campaign – Scott's breakthrough season – that gave him the edge going into the Euros.

"The tournament environment is so different, and not a lot of people get to experience that," he explains. "To do so at such a young age – I was 18 at the time – you've got a game every three days.

"Playing in the Championship also helped with that. Some of the squad were just at Premier League Clubs playing Under-23s, so the experience I had from last season playing Saturday then Tuesday every week definitely helps, and I think a lot of people benefitted off that.

"The pressure of playing for your country against other big nations is something I've brought back here too. I know when you have to win a game and you have to dig deep."

His popularity among the Robins faithful has even earned Scott comparisons to a certain Premier League ace, affectionately baptised as the 'Guernsey Grealish' by supporters.

"Probably because of the socks," he laughs. "He's one of my favourite players and we have similar ways of playing and dribbling, and we've both got the same socks.

"I've got other idols as well that I look to – the likes of Jude Bellingham who's flying at the minute and he's an inspiration for a lot of young, English lads coming through the Championship and seeing what he's done at a young age."

Following in their footsteps, Scott turned out 38 times for Bristol City in the second tier last season, as the Robins placed 17th in the Championship standings, building on three appearances the previous term.

His performances saw him named the Club's 2021/22 Young Player of the Year, something which was a huge honour for the starlet.

"I think it was voted by the fans as well, so that makes it even more special when the fans at the Club appreciate how you've played throughout the season," he continues.

"I played quite a lot of games last year, which I wasn't expecting. I had plenty of highs and lows. There were times when I was dragged off after 30 minutes and you're sat in the changing rooms thinking, 'I'm not cut out for this level yet.' You've got to remember you're still young."



This season, the Robins' number seven has once again established himself as a mainstay in Nigel Pearson's side and as the Championship presses pause for the World Cup, it gives him the perfect time to reflect on his start to the campaign. And one thing he has on his side this term is self-belief.

"With the experience I've got from last year and in the summer, I feel I can bring that quality to the team," he asserts. "I have full confidence that I should be one of the first names on the teamsheet.

"It's important I keep my feet on the ground and keep working hard to stay in the team and keep doing what I've done to get here."

IN THE ZONE



Ask any supporters up and down the country and they will very often have a familiar matchday routine: what time they travel, when they arrive at the stadium and what they do before kick-off.

However, it's becoming increasingly common for fans to include a trip to their Club's Fanzone as part of their pre-match to-do list.

So, what are Fanzones and how is their recent emergence across the EFL helping to bring a new perspective to the matchday experience?

WORDS // **ANDREW POMFRET**



Fanzones represent a space for fans to meet, to soak up the pre-match atmosphere and feel part of the experience. They aren't a recent phenomenon, mainly rising to prominence in the 2000s as part of European Championships and tournament football, but since that time there have been some truly innovative Fanzones that have emerged across various Clubs and leagues in Europe.

As a minimum, they will often include opportunities for fans to purchase refreshments and socialise, but recently they have grown to include street-food vendors, live music, family activities, opportunities to meet players and house a number of Club partner activations.

To get some insight into the rationale for opening a Fanzone, we spoke to a number of EFL Clubs who had recently implemented them. A key factor when conceptualising and creating the space was the importance of collaboration and engagement with their supporters and fan groups.

Sheffield Wednesday's Commercial Sales Executive, Millie Sequerra, explains: "The original idea for a Fanzone came via the Club's Fan Engagement Panel. After dropping down a division, we visited many new away grounds and a few had Fanzones, which our supporters loved."

The Club quickly realised that the Fanzone at Hillsborough had to be about entertainment for the fans, with the Club's traditions and brand a key focus.

"The Fanzone features a rooftop stage where we showcase different local live musicians each week," Sequerra continues. "In the build-up before the game, they sing Wednesday-themed songs to get supporters in the mood, and our mascots Ozzie and Barney Owl meet young supporters and pose for selfies, as well as helping to serve pre-match refreshments.

"We ask for feedback all the time – as a result, we have already doubled the bar space due to its appeal and are now in the process of adding a roof to keep the Fanzone warm and dry over the winter months.

"While the most important thing is that the fans love the space, commercially it has also been a huge success for us, generating thousands of extra revenue per game."

Over at Blundell Park, Grimsby Town's Supporter Liaison Officer, Kristine Green, speaks proudly of the collaboration between the supporters and the Club in growing their Fanzone, with the food and beverages on offer garnering somewhat of a cult status online across social media and fan message boards.

"The nearest home pub closed a number of years ago and, in conjunction with our family offering, we wanted to give fans a reason to get to Blundell Park earlier," says Green. "Despite limited space, we revolutionised one corner of the ground by creating our Fanzone.

"While the fans want to be entertained – monthly we have a local act on the stage

SUPPORTER SERVICES | **FANZONES**



providing live music – some of the main requests were about the refreshments. The fans wanted different beer than inside the stadium, so we joined forces with a local brewery to provide beverages and we installed a local food vendor who creates some innovative food options, which change every game. As he is local, he understands the people he is serving, highlighted by the photos of the food fans often post to social media!"

One Fanzone that has evolved over a number of years – and was a primary reason the Club won Family Club of the Year at the 2022 EFL Awards – is down at Portman Road. Ipswich Town's Supporter Liaison Officer, Liz Edwards, explains how the outdoor area has become a hugely important focal point for a range of activity, helping the Club to concentrate its efforts to provide real fan engagement ahead of matches.

She reveals: "Alongside matchday activities run by our Community Trust in the Fanzone, we also have a large screen showing the early TV game and ITFC related content, local singers and performance groups, a pop-up Club shop, food vendors, ex-player signings and most recently, a pop-



up bar has been introduced to meet excess demand.

"Attendance in the Fanzone has therefore increased from previous seasons, and a number of fans who used to socialise in the Town centre before games have said they now head to the Fanzone instead due to its relaxed friendly atmosphere.

"Our Fanzone is open to all home fans, so it is a perfect place for me to be visible and be able to help people. I have an 'SLO hub' that includes the ITFC Heritage Society. This is effectively a matchday pop-up museum and covers various themes throughout the season. It's a way for us to provide a wide variety of information, to help reinforce the Club's values, tell the young fans a bit about the Club's history and talk to anyone who wants to chat.

"One of our major challenges has been to manage the growth in attendance. Catering for thousands that come through the Fanzone on a matchday with a range of activities and a variety of food and drink is challenging but, ultimately, it's rewarded by the success of the facility and the numbers attending."

What's clear is that a growing number of Clubs are recognising the broad appeal of Fanzones as a communal space for junior fans, families and groups of friends. The fact that supporters themselves can play a part in creating the sort of shared experience that will make them want to come back is clearly integral to their success.

Clubs have engaged their supporters to create Fanzones that celebrate their identity and all things unique and valued about their Club – things that can't be offered anywhere else but at the stadium ahead of kick-off on matchdays.

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“Football can bring people together from different backgrounds because even though you don't know the language, the football will teach you how to speak.”

Naby, member of the British Red Cross Young Refugee Group





The British Red Cross Society, incorporated by Royal Charter 1908, is a charity registered in England and Wales (220949), Scotland (SC037738), Isle of Man (0752), Jersey (430) and Guernsey (CH142).

Football is for everyone. And it can bring us closer to each other.

The EFL and British Red Cross are teaming up to support people facing loneliness and isolation across the UK.

In October, Queens Park Rangers (QPR) opened its doors to welcome British Red Cross’ Young Refugee Groups for an unforgettable experience. Simply enjoying a kickabout and watching the match with like-minded people meant they could build meaningful connections and make new friends – all through the power of football.

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[MAIN FEATURE]

VINCENT KOMPANY:

In Good Kompany

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

Four Premier Leagues, four EFL Cups, two FA Cups, two Belgian First Division titles and a third-place medal at the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

A truly decorated career, there's very little Vincent Kompany didn't achieve as a player, earning himself a reputation as one of football's greatest-ever defenders.

But now, the Belgian is fast becoming one of English football's most talked about up-and-coming managers.

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MAIN INTERVIEW | **VINCENT KOMPANY**



"Don't believe the hype and don't believe the drama," the former Manchester City captain and Burnley manager says. A phrase he repeats regularly to his players, as Burnley sit top of the Sky Bet Championship.

Vincent Kompany has learned from the best. The defender played under the likes of Pep Guardiola, Roberto Mancini, Manuel Pellegrini and Roberto Martinez during a decorated 17-year playing career, while also sharing the pitch with the likes of Sergio Aguero and David Silva.

But despite the former Manchester City skipper's illustrious list of former managers and team-mates, the best piece of advice he's been given, he wrote for himself.

"It's true," he says. "Don't believe the hype, that's the advice I always give to myself. Stay on course and stay humble. If you have a bad day, remember to take a deep breath and make sure you face people in the way that you would want to be led in those moments."

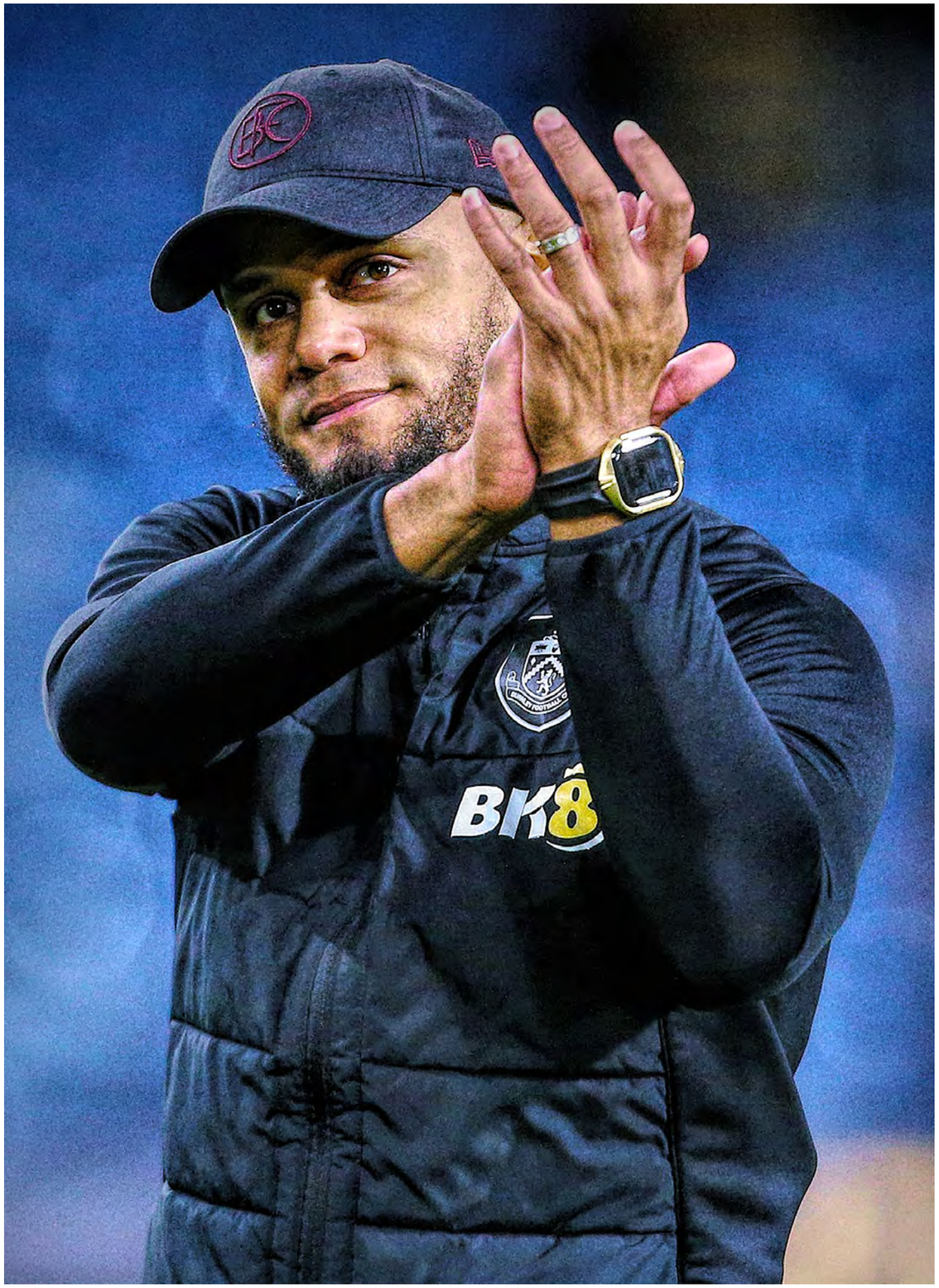
No-one – not even Kompany himself – could have envisaged Burnley sitting top of the Championship ahead of the mid-season World Cup break. The departure of long-serving manager Sean Dyche was followed by relegation from the Premier League, as well as a number of player departures, leaving Kompany with a huge task upon arrival at Turf Moor, as the "rebuild" began.

But the 36-year-old's appointment signalled the beginning of a new era for the Clarets. His key principles of "togetherness" and "hard work" have brought a fresh positivity to the Club, and with just two defeats in his first 21 games, it's so far, so good.

But why Burnley for the former Belgium international?

"Burnley Football Club is a truly historic English side and it's an honour to be appointed first-team manager," Kompany said on his first day in the building. And since his appointment, it is evident that they were by no means just empty words.

What becomes increasingly clear the more he speaks is, in Burnley he has a project he believes in, a culture he believes in and a town he wants to make proud again.



MAIN INTERVIEW | **VINCENT KOMPANY**



"I took my time deciding what I wanted for the next step of my career, where I wanted to be and most importantly, who I wanted to work with," he explains.

"Who I wanted to work with was much more important for me than the name of the Club. I thought a lot about it and this was something I wanted to do and challenge myself with.

"As a new manager, you want to come in and put your own stamp on things, but I wanted to protect at all costs the discipline there is here, the work rate and the togetherness of this Club. That type of culture takes so long to create and it's something that was already here before me and the players understand that that's what this Club is about.

"I don't want to sound naïve, because I know this game is dependent on results, but as a manager, you try and anticipate all the possible scenarios that could happen – what happens if you win everything and what happens if you lose everything. Managers often lack time; there are enough good managers in the game, there just isn't always enough time.

"That was a discussion I was able to have at Burnley and express my views on. I was able to have a conversation about what is rational, what is realistic and what is normal to expect. From there, it was an easy decision."

Of course, relegation from the Premier League meant pressure was on Kompany the minute he walked through the door, but performances so far have quickly answered any previous questions asked of his suitability for the job.

"I've not lived many years of my life without expectation, though," he says, smiling.

"I started as a 'talented' player when I was younger with expectation on me. Then, when I made it as a footballer, there was expectation on me to succeed at bigger Clubs. Now I'm a manager, there is a different sort of expectation on me.

"As a person, I've never known anything different but you have to use that as a positive. I know the tools I have, and I have to use them to succeed."

His reputation as one of the most respected and successful players in Premier League history shows, and while he doesn't want to be compared with other managers, there's no doubt that Kompany comes into management having learned from some of football's most successful figures.

In a matter of months, the Belgian has revolutionised Burnley's style of play. Dominant in possession and the highest scorers in the division, these are exciting times for Clarets fans.

The secret behind this early success? "Togetherness, work rate and staying humble," he answers.

"I've spoken about the togetherness of this Club, and the environment. That's important to me. But as a manager, the most important thing I want from my team is a high work rate. I have an incredibly hard-working and honest team here, which is something I insist on as a manager. It's a philosophy I believe in as a manager and it dictates the type of players I want to sign.

"My message to the players is, 'if you have the ball, there's no need to give it away', especially if we think we can do something with it. That's why we have more possession than any other team, because



> "THE CHAMPIONSHIP IS A BLAST, ISN'T IT? IT'S A REAL JOY AND A FANTASTIC ENVIRONMENT TO LEARN AND DEVELOP ...YOU GET YOUR HEAD DOWN, WORK HARD AND BATTLE OUT RESULTS, THEN BEFORE YOU KNOW IT, YOU'RE HAVING A BEER WITH THE OPPOSITION MANAGER"

we enjoy being on the ball and enjoy doing something with it when we have it."

Kompany's attention to detail is admirable. No stone is left unturned in match preparation and the relationship he has with each of his players has impressed everyone around the Club.

The never-say-die attitude he has instilled on his players keeps getting stronger too, and has been seen numerous times this season, with Burnley coming from behind to win games on multiple occasions this season.

As a result of Kompany's leadership, values and footballing philosophies, the Clarets are playing some of the most attractive football in the division. But more importantly, his dressing room has a sense of togetherness that makes it look like his side has been playing together for years.

He adds: "I'm a happy person and that's never too much related to results – I think that's valuable in this job. I want to create an environment where people can always speak their minds.

"When we debrief a matchday, I tell the players that it's a privilege to be on the screen in the room of the debrief. With a squad of 30 players and only 11 starting, most players in the matchday debrief are watching someone else perform, so I tell them it's a privilege when their name gets mentioned, even if it's mentioned because of a mistake that's been made.

"But that also helps everyone else improve and to improve as a group, I like to coach this way. I don't ever want anything to feel personal, I want every player here to do well. My goal and our goal is for every player to succeed and creating an environment where people can speak openly and communicate effectively allows for that improvement."

As a manager, he comes across as open, honest and communicative, but one thing is clear: he is as demanding in the dugout as he was as a captain on the pitch. His players have jobs to do and if they are not executed with maximum effort, then they are not for Burnley Football Club.

After falling behind to Sunderland earlier in the season and a miserable first-half display, Kompany delivered a half-time team talk that made the headlines.

"You're not in London or Madrid," he said to his players. "You're in Burnley!"

He explains: "The main reason for me saying that was because I was hammering home that I cannot have a team that doesn't work hard. If I don't have a team what works hard, I'd rather go home and shut the door behind me. And I'd say the same to the players too.

"I'd say, 'leave, shut the door behind you, go home and try again another day.' It's absolutely pointless if the basics aren't there in the team and that game against Sunderland was the first time this season I've seen that from my team. That's when they get to see who I am and what I'm about.

"I'll defend them if they perform well, I'll defend them if they lose, but if the basics go then you'll see another side to me."

With an estimated population of 88,000, Turf Moor is the heart of the town, and Kompany recognises that.

"There are very few Football Clubs like Burnley," says Kompany. "If you look at Burnley as a town, every family in the area supports Burnley Football Club. That's quite special. If you go to Manchester or most other cities in the world, you'll knock on a few doors and people will support different teams or at least have a choice of who to support, but not in Burnley.

"Literally every door you knock on, behind it is a Burnley fan. That creates a very different type of pressure but also a very different type of meaning to what we're doing here. It's something that maybe doesn't mean much outside of Burnley, but in Burnley it matters more than anything. That's very special and something that's very different to what I've experienced before. They are proud supporters and we want to make them proud."

It feels like something special is happening. It can be sensed by those inside the Club and those supporting it.

And it comes as a surprise, not least to Kompany himself, whose managerial debut in English football is going better than even he could have predicted. While the Championship is a notoriously difficult division given its competitiveness and unpredictability, it also continues to be a breeding ground for young managers of the future.

"The Championship is a blast, isn't it?" he remarks. "It's a real joy and a fantastic environment to learn and develop. Everyone knows we're in this mad, mad division that's a real rollercoaster. You get your head down, work hard and battle out results, then before you know it, you're having a beer with the opposition manager.

"We're all living in this mad division but you learn so quickly here. There are so many games, it's so unpredictable and you learn so much. Outside of Europe's top leagues, there's nothing better than the Championship – there's nothing like it and you feel that in every single game."



With 12 Club trophies to his name, Kompany's decorated career puts him among some of football's finest talents on the pitch, but while he is no doubt able to draw on those past experiences, he is a manager now and his focus is solely on Burnley and what lies ahead.

"Any type of experience to have as a manager is an advantage," he claims. "You have to use all experiences in a positive way. As a captain, I led teams in many situations, through good and bad, and I do the same as a manager.

"My focus now is on helping players get better and helping players achieve something. I want every player to succeed. We need to be stable first, then grow and progress as a team together. That comes with patience, staying humble and hard work."

RAISED IN THE EFL

An impressive 23 of the 26-man England squad selected by Gareth Southgate for the 2022 World Cup either came through an EFL Academy, have played in the EFL (via the loan system) or made their professional debut in EFL competition.

Here are all the numbers you need to know about the Three Lions team.

PICKFORD
Jordan



EFL CUP APPS
14
EFL TROPHY APPS
1
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
24
LEAGUE ONE APPS
51
LEAGUE TWO APPS
12
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Burton Albion, Carlisle United, Bradford City, Preston North End
EFL & CLUB DEBUT
Cheltenham Town 2-2 Burton Albion (3 Aug 2013)

POPE
Mick



EFL CUP APPS
11
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
33
LEAGUE TWO APPS
46
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
York City, Bury, Charlton Athletic
EFL DEBUT
Charlton Athletic 4-1 Bristol City (4 May 2013)

RAMSDALE
Aaron



EFL CUP APPS
3
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
2
LEAGUE ONE APPS
20
LEAGUE TWO APPS
19
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Chesterfield, AFC Wimbledon, Sheffield United
EFL DEBUT
Accrington Stanley 4-0 Chesterfield (6 Jan 2018)

ALEXANDER-ARNOLD
Trent



EFL CUP APPS
6
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Liverpool 2-1 Tottenham Hotspur (EFL Cup – 25 Oct 2016)
EFL CUP WINNER (21/22)

COADY
Conor



EFL CUP APPS
14
EFL TROPHY APPS
2
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
177
LEAGUE ONE APPS
39
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Sheffield United, Huddersfield Town, Wolverhampton Wanderers
EFL DEBUT
Sheffield United 2-1 Notts County (2 Aug 2013)
CHAMP WINNER (17/18)

DIER
Eric



EFL CUP APPS
15
EFL DEBUT
Tottenham Hotspur 1-0 Sheffield United (EFL Cup – 21 Jan 2015)
EFL CUP RUNNER-UP (14/15, 20/21)

MAGUIRE
Harry



EFL CUP APPS
27
EFL TROPHY APPS
5
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
45
LEAGUE ONE APPS
134
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Sheffield United, Wigan Athletic, Hull City
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Sheffield United 0-2 Cardiff City (12 Apr 2011)
L1 PLAY-OFF RUNNER-UP (11/12), L1 TEAM OF THE SEASON (13/14), CHAMP PLAY-OFF WINNER (15/16)

SHAW
Luke



EFL CUP APPS
11
EFL DEBUT
Stevenage 1-4 Southampton (EFL Cup – 28 Aug 2012)
EFL CUP WINNER (16/17)

STONES
John



EFL CUP APPS
23
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
24
LEAGUE ONE APPS
18
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Barnsley
EFL & CLUB DEBUT
Barnsley 0-4 Reading (7 Mar 2012)
EFL CUP WINNER (17/18, 18/19, 19/20, 20/21)

TRIPPIER
Kieran



EFL CUP APPS
21
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
174
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Barnsley, Burnley
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Middlesbrough 2-1 Barnsley (9 Feb 2010)
CHAMPIONSHIP PROMOTION (13/14)

WALKER
Kyle



EFL CUP APPS
26
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
51
LEAGUE ONE APPS
9
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Sheffield United, Northampton Town, QPR
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Northampton Town 0-1 Oldham Athletic (15 Nov 2008)
CHAMP PLAY-OFF RUNNER-UP (08/09), CHAMP WINNER (10/11), EFL CUP RUNNER-UP (14/15), EFL CUP WINNER (17/18, 18/19, 19/20, 20/21)

WHITE
Ben



EFL CUP APPS
11
EFL TROPHY APPS
8
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
46
LEAGUE ONE APPS
15
LEAGUE TWO APPS
42
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Newport County, Peterborough United, Leeds United
EFL DEBUT
Brighton 4-0 Colchester United (EFL Cup – 9 Aug 2016)
CHAMP WINNER (19/20)

BELLINGHAM
Jude



EFL CUP APPS
1
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
41
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Birmingham City
EFL & CLUB DEBUT
Portsmouth 3-0 Birmingham City (EFL Cup – 6 Aug 2019)
EFL YOUNG PLAYER OF THE YEAR (19/20)

CALLAGHER
Conor



EFL CUP APPS
3
EFL TROPHY APPS
4
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
47
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Charlton Athletic, Swansea City
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Newport County 3-0 Chelsea U21 (EFL Trophy – 25 Sep 2018)

HENDERSON
Jordan



EFL CUP APPS
32
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
10
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Coventry City
EFL DEBUT
Sunderland 1-2 Blackburn Rovers (EFL Cup – 12 Nov 2008)
EFL CUP WINNER (11/12, 21/22) EFL CUP RUNNER-UP (15/16)

MOUNT
Mason



EFL CUP APPS
14
EFL TROPHY APPS
3
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
38
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Derby County
EFL & CLUB DEBUT
Swindon Town 2-1 Chelsea U23 (EFL Trophy – 13 Sep 2016)
CHAMP PLAY-OFF RUNNER-UP (18/19), EFL CUP RUNNER-UP (21/22)

PHILLIPS
Kalvin



EFL CUP APPS
14
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
165
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Leeds United
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Wolverhampton Wanderers 4-3 Leeds United (6 Apr 2015)
CHAMP WINNER (19/20)

RICE
Declan



EFL CUP APPS
9
EFL TROPHY APPS
3
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Coventry City 4-2 West Ham United U23 (EFL Trophy – 30 Aug 2016)

FODEN
Phil



EFL CUP APPS
18
EFL DEBUT
Leicester City 1-1 Manchester City (EFL Cup – 19 Dec 2017)
EFL CUP WINNER (17/18, 18/19, 19/20, 20/21), ALAN HARDAKER TROPHY (19/20), SCORED FIRST SENIOR GOAL IN THE EFL CUP

GREALISH
Jack



EFL CUP APPS
13
EFL TROPHY APPS
1
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
95
LEAGUE ONE APPS
37
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Notts County, Aston Villa
EFL & CLUB DEBUT
MK Dons 3-1 Notts County (14 Sep 2013)
CHAMP PLAY-OFF RUNNER-UP (17/18), CHAMP PLAY-OFF WINNER (18/19), EFL CUP RUNNER-UP (19/20)

KANE
Harry



EFL CUP APPS
22
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
37
LEAGUE ONE APPS
18
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Leyton Orient, Millwall, Leicester City
EFL & CLUB DEBUT
Rochdale 1-1 Leyton Orient (15 Jan 2011)
EFL CUP RUNNER-UP (14/15, 20/21)

MADDISON
James



EFL CUP APPS
16
EFL TROPHY APPS
5
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
47
LEAGUE ONE APPS
25
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Coventry City, Norwich City
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Coventry City 1-2 Cardiff City (EFL Cup – 13 Aug 2014)
EFL TEAM OF THE SEASON (17/18)

RASHFORD
Marcus



EFL CUP APPS
17
EFL DEBUT
Northampton Town 1-3 Manchester United (EFL Cup – 21 Sep 2016)
EFL CUP WINNER (16/17)

SAKA
Bukayo



EFL CUP APPS
8
EFL TROPHY APPS
4
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Cheltenham Town 6-2 Arsenal U21 (EFL Trophy – 30 Oct 2018)

STERLING
Raheem



EFL CUP APPS
30
EFL DEBUT
Liverpool 1-3 Swansea City (EFL Cup – 31 Oct 2012)
EFL CUP WINNER (15/16, 17/18, 18/19, 19/20, 20/21)

WILSON
Callum



EFL CUP APPS
15
EFL TROPHY APPS
2
CHAMPIONSHIP APPS
46
LEAGUE ONE APPS
48
PREVIOUS EFL CLUBS
Coventry City, A.F.C. Bournemouth
CLUB & EFL DEBUT
Coventry City 0-1 Hartlepool United (EFL Cup – 12 Aug 2009)
CHAMP WINNER (14/15)

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Meet the Club Financial Reporting Unit

Earlier this year, EFL Clubs agreed to the creation of the new Club Financial Reporting Unit (CFRU).

Launched to oversee the League's regulation of Club Financial records, HMRC Reporting and Financial Fair Play Regulations, the CFRU is the primary point of contact for Clubs and their officials, and brings independence to Financial Regulation decisions.

So why was it set up, who is involved and how will it work?

The CFRU director, John Potterill-Tilney, explains all.

Why was the CFRU set up?

Financial regulation and sustainability of Football Clubs is an important area for the EFL. An external review of the EFL in early 2021 identified concerns about how independent Financial Regulation was within the EFL.

As the EFL Board includes Club representatives, this could be perceived as a conflict of interests. Therefore, as part of its commitment to strong governance, the EFL created the CFRU – an independent team – to focus primarily on these elements.

As a separate team with information barriers to the rest of the EFL, the Unit allows more financially sensitive conversations to take place with Clubs. Concerns raised stay within the Unit and are not shared with other departments or with the EFL Board. Therefore, previous concerns about a conflict of interest are reduced.

In addition, historic disciplinary cases have also taken multiple seasons to resolve despite the best efforts of the EFL. It is hoped that having a dedicated team will expedite any future disciplinary processes.

What does the CFRU do?

The Club Financial Reporting Unit (CFRU or Unit) is a team responsible for monitoring whether Clubs are adhering to the relevant financial regulations. It reviews Profit and Sustainability (P&S) submissions for Championship Clubs and Salary Cost Management Protocol (SCMP) submissions for League One and League Two Clubs. It also reviews forecasts provided by Clubs aimed at ensuring financial sustainability. These forecasts are submitted annually and also in the case of any acquisition of control.

If a Club is found in breach of the rules, the CFRU will attempt to form an 'Agreed Decision' with the Club which may involve it having to follow an agreed business plan and/or a points deduction (suspended or otherwise). Alternatively, a hearing may take place in front of a separate independent panel – the Club Financial Review Panel – which will decide whether or not a Club has breached the rules and what the sanctions should be, in line with EFL sanctioning guidelines.

The Unit also feeds into ongoing discussions as to how EFL Financial Regulation may be changed in the future. With the financial information and expertise it has available, the Unit is able to assess the impact of any proposed rule changes and suggest appropriate amendments or raise areas of concern.

How does the CFRU maintain its independence?

The CFRU operates in its own room to ensure no-one can overhear conversations, using separate electronic filing systems and tight controls on information in its possession. Other parts of the EFL will not know which Clubs the Unit is investigating – or why.

The Unit will work alongside the Governance department on matters relating to a change of ownership, but that work is focused on providing guidance on what funds the Club needs to operate over a minimum of a two-year period, to enable the EFL to consider that as it assesses the ultimate source and sufficiency of funding available to any purchaser.

And the Panel the Unit reports into on regulatory matters – the Club Financial Review Panel – is fully independent. In December, Clubs will finish approving the appointment of a group of multi-disciplinary experts with legal, football administration and accounting knowledge to sit on the panel.

How does the CFRU work with Clubs?

Despite there being a limited number of submission deadlines throughout the year, the Unit is often in constant dialogue with Clubs throughout the season.

The Unit's primary role is to review a Club's regulatory submission. When received, the Unit will review the financial information, most of which will be a financial forecast of some kind. Where necessary, the Unit will ask questions of the Club to gain better comfort over certain balances or assumptions. Where appropriate, meetings will be held with Clubs to talk through particular areas or adjustments.

If the Unit is not comfortable with a forecast and the Club is not able to provide sufficient supporting evidence to persuade the Unit otherwise, it will make an adjustment to a particular line item, impacting the overall forecast. The Unit will then use this adjusted submission to determine whether or not the Club has complied with the rules.

Certain Clubs are also more closely monitored by the Unit and have to provide regular updates on its financial progress against certain budgets. This additional monitoring may be a result of disciplinary action, a change of ownership or because a forecast suggests they may breach the relevant rules in the future without remedial action.



EFL financial regulations are often complex. Therefore, the Unit also provides advice to Clubs throughout the year as to what can or cannot be included.

And financial information provided to the Unit allows it to provide anonymous benchmarking information to Clubs at certain points in the season. This allows them to understand where they stand in relation to other Clubs on key items such as gate receipts, overall revenue and player wage spend.

And finally, tell us who is in the CFRU team...

The Unit is a small team of Chartered Accountants united by their financial background and love of sport.

I joined to lead the Unit as Director of Club Reporting in April 2022, having previously worked as a forensic accountant. I have worked on many high-profile investigations and disputes, including football finance cases heard before the Court of Arbitration for Sport and investigations on behalf of the Ministry of Justice.

Rob Dickinson is the Manager in our team and joined the EFL three days prior to the first COVID lockdown. He previously worked in the Deloitte audit department, where his portfolio of clients included a Premier League Football Club. In his time at the EFL, Rob has helped implement numerous regulatory updates and has helped refine the Clubs' submission process to be more efficient.

Rob and I are supported by a Club Financial Reporting Officer, Tom Ambler, who also trained and worked in the Deloitte audit department before transferring over to Deloitte's Sports Business Group, authors of the renowned Annual Report into Football Finance.

STUDENT OF THE GAME

As the saying goes: everyone has their own journey. Sutton United's **TOPE FADAHUNSI** is living proof of that.

WORDS // JACK WYLIE

While rising through the ranks in Watford's Academy, he rubbed shoulders with Manchester United star Jadon Sancho, talented Burnley loanee Nathan Tella and former England youth international Ian Poveda.

After being released by the Hornets in 2015, the Sutton-born youngster dropped down to non-league side Tooting & Mitcham United alongside Isaiah Jones, who would go on to attract the attention of Middlesbrough and rapidly emerge as one of the hottest prospects in the Sky Bet Championship.

Still awaiting his own big break in the game, Fadahunsi looked abroad for playing opportunities, signing a short-term deal with Finnish Second Division outfit Kemi City in September 2019.

"My brother's friend had started an app called 'Skouted' where you could set up a profile and hopefully receive offers," he recalls. "They were sponsoring Kemi City and I had the opportunity to play out there full-time in a professional environment.

"Going to Finland was very eye-opening. It was a different lifestyle and culture and I must admit, it was a shock at first. The sun doesn't set for parts of the year because it's so far up north. There was one night where I'd been speaking to my flatmate for a while and I asked him for the time, and it was 2am – it was bright daylight outside!

"I joined during their mid-season break and then played about 10 games. We ended up winning the league and I really loved it. I had a fantastic experience and made some lifelong friends."

When COVID-19 prevented his return to Scandinavia, Fadahunsi turned to higher education to prepare for a career away from football, studying architectural engineering and design management at Loughborough University.

"Before going out to Finland, I'd been accepted to go to Loughborough," says the Sutton striker. "The season in Finland runs from April to October and the university year is around September to May, so the plan was to manage the two, but COVID ended up scuppering that.

"I'd gone to a college that specialised in engineering, so I was shoehorned into that area. If I'm being completely honest, it's a lot of work to balance doing an engineering degree and still trying to play professional football. I was waking up at 5:30am and training before starting lectures at 9am. Then, I wouldn't be getting back until 10pm at night, running off about four hours sleep from the night before.

"I did struggle at times, but I learned a lot and it's going to be very useful in the future, as my plan for life after football is to be a property investor.

"The knowledge I've gained about the construction industry and the legal proceedings and all that will be paramount. The long-term goal is to redevelop and introduce better infrastructure back in my home nations of Ghana and Nigeria. Without a solid foundation of knowledge in engineering, I wouldn't be able to achieve those goals effectively."

Although Fadahunsi would've preferred a direct route to professional football, he's grateful for his detour and believes he can use the experience gained to his advantage.



"I've seen the other side of life," he explains. "I've been released, and I've spent a long time out of the professional game. If you've never experienced it, you might not even know why you don't want to be in that situation.

"I gained a lot just from a social point of view and I grew a lot as a person, and I don't think I would be playing professionally now without going to university. It's sparked a huge change in my outlook in life and the way I view the world in general.

"You meet different people, you hear different opinions, you have different experiences and you learn about different cultures. You develop your ability to manage your time and manage your money. You learn to be resilient and push through obstacles. These are intangible skills that you can take onto the football pitch." ›



The Leicestershire-based university is renowned for its sporting prestige, and Fadahunsi capitalised on the facilities available, developing significantly on the pitch over the course of his three years on campus.

"The first-team pitch at Loughborough is Premier League standard," he notes. "I've never seen another gym like the one there. They get a high intake of very good players who have been released from Academies or professional contracts, so the standard of training was fantastic.

"There were also sport scientists and physiotherapists at our disposal and the level of coaching was very high, too. If you're willing to make the best use out of the tools Loughborough can offer you, then you can come out as a more complete player, as well as having a degree under your belt.

"The team plays in the University BUCS league and in Step 5 of non-league. I amassed around 150 appearances in total and we managed to win a BUCS Championship in my final year."

Having played predominately as a right-back for much of his footballing career growing up, a sudden switch up front changed Fadahunsi's fortunes in an instant.

He explains: "During pre-season going into my second year at Loughborough, the coaches started calling me Michail Antonio because my build is similar and he'd also been at Tooting & Mitcham. It became a talking point to try me out as a striker.

"A few games into the season, we were losing 2-0 at home and I hadn't been playing particularly well. There was a substitution in the 78th minute and my manager called me over to the sideline. Instead of taking me off, he told me to go up front, and my reaction was: 'I don't think it's time to be testing this out now!'

"Two minutes later, I chased down a long ball over the top, it bounced over the keeper and I slotted it in. Then, around the 90th minute, a corner came swinging in and I headed it in. I ran over to the side of the pitch and gave it a big knee slide and from there, the rest is history!"

Having netted 35 times and accumulated 14 assists in 47 outings during the 2021/22 season, the university graduate had put several Clubs on high alert.

And it would be Fadahunsi's hometown team that would ultimately offer him his long-awaited chance in the EFL.

He adds: "I didn't necessarily know I was ready for playing at a certain level because I hadn't seen or experienced it. At times, it felt like I wasn't going to make it if I'm honest, but I remained focused and worked very hard, and I had people around me who kept supporting me through it all.





PLAYER INTERVIEW | **TOPE FADAHUNSI**



That goal against Barrow was followed by another decisive strike against Mansfield Town, while he then scored five minutes into his first start in the Papa Johns Trophy to cap off a memorable opening month in League football.

With three winning goals from five appearances in August, Fadahunsi became an instant hit with the U's supporters.

"The fans are incredible," he beams. "I didn't really have many fans watching games at Loughborough, so it's a new experience. I think they've embraced me, especially because I'm a local lad, and then I've scored a couple of winners as well.

"I recently had a conversation with a fan on the bus on the way home – when I have the time, I like to speak and engage with the fans and I think they appreciate that. It just feels like a family."

Having adapted well to life in League Two, primarily as an impact substitute, Fadahunsi is determined to fully establish himself at the professional level.

"It's been a learning curve," he admits. "The defenders are much smarter, more mobile and more physical at this level, and it's about finding ways that I can combat their attempts to thwart me.

"The tactical information we receive is so much more detailed than I was used to as well, and I guess that's where my university experience has come in handy!

"I didn't expect to go through as much as I did to get to this place, but I'm grateful for it because it's given me a new perspective and made me a better footballer and a better human-being by going through these different experiences.

"It's only just the beginning now of my professional career and hopefully, it'll be a long journey from here."

> **"I DIDN'T EXPECT TO GO THROUGH AS MUCH AS I DID TO GET TO THIS PLACE, BUT I'M GRATEFUL FOR IT BECAUSE IT'S GIVEN ME A NEW PERSPECTIVE AND MADE ME A BETTER FOOTBALLER"**

"Sutton was my first trial, so I was thrown in at the deep end as I was playing five leagues lower at Loughborough. I won't lie, I panicked a bit and thought it was such a big jump, but I went in there and after the first day, I felt I could definitely help the team. Thankfully, the manager agreed!

"There have been a lot of young players who have messaged me since I moved to Sutton, asking for general advice about how they can get into the professional game. Being an inspiration to them is very important to me because I want to show that hard work can pay off and dreams can be achieved."

Eager to make up for lost time, the 23-year-old made an immediate impression at his new Club with an EFL debut to remember.

"It was a bit of a mad situation," he reminisces. "I'd actually told my parents not to come to the game because I hadn't featured in the Papa Johns Trophy game a few days earlier and I thought I would just stay on the bench again.

"It was 0-0 with about 20 minutes to go, and the manager called me over to bring me on. As I was coming on, I said to myself, 'I'm going to score the winner here'. It was more being sarcastic really, but I ended up speaking it into existence!"

/theEFL /EFL /efl

EFL 'Access All Areas'

WITH ON-PITCH BRIEFINGS, DRESSING ROOM FOOTAGE AND INTERVIEWS WITH CLUB STAFF AT HALF-TIME, WYCOMBE WANDERERS' SKY BET LEAGUE ONE FIXTURE AGAINST PORTSMOUTH BECAME THE FIRST-EVER EFL 'ACCESS ALL AREAS' MATCH, WITH ENHANCED BROADCAST COVERAGE FROM SKY SPORTS. WORDS // **BILLIE MARSHALL**

The game at Adams Park gave supporters more behind-the-scenes access than ever before, and perhaps a glimpse at the future of live football broadcasting.







The cameras inside the dressing rooms captured the emotion throughout the day and familiar faces from both Clubs appeared in the commentary box, while the pre-match officials' briefing with both Club captains was aired, alongside a feature with referee, Scott Oldham.

It was Wycombe who ran out winners on the day, courtesy of goals from Anis Mehmeti and Garath McCleary, however, alongside the excitement on the pitch, the coverage provided the audience up and down the country with a unique perspective of an EFL matchday.

"We want the people watching to gain more of an insight into the thoughts of the managers, the coaches and particularly some of the preparation around the match – what exactly does a matchday look like?" That is the view of EFL Chief Commercial Officer, Ben Wright, who believes taking a more innovative approach to broadcasting will not only highlight the quality on the pitch, but also showcase the overall offering in the EFL.

He continues: "We know from research that supporters want more access than ever before, and we want to be innovative and be perceived as contemporary and relevant.

"I think the number one thing it has showcased is what a brilliant product League One actually is. You look at some of the matches in that division and the quality of them – it's fantastic.

"I watched Plymouth Argyle against Exeter City several weeks ago, which had a really good audience on Sky. With the quality of that fixture, we want supporters up and down the country to see that.



"Hopefully, they'll have seen that across the World Cup period, but particularly around the 'Access All Areas' game, just the sort of different things we're trying to do to give it an enhanced feeling."

The World Cup has provided the EFL with the opportunity to take centre stage domestically, with Sky Sports showing live League One and League Two action across the period, while all fixtures across the divisions are streamed by the Clubs.

The desire to be innovative and enhance the live viewing experience is shared by the EFL's broadcast partner, Sky Sports, with support from Clubs to explore what could be delivered without impacting team preparation.

Sky Sports' Senior Producer, Sean Boyle, says: "With League One and League Two continuing during the World Cup, we wanted to do something that might generate a bit of buzz and excitement around our domestic football. Innovation has always been at the heart of Sky Sports, and we were excited to be able to enhance our coverage to take our customers closer to the game.

"Any time we get to film and show things that we haven't been able to before, it's exciting. We're football fans too and we find seeing what goes on behind the scenes enjoyable and we really hope the audience has done too.

"We're extremely grateful for the EFL and both Clubs giving us the additional access – it's fantastic to have their support to enable us to push the boundaries of what has been done before in football broadcasting."

The fixture represented a 'step change' for the League in terms of how the product could be showcased, with supporters eager to get closer to the action. Whether that is through more cameras in grounds or enhanced features on a matchday, access – achieved through a collaborative approach – will be central to that in the future.

Wright continues: "You are in a place now where an interview on arrival and an interview after the match is absolutely standard, but what we're trying to do is move that on, so it's a little bit more of a preview beforehand, it's some interaction during the match and it's more after as well.

"I think they're just natural step changes in how live sport will be positioned and we need to make sure we're at the forefront of that."

Audience habits are changing, and as for the future of live sports broadcasting, particularly that of the EFL, the opportunities are there to bring the supporters closer to the action than ever before.

> "THESE ARE JUST NATURAL STEP CHANGES IN HOW LIVE SPORT WILL BE POSITIONED AND WE NEED TO MAKE SURE WE'RE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THAT."
>
> **BEN WRIGHT**
> EFL CHIEF COMMERCIAL OFFICER

WORDS // HOLLY HUNT

Mason Mount, Declan Rice, Conor Gallagher and Bukayo Saka; just a selection of the current England crop who forged their way to international and top-flight careers via the Papa Johns Trophy.

A Springboard for Success



Through the years, the EFL Trophy has so often been the start of the journey for a new wave of talent at all levels. A competition which is famed for discovering the next generation, the future is waiting to be uncovered in the here and now.

West Ham United skipper Rice had his first taste of professional football in the 2016/17 competition, when he captained the Hammers Under-23s before making the step up to the first team.

West Ham's first-team coach Kevin Nolan has worked closely alongside the Academy to create a link to the senior squad, and the competition has allowed his players to progress.

"I've played a big part in our Under-21s and it's a great competition," he explains. "Being able to play proper games at proper stadiums and seeing the lads react to walking out to atmospheres, it gives you a good outlook as a coach to see where they're at. It's brilliant for those experiences."

In 2018/19, Gallagher featured for Chelsea Under-21s against Newport County, and that same season saw Arsenal starlet Saka score his first professional goal against Portsmouth.

And the competition set the likes of Callum Hudson-Odoi and Reece James on their way to silverware, having both collected Champions League and Club World Cup winners' medals at Chelsea.

Hudson-Odoi enjoyed tremendous success in the EFL Trophy, being named in the 2017/18 Team of the Tournament following his group stage exploits, having found the net four times, and that form saw him earn a Premier League debut before lifting the FA Cup in the same season.

Ex-Swansea City boss Garry Monk lifted the trophy with the Welsh side in 2006 as a player, and the 43-year-old highlighted some of the benefits in fostering the next generation.





"It's been well documented, especially in recent years, that it exposes young players to what we call 'real football', which is men's football," he notes.

"This competition is a chance to play against experienced professionals at Football Clubs on a stage where you go through rounds to get to the next round and then the potential of getting to a final. It's huge for young players."

Last season, 106 debuts were made in the competition and that trend has continued this term. Jack Shorrock became the youngest-ever player to feature for Port Vale at 15 years and 145 days old, with the youngster making his debut in an emphatic 4-0 showing over Shrewsbury Town.

Meanwhile, Northampton Town starlet Josh Tomlinson broke Ivan Toney's record as the youngest teenager to find the back of the net for the Cobblers in October.

Tomlinson, who was just 15 when he made his first-team bow for the Club, was on the pitch for just eight minutes before opening his account for Northampton against Arsenal Under-21s in Southern Group H. And despite the scoreline, slipping to a 3-1 defeat, it was a night to remember for the young midfielder, who took the mantle from England international Toney.

Elsewhere, exciting Barnsley prospect Fabio Jalo bagged a brace in a 4-2 victory over Doncaster Rovers before establishing himself in Sky Bet League One matchday squads, while Shrewsbury Town's Travis Hernes was handed a call-up for Norway Under-18s after scoring on his professional debut against Wolverhampton Wanderers Under-21s.

Plymouth Argyle's talented teenagers have also benefited from opportunities in this season's competition, with Academy trio Oscar Halls, Caleb Roberts and Will Jenkins-Davies all getting on the scoresheet during their run to the latter stages.

Current Portsmouth boss Danny Cowley, who previously led Lincoln City to victory in the competition, has long been an advocate for the Papa Johns Trophy, saying: "It's a great opportunity for the big Clubs to play some of their younger players in a competitive game, and it's great for the League One and League Two Clubs and their younger players, too.

"I love being a part of the competition, not only being involved in it as a manager but scouting and seeing players in a competitive environment. It gives you real context as to where those players are when you're looking at recruitment."

And at the end of the rainbow sits the biggest stage of all: the home of football, Wembley Stadium.

In 2019, Portsmouth and Sunderland attracted the largest-ever attendance for an EFL Trophy

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Final. Over 85,000 Pompey and Black Cats fans flocked to the capital – Wembley awash with a sea of blue and red – to see Portsmouth eventually triumph in a penalty shoot-out to lift the trophy, breaking a three-decade old record set in 1988.

This season, a cumulative attendance of 62,281 across 30 Papa Johns Trophy fixtures marked the highest seen in the first round of the Group Stage since the competition was reformatted in 2016/17.

Three ties attracted crowds of over 5,000, with the Yorkshire derby between Bradford City and Sheffield Wednesday in Northern Group H peaking at over 6,092. The Owls also travelled in record numbers, taking the biggest away crowd to an EFL Trophy game with 3,355 making the trip across the M62.

At the time of wrtiting, Bolton Wanderers are among the remaining teams vying for a trip to the capital this year, with Ian Evatt's side booking their place in the knock-out stages, and the Trotters boss is eager to make more memories with Bolton.

"Any time you get a chance to play a cup final at Wembley, you should try and take it with both hands because those are the moments in your football career that you remember," he said, speaking during the Group Stage.

On the other hand, several teams have felt the financial betterment of the competition, putting prize money towards various uses to benefit the community on a wider scale.



In 2018, Lincoln triumphed over Shrewsbury in the Final at Wembley and the Imps put the funds towards the Club's new training facility, using the money – coupled with an impressive FA Cup run – to build the Soper of Lincoln Elite Performance Centre, having previously been housed at their LNER Stadium.

Similarly, Peterborough United's run to the Quarter-Final of the EFL Trophy in 2018/19 funded improvements to facilities and the completion of a new 3G pitch at their Academy at the time.

Speaking on the boost that the money gave the Club, former Posh Chief Executive Bob Symns explained: "The prize money received through victories in the opening rounds of the Trophy has been really important to us.

"We've put the funds towards facilities at the Mick George Training Academy, as well as the purchase of additional medical equipment for use on matchdays. We have also been able to improve some of our catering provisions at the stadium, which I know our supporters have felt the benefit of."

Meanwhile, Forest Green Rovers' funds contributed towards installing new kitchen equipment in their main stand, as well as upgrading catering facilities in the other three stands at the stadium.

More recently, newly promoted Sutton United reached the Final at the first time of asking, giving the South Londoners a boost on and off the pitch.

And this year, a host of Clubs will reap the rewards of the Papa Johns Trophy – a competition which means a whole lot more to its Clubs.

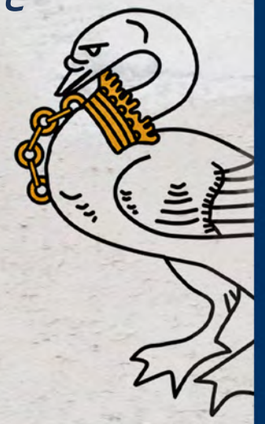
GARETH AINSWORTH

10 YEARS A WANDERER

24 September 2012 – Present

Managerial Honours
2017/18 – Sky Bet League Two Third-Place Promotion
2019/20 – Sky Bet League One Play-Offs

"I feel lucky more than proud. It's been a pleasure and I've really enjoyed every minute of it."
Gareth Ainsworth



"He's created a no-blame culture and he's the first to say that if something doesn't work, it's on him and if it does work, it's on us. When you've got somebody like that, how can you not want to succeed for them?"
Adebayo Akinfenwa

"He sees the individual first, which is often lost in the game. That encourages us players to be ourselves and when you get that from the top, you get 100% buy-in. Anything he asks us to do, we're willing to do it."
Jack Grimmer

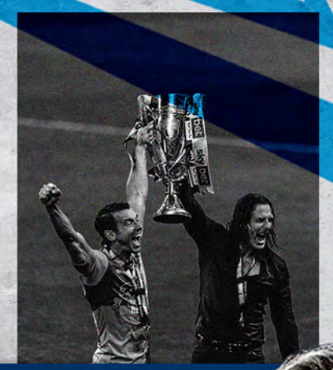
"I think what sets him apart is that he's an honest, genuine man and it's a credit to him how he keeps going from strength to strength."
Dom Gape

"One of his biggest strengths is that he cares about the players. The energy and enthusiasm that he brings every day really galvanises everyone. To get to 10 years in a management role is incredibly unique and I think that's just testament to the job he's done here."
Matt Bloomfield

"He wears his heart on his sleeve and I think that's why players run through a brick wall for him."
Jason McCarthy

"He's a great guy, he's humble and he's the most positive person I've ever met in football."
Joe Jacobson

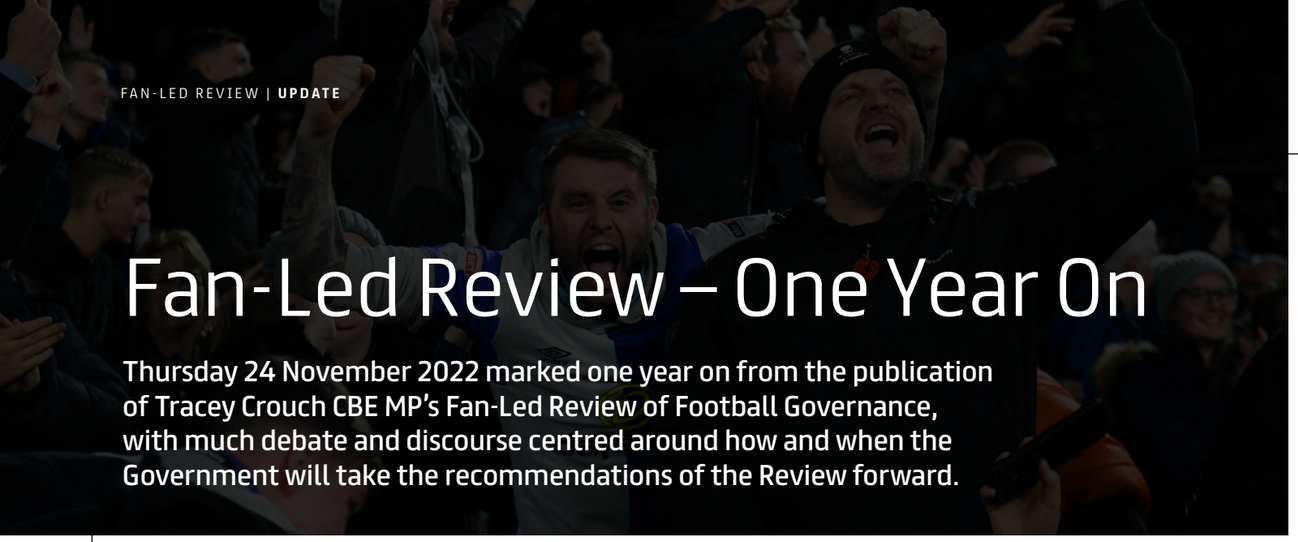








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Fan-Led Review – One Year On

Thursday 24 November 2022 marked one year on from the publication of Tracey Crouch CBE MP's Fan-Led Review of Football Governance, with much debate and discourse centred around how and when the Government will take the recommendations of the Review forward.

The EFL has long advocated for a fundamental financial and regulatory reset in order to ensure the long-term sustainability of the professional game and in turn, the communities EFL Clubs represent.

On the one-year anniversary of the Fan-Led Review and with all eyes on Westminster as to what happens next, politicians from across the political spectrum shared their thoughts with the EFL Magazine on the state of play...





Chair of the Fan-Led Review of Football Governance

Tracey Crouch CBE MP (Conservative)

The Fan-Led Review is about far more than football, just as football is about far more than the sum of its parts. Those of us who are passionate about the game and have put so much of our own time and effort towards this passion, are sometimes at risk of getting caught up in the technical details of football reforms. But, as we push for the implementation of the Fan-Led Review, it helps to take a step back and consider the broader value of our Clubs and the game.

Doing so not only helps us to make a more compelling case for football reform, but also shines a light on all the things that are best about it: community spirit and togetherness, the pride in our hometowns and their people, the empowerment and opportunity it gives to people of all background, ages and abilities.

I know that EFL Clubs are keenly aware of this value, and of their responsibilities towards the communities they are part of. Even without the reform, football is already going to great efforts through the tireless charity work of Clubs' community and supporters' trusts.

At a time when people are facing tough times over the cost of living, many will be feeling a sense of hopelessness about what the future holds, and worrying about their prospects, as well as those of their families and communities. Football can't solve all of these problems by itself, but it can certainly be part of the answer and the Fan-Led Review shows us how.

EFL Club Constituency MP

Sara Britcliffe MP (Conservative)



I remain confident, as should Clubs and fans, that it is a matter of when and not if the White Paper on football governance will be published and implemented. Myself and my colleagues in Parliament – both Conservative and Labour – are pushing for this to happen as soon as possible, and have been supported in this by the tireless efforts of the EFL and fan groups such as the Football Supporters' Association (FSA).

As a community-focused MP for Hyndburn & Haslingden – an area with a strong and proud footballing tradition – I am particularly concerned with the issues facing local people, communities and indeed Clubs such as Accrington Stanley, whom I have been able to work closely with since I entered Parliament. This allows me to ground the argument for creating a more sustainable future for football in the real-world concerns of my constituents.

It is plain to see that Clubs do a huge amount of work in their community to support the disadvantaged and less well off. That's before you even count the important role they play in bringing a sense of community spirit and pride in place to the surrounding area, which goes far beyond the season ticket holders or casual supporters. Football has a major positive social and economic impact on people in my area from all walks of life, whether they have a direct interest in football or not, and I know this applies to all Clubs in the EFL.



Shadow Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage & Music

Jeff Smith MP (Labour)

Football Clubs are at the heart of our towns and cities. As Shadow Sports Minister, when I speak to football supporters and officials up and down the country, I hear how Clubs bring a greater sense of place and identity to their communities, as well as creating good jobs and boosting local economies. They're much more than businesses, but vital sources of local pride and identity.

But all of this is under threat. Big gambles have been taken with the futures of some Clubs, and the financial sustainability of the pyramid has never been more at risk as a result of imbalances across the professional game. The need for reform of football governance, to protect these vital community assets, has been demonstrated time and again. And one year on from the Fan-Led Review's recommendations going public, we have a growing list of examples of why it must be implemented quickly.

If more Clubs and fans suffer because of delays to the implementation of the Review, responsibility will rest partly on the Government's shoulders. After sitting on the report since last November, the then-Sports Minister promised a White Paper committing to all the strategic recommendations in April this year. Two prime ministers later, with the Government paralysed by chaos, we've still had nothing.

With further delays or watered-down proposals, we run the risk of more Clubs gambling on their future success and ending up in financial problems, especially given the challenging economic outlook. As a result of the Review, we have a detailed plan for the future; we have the broad backing of fans and other key football stakeholders; we have support from cross-party politicians. We now need the Government to get on with the job, and deliver a fully independent regulator, enshrined in legislation, otherwise a Labour Government will.

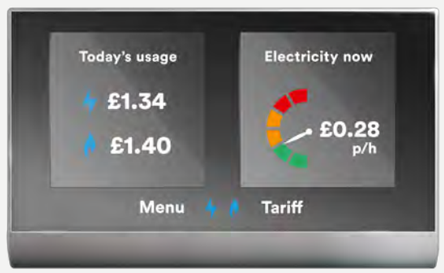
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Making the EFL mentally healthy

One of the key objectives of the EFL's three-year safeguarding strategy is to ensure that Club Safeguarding Officers receive up-to-date quality assured training courses, enabling them to confidently deal with concerns that arise, as well as working alongside others to help prevent them from occurring in the first place.

"Safeguarding, wellbeing and mental health are all entwined," Alex Richards, Head of Safeguarding at the EFL, explains. "When Safeguarding Officers are dealing with cases of harm or abuse and supporting victims and their families, more often than not these individuals are also experiencing mental health difficulties.

"I wanted to ensure that our Club safeguarding staff had access to a course which teaches them to recognise common mental health concerns, be able to listen non-judgementally and give support and information with regards to professional help available without cost being a prohibitive factor."

During the pandemic, members of the EFL Safeguarding Team trained as Mental Health First Aid Instructors through Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) England, enabling the League to offer both the adult and youth Mental Health First Aid courses free of charge to all 72 Member Clubs.

MHFA England is a community interest company – established in England in 2007. They are the only licensed body to deliver mental health first aid training in England, with a desire to create a society where everyone can thrive, where there is zero stigma surrounding mental health and where mental health can be openly discussed and supported.

"The course has been very well attended and received, and we have had such positive feedback," Richards continues. "We are hoping that by the end of this season, we will have at least one youth and adult Mental Health First Aider in every EFL Member Club."

Vicki Cockman, Director of Delivery at MHFA England, adds: "We are delighted that the EFL Safeguarding Team have been trained as Mental Health First Aid Instructors and are now delivering our Adult MHFA and youth MHFA courses to Club staff.

"The last couple of years have been tough on everyone, and it is more important than ever that we build our confidence and knowledge on how to speak more openly about our mental health and support each other.

"By delivering our youth MHFA, the EFL is showing their young people the importance of looking after their mental health, that it is OK to talk about mental health and that they can and should ask for support when they need it.

"MHFAiders will not only be working to support families and colleagues, they will also be supported with ongoing learning and development opportunities offered as part of their certification. This will ensure that MHFAiders stay effective, confident and motivated and help to play their part in improving the mental health of the nation."



"The training was vital in improving people's attitude and addressing the stigma attached to mental health issues, while also having a positive impact on how I manage my own mental health."

ROB CRONICK
Cardiff City Head of Safeguarding

"Understanding why people suffer, how they change and how to help them live more satisfying and gratifying lives is very important."

GREG GILLARD
Bolton Wanderers Academy Designated Safeguarding Officer

"Completing the Mental Health First Aid course has given me an understanding of the issues people may be going through and, importantly, on how I can support people going through this difficult period with confidence."

PAUL ANTROBUS
Crewe Alexandra Designated Safeguarding Officer



WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Connor Wickham has faced more setbacks than most, but it hasn't kept the Forest Green Rovers man down.

The striker, who has opened up about the mental struggles that he's endured after being blighted by injuries throughout his career, is finally enjoying being back on the pitch, fighting fit in Sky Bet League One.

New Beginnings

In November 2016, Wickham sustained a serious knee injury that would keep him out for almost two years, eventually making his comeback in October 2018 for Crystal Palace in the top flight.

More setbacks meant that Wickham was restricted to just 50 Palace outings in six seasons, and a fresh start at Sky Bet Championship side Preston North End ahead of the 2021/22 campaign only brought more bad luck.

Five minutes into the Lilywhites' Carabao Cup tie against Cheltenham Town, Wickham was forced off with a significant hamstring injury that would require surgery, marking his last appearance in a Preston shirt – just two games into his stint at the Club.

"I suffered that injury at Preston and that honestly was probably one of the lowest points of my career," he acknowledges. "Even after doing my ACL, the hamstring injury I got at Preston was one of the lowest points of my career, even mentally.

"That was probably more difficult to handle than my ACL and that's probably down to the fact that before I'd done my ACL, I hadn't really had any injuries that had been long-term.

"I'd been training at Preston for a few months before that game and had finally got to a place where I was fit, and then the carpet got pulled from under my feet five minutes into the game."

Although there was an element of certainty to his ACL tear, it didn't stop it from taking its toll on Wickham, who faced an extended period on the sidelines.





"When it happened, I knew straight away," he explains. "I didn't know that I'd done my ACL, but I knew it wasn't good. In your head, you almost process that easier because you half know what it's going to be and the timeframe; you can't cheat an ACL or cut corners anywhere in that rehab.

"Mentally, I thought to myself it was going to be nine to 12 months and I can't change it or sit and cry about it every day. You have to absorb them feelings and emotions when they come in, but it's then how quickly you can change that.

"I did mine in the end of November when it was dark in the mornings and it's getting dark early, so you're going to training and getting in for eight o'clock when it's not really light yet and then leaving at three o'clock and it's already going dark and miserable. It's not the easiest thing to keep that momentum and that mindset going for that long."

Long before the injuries that would curtail his budding Premier League career, Wickham became Ipswich Town's youngest-ever debutant when the promising youngster made his professional bow at the age of 16 years and 11 days in April 2009.

Receiving comparisons to the legendary Alan Shearer, the England youth international scooped the EFL's Young Player of the Season and Championship Apprentice Award in 2011.

That summer, having scored 15 goals in 72 games as a Tractor Boy teenager, Wickham commanded the highest fee for an EFL player moving to a Premier League Club and broke Ipswich's record for an outgoing transfer when Sunderland AFC swooped for his services for a reported £8m.

Now 29, he looks back on his early success with fondness and believes he's still got plenty more to give.

"When I was 18 and picking up those awards, you're almost naïve to what the future is going to hold," he says. "I could've won those awards and completely disappeared off the scene – football can change overnight, so you've just got to take any opportunity as it comes really.

"All of a sudden, at Sunderland I was in a dressing room with the likes of Wes Brown and John O'Shea, who had won multiple Premier Leagues and had won the Champions League. Growing up, Fernando Torres was my hero and suddenly I was sharing a pitch playing against him.





"You can't predict injuries and you never know how your career is going to pan out, but I wouldn't change anything I've done. I'm proud of the career I've had and I still feel like I can potentially have another seven or eight years. I've still got the quality and the hunger to play at the highest level, I just need to get fit and show it."

Wickham is now a senior figure in newly promoted Forest Green's dressing room, having got the wheels in motion for his resurgence during the second half of last season at Milton Keynes Dons, helping them reach the League One Play-Offs.

Once he got back into his stride after overcoming his hurdles, the Hereford-born frontman didn't want to stop there and his goalscoring form this campaign, with nine goals in all competitions to his name at the time of writing, silenced any doubts he might have had.

"I still feel like I've got so much to give, and I'm being given that opportunity now at Forest Green," he adds. "Playing football is the most important thing and I've got that love back for the game.

"I'm enjoying every single day now that I go in and train and can look forward to matchdays to show what I can do again. I know my body inside out and I'm feeling really good now.

"I'm enjoying playing football and I'm back playing week in, week out on Saturdays and Tuesdays. I had people that were saying, 'he's not fit' and 'he can't last this number of games'. Now, it feels like I'm starting to get back to my old self and scoring goals. My name is getting back in people's mouths."



Supporter Sanctioning Guide

With thousands of fans entering EFL stadia across the country every matchday, Clubs work hard to ensure their operations offer a safe and welcoming environment to provide an enjoyable experience for all.

The EFL has long supported its Member Clubs in relation to the sharing of best practice and guidance, that ultimately helps to enhance the experience of all spectators attending our fixtures.

Clubs can disappointingly encounter a range of issues on matchdays, from persistent standing, anti-social behaviour, criminal damage and running onto the pitch, to the use of pyrotechnics and drugs, ticket touting and hate crimes, where people are targeted in a prejudiced way.

Therefore, with a view to adopting a more consistent approach in how Clubs manage supporters who breach the terms and conditions of entry and ground regulations at stadiums, the EFL has collaborated to create the **Supporter Sanctioning Guide**, produced alongside experts in football policing and the Football Supporters' Association (FSA).

Bob Eastwood, the EFL's Head of Security and Safety Operations, says: "The vast majority of football supporters show their passion for the team they follow in the correct way. However, the behaviour of a very small number of individuals presents a challenge for Club officials across the country.

"Following the return of fans, after the disruption caused by the COVID pandemic, the behaviour of some supporters has been placed under the microscope, which has prompted questions about how the football authorities deal with incidents that are in contravention of ticketing terms and conditions or ground regulations.

"The EFL, with our long-standing track record for innovation, identified an opportunity to produce a new robust set of solutions for managing and dealing with supporter behaviour."

The guide helps Clubs in tackling the problems caused by a minority of fans in a consistent and proportionate way.

It contains a range of information to help support a fair, just and transparent standardised process in dealing with supporter sanctions, to help move away from a culture of Club bans being issued in every circumstance and instead towards a case-by-case system and proportionate sanctioning.

A clear process for appeals and communication between Clubs and supporters has also been established within the guide, which promotes new ways of dealing with some offences, including education programmes and restorative justice which seek to address the behaviour and prevent re-offending.

Amanda Jacks, from the FSA, who co-authored the guidance with Dr Ashley Lowerson from Northumbria University, says the EFL deserves credit for providing a clear framework for its Member Clubs to adopt.

She states: "Traditionally, a Club's default position was to simply exclude those supporters who have unfortunately behaved in an unacceptable way, but what the guidelines reflect now, and this is absolutely with the EFL's support, is a recognition that Clubs are not going to resolve this issue alone by exclusion.

"So, what the guidance is quite heavy on is the need for education and restorative justice – and a move away from this default position of a punitive response to a more holistic one."

Dr Ashley Lowerson adds: "The creation of the Supporter Sanctioning Guidance will rebalance the rights of spectators and those of the Football Club. A process that is autonomous yet encapsulates proportionality and fairness."

The EFL, Premier League, The FA and FSA have all agreed to work collaboratively to ensure that those attending games can do so in a safe and friendly environment, and as such came together to launch a programme of workstreams in the summer.

Ravi Sharma, who oversees the security operation at Stoke City, believes that a consistent approach by Clubs in how they deal with poor behaviour will provide a greater degree of clarity for supporters.

He says: "We need to fully open our eyes to the need for consistency across the board. We may do our own thing at Stoke City, which is completely different to what other Clubs across the country could be doing.

> "The EFL, with our long-standing track record for innovation, identified an opportunity to produce a new robust set of solutions for managing and dealing with supporter behaviour."
>
> **Bob Eastwood**
> EFL's Head of Security and Safety Operations

"Having the EFL guidance is important in two ways: one, it gives us a standard that we can all adhere to in terms of the protocol and, second of all, it gives supporters transparency, which is important.

"This is the standard that we're all going to use and there's going to be consistency in the approach. I think supporters need to understand what the sanctions could be. Some of the incidents from last season, post-lockdown and during the Play-Offs last year, a number of Clubs were found to be in breach of FA regulations, which resulted in substantial fines for Clubs and the banning of some fans. The police also made a number of arrests.

"The Guidance will help to reduce conflict between Clubs and supporters, promote positive, lively atmospheres across the leagues and improve safety within the EFL's 72 grounds."

Happier, healthier, inspired communities

How Lincoln City's **Conversation Club** is bringing the local community closer together

Whether it be seeking employment, looking for community volunteering opportunities or simply hoping to have the confidence to chat with a neighbour as you pass them in the street, Lincoln City's Conversation Club helps those eager to learn or improve upon their English to open new doors, as well as build lifelong friendships.



Neville Coupland, Community Organiser

The programme, delivered in the LNER Stadium area and funded by the National Lottery, has engaged with individuals from a variety of countries, including Bulgaria, Mexico, China, Poland and Italy over the years.

Classes teach English to non-native speakers in accessible community settings to help them progress onto further opportunities.

Babs Free, Lincoln City Foundation's ESOL Leader, has helped to establish the programme, teaching courses to almost 50 students from 25 different countries, and praised the attitude of members already facing adversity.

"They regularly attended, even though COVID and childcare issues combined to make life difficult," she said.

"Added to these negatives was employers' unthinking and casual re-assignment of work shifts, which meant some came straight off a night shift or were mortified to have to cancel at the last minute. Homework was always completed, and our classes progressed from self-conscious mumblings to cheerful chatter – a triumph for any language teacher.

"It's been a fantastic opportunity to teach such a diverse group of people. They all want to speak to English people more but find it hard to engage with first-language speakers. So, if you get a chance, practise your own language skills with a passing student and see what you can learn from them."

The last six months have seen excellent levels of progress in the students' English levels, as well as enjoying social events outside of the classroom, which have really been the icing on the cake, with new families in Lincoln becoming positively linked in their new homes.

Some of these included sightseeing visits to local landmarks, such as the Lincoln Cathedral and Lincoln Castle; socialising over food, including a barbecue at St Andrews Garden to try different cuisines from across the group; picnics and other gatherings.





> Homework was always completed, and our classes progressed from self-conscious mumblings to cheerful chatter – a triumph for any language teacher
>
> "



Participant Alan has benefitted from the programme since relocating to Lincoln from Hong Kong.

He recalled: "After I moved to Lincoln, I found that my English was not good enough to survive in the UK. I was always afraid that people don't understand what I'm saying and of course, I'm not able to fully understand what they're saying either. Some of them speaking quite fast and some of them speaking in colloquial, it's a disaster for me.

"In order to adapt my life in the UK, I decided to seek for an English course to improve and upgrade my English skills. Fortunately, I discovered that there was a free English course offering by Conversation Clubs at Lincoln City Foundation.

"Everyone in the class spoke a similar level of English, so whenever we spoke or shared an opinion, we had to use English, pushing us to practice more and listen more. I've learned so much and it's really helped build my confidence in public."

And Alan is just one of many participants joining in with Conversation Clubs. Ha Eun, a regular volunteer for Conversation Club since relocating from South Korea, described the sessions as a "resting place" where she has "met lovely friends who understand me and make me feel comfortable".

eBay Community Champions 2022

As part of its partnership with the EFL and the wider Small Businesses United campaign, eBay recently launched its Community Champions event.

In the lead up to the local Sky Bet League Two derby match between AFC Wimbledon and Sutton United in October, eBay brought together four grassroots teams from the local area to decide who would be crowned the eBay Community Champions 2022.

The Community Champions event was eBay's own spin on this local derby, bringing together the community and a celebration of all things football.

Two local eBay small businesses, Dassleresales and Hampers by Lauren, were able to sponsor the grassroots teams and matchday, all funded by eBay.

The event consisted of a series of fun football challenges and games which gave grassroots players the opportunity to exhibit their football skills and flair, while being professionally coached by Wimbledon and Sutton players.

The evening was hosted by Sky Sports pundit and former EFL footballer, David Prutton. In the end, two grassroots teams were crowned champions, but ultimately everyone who took part went home a winner.



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EDI Education

The EFL 'Together' strategy, launched in August 2022, was built across five key strategy pillars – Support, Communicate, Educate, Embed and Listen.

Each pillar provides the EFL with the outcomes and outputs to ensure the 'Together' strategy can be successful and steer the EFL on its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) journey.

The Educate pillar is key in ensuring EFL Clubs have the understanding, awareness and knowledge to support their own journey and making sure everyone across the EFL has the ability to make a difference to improve the environment, as well as establishing the EFL as a source of good practice.

The Educate pillar states that the EFL, along with its partners, provides a comprehensive programme of education to EFL Clubs and beyond, ensuring awareness and understanding, which allows for the removal of barriers.

Its outcomes are that EFL Clubs are confident to operate in a changing EDI landscape and have improved awareness, knowledge and understanding across EDI topics. The future ambition within the Educate pillar is for Clubs across the EFL to be confident to challenge all forms of discrimination and implement an inclusive culture, making alterations to the environment to support participants.

Since the launch of the 'Together' strategy in August, the EFL Inclusion Department have been working tirelessly to provide opportunities for the EFL and its Clubs to increase their understanding, awareness and knowledge. A total of 23 webinars have been made available to staff across the EFL, EFL Trust, Clubs and CCOs, producing over 2,000 collective hours of education to staff across the various organisations – the yearly target through the strategy was 1,000 collective hours. The success of the webinars has demonstrated the willingness across the EFL to increase knowledge and improve the environment.

The Inclusion Department has also delivered guidance to Clubs in regard to Cultural Celebration and good practice in relation to supporting fans from the Sikh faith to attend matches, with policies related to the attendance with Kirpans. Projects in conjunction with Muslim Chaplains in Sports and Holocaust Educational Trust have provided guidance, while Club visits once again offer greater scope of support provided across the EFL.

Playing for Inclusion E-Learning opportunity remains a vital resource in accessing education opportunities and the team has been working on updating the content to ensure it is relevant to the new journey in which the EFL is undertaking.

As we move into the second half of the season, the importance of education does not diminish. The webinar series will continue to provide a further 20 opportunities. Along with the new webinars, the Learning Management System will open with the recordings of many of the previous webinars being available to view.



Guidance documents will be developed in areas such as sanitary products within stadiums, as well as guidance on supporting Ramadan and Prayers for Muslim players and staff across the EFL. E-Learning will become more prominent with the launch of EDI related E-Learnings focused on the overall business and to support Senior Managers and Board Members.

Towards the end of the Season, the Inclusion Department will provide a conference for Disability Access, Officers, Inclusion Leads and its first Women in the EFL Conference for female staff and allies across the EFL.

The creation of the 'Together' strategy was built on consultation. As the EFL continues its path, it will seek to consult with all across the EFL to understand the future need within the Educate pillar to ensure provisions meet the needs of EFL Clubs.

When Preston North End unveiled Ryan Lowe as their new manager in December 2021, Plymouth Argyle fans were understandably concerned about the impact his departure would have on the Club, having experienced a period of sustained progress.

SCHUEY'S at the WHEEL

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

But they needn't have worried. Lowe's understudy, Steven Schumacher, was ready and waiting to step into the hotseat after almost four years as an assistant.

Fast forward 12 months, he's got the Pilgrims primed for a promotion push in Sky Bet League One.

"Going to Preston was definitely a consideration because when Ryan was offered the job, there was a deal in place to take me with him," Schumacher admits. "But once this opportunity came from the owner, Simon Hallett, and the CEO, Andrew Parkinson, I just felt I was ready for it.

"I'm a big believer in taking risks. I backed myself to try my hardest, to learn and to improve every day – that's all I can do. If it doesn't work, then at least I've tried.

"So far, I've really enjoyed it. As far as first years in management go, it couldn't have gone much better, apart from maybe getting in the Play-Offs last season.

"Although that was a disappointment to miss out, I think it was a big learning curve and highlighted pretty quickly what we needed to do in the summer to try to take that next step."

As a player, Schumacher made 461 appearances for six EFL Clubs in a career spanning 14 years at League One and League Two level.

As an assistant manager, he has back-to-back League Two promotions on his CV, having worked as number two to his fellow Liverpudlian Lowe at Bury and Plymouth.

Now, the 38-year-old is eager to be a success as the main man in charge.

Having completed the 2021/22 campaign just three points adrift of a Play-Off berth, Argyle have put themselves firmly in the conversation for promotion to the Sky Bet Championship this term after producing a run of 15 league games unbeaten from the middle of August to the start of December.

"It feels pretty good," says Schumacher. "To have got so many points in what's been a really competitive League One is a brilliant achievement and shouldn't be underestimated.

"When we got the fixtures drawn out in the summer, we expected to have a tough start for the first 10 games, but the players stepped up to the challenge and we got a great haul of points.

"More recently, it's been hard because we've had a few injuries to some important players, but credit to the lads, they haven't sulked about it and have been grinding out results."

In spite of his relative lack of experience at the helm, Schumacher is clear in his vision and has already implemented many of those beliefs.

"As a number two, I learned to be a good grass coach – that's what I consider to be my strength," he clarifies. "I'm good with detail, session planning, game planning and trying to get a message across to the players.

"I'm hands on and I want to make sure our team is organised.

"We've got to play with energy, first and foremost. We've got to be fit and we've got to play with an intensity that teams might struggle to handle. We like to pass the ball forward with speed and utilise the players that have the attacking prowess to hurt teams.

"We're going to be a Club and a team where the players get a lot of power and ownership. It's important for me to give them that trust to work out how we can get the better of the opposition, and for them to have an understanding of the game.

"There are six or seven of our players going through their UEFA B coaching course, so I think they're interested in how things work and the coaching process.

"We also use analytics quite a lot, not only in recruitment but also game planning. We look at information every week from our full-time data scientist. The modern-day game demands more detail. It's not enough just to see it with your eyes and get a good feeling anymore. If the information is there, you should definitely be using it."



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The Argyle boss isn't the only first-time manager to enjoy success in the third tier.

Liam Manning took MK Dons to the Play-Offs at the first time of asking last season, while Kieran McKenna has turned Ipswich Town into promotion contenders in 2022/23.

Schumacher, who also has a degree in sports journalism and broadcasting, believes the level is perfectly designed for young managers to gain invaluable experience.

"Football pitches, facilities and training grounds have all improved, so if you've got a clear idea of how you want to coach a team, the facilities now are enabling you to do that," he explains.

"I think the trend of young managers getting opportunities is important because we're the future of the game. We're coming into the job with enthusiasm and different ideas to the older generation.

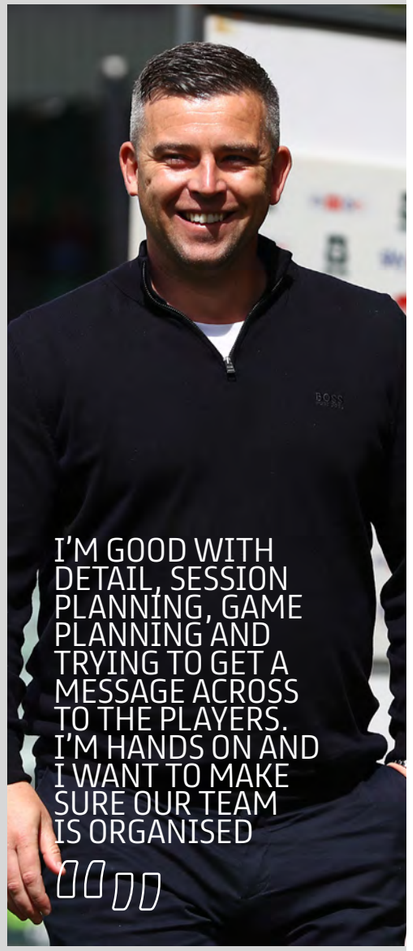
"The opportunity is there in the EFL and hopefully us younger coaches can take those chances and build teams with styles and reputations that the Premier League Clubs eventually start looking at, like Graham Potter and Eddie Howe have done."

Likewise, Schumacher has showcased a willingness to put faith in young players, utilising the Papa Johns Trophy as a platform to integrate many of Argyle's talented Academy prospects.

Most notably, seven teenagers featured during the Club's Round of 32 victory over Charlton Athletic, with 17-year-old Caleb Roberts even getting himself on the scoresheet.

"The EFL Trophy is a great platform for the young players to play and shine in front of a crowd," he comments. "We made a conscious effort this year to field teams that would help the young players, fielding them alongside really good senior professionals to guide them through games.

"The pathway is definitely there and the lads in the Academy are all doing a great job, from the Under-8s to the Under-18s. When the young players come to train



with us, they don't look out of place and that wasn't the case when we first came down here."

Plymouth have also been astute in their recruitment, exploiting the loan market to their advantage, with Norwich City's Bali Mumba, Swansea City's Morgan Whittaker, Aston Villa's Finn Azaz, Wolverhampton Wanderers' Nigel Lonwijk and Birmingham City's Sam Cosgrove all impressing so far.

"In the summer, we concentrated on trying to bring in players who were going to be the difference for us," he notes. "We didn't increase the numbers of the squad from last year, but we definitely increased the quality.

"The loan system was crucial for us in doing that. We highlighted targets that had been out on loan before and displayed attributes that would improve our team. I would've loved to sign all five of those players permanently but realistically, we just can't afford their wages.

"The lads have all contributed massively and have been a huge part of our team and hopefully they're enjoying the experience."

It's not just on the pitch where Schumacher has helped to establish a winning formula.

The Pilgrims have increased their levels of engagement with the local community, including player visits in schools, the provision of courses and programmes for a wide range of disabilities, and the launch of Project 35 – an initiative designed to support those in need during the cost-of-living crisis, with tens of thousands of lunches being delivered across the region, as well as thousands of schoolchildren participating in free sports, health and wellbeing sessions.

Even the Club's Under-18s squad have showed their community spirit by undertaking a litter pick around the area and donating to a local foodbank.

"The Club, over the last four or five years, has definitely created stronger links and relationships with the community," he says. "We've made a conscious effort to get out there, do things properly and be a good example for the city of Plymouth.

"We're seeing the impact of that in the attendances we've been getting. People are proud to come and watch us again, we're selling out every week and the atmosphere is buzzing. It's an intimidating place to come and our home form has been brilliant, with a Club-record nine wins in a row.

"For the young players, getting involved with the community work is part of their education. They're young footballers and they're all doing great, but they've got to understand that there's a long way to go and them being out in the community and setting good examples is really important."

Only a year into the job, but already in the driving seat for automatic promotion, it seems Plymouth are on the right track with Schumacher at the wheel.

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A conscious effort is being made to develop football's future stars as people, as well as players.

Through the EFL's education partner, League Football Education, Academy scholars across the country have been provided opportunities to gain a better understanding of how developing a broader identity can support performance, wellbeing and transition.

Mentoring the next generation

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

LFE's Personal Development programme consists of six mentoring workshops for prospects aged 16 and 17, presented by one of eight trained deliverers, while additional resources are also provided for Club staff delivery, including a module to create an individualised plan.



Five of the mentors involved have current or prior experience in the professional game, with Carlisle United forward Tobi Sho-Silva and past EFL players Bobby Copping, Fraser Franks, Linvoy Primus and Mark Roberts passing on their insights, alongside former Olympic swimmer Adam Whitehead, Paralympian Jack Rutter and ex-international basketball player Dru Spinks.

Project Leader Kelly Butterworth says: "The mentor programme began in the 2018/19 season with two pilot Clubs, developing on from the My Future Today event which focused on exploring a broad identity and understanding the concept of personal development.

"The initiative has allowed for these key concepts to be explored further, in a palatable and gradual format, allowing apprentices to form working relationships with a personal development mentor, and be supported through an introduction to personal development, understanding and becoming self-aware of their own characteristic skills and guided through their own goal-setting process.

"The mentoring programme has only gone from strength to strength, with eight mentors currently delivering to 41 Clubs across the 2022/23 season – an increase of 39 since the year of its inception.

"Members of the mentor team all come from an elite sporting background and are familiar with the highs and lows that participating in elite sport can bring, which make them ideal candidates to support our first-year apprentices at Clubs.

"In addition to this, they are strong advocates for engaging in personal development and have demonstrated taking ownership of their activities both in and out of their sporting environments, whether it be through mentoring, higher education or counselling, to name a few.

"Their ability to empathise and share their own personal anecdotes add a really unique and person-centred feel to the programme, allowing them to draw on their own experiences and provide another avenue of support and guidance to these young athletes."

Here, the five mentors that have plied their trade in the EFL discuss the project from their perspectives.



BOBBY COPPING

FORMER EFL CLUBS: BURY & PETERBOROUGH UNITED

I joined the programme in September 2021, having previously gone through the same mentoring sessions as a scholar only three or four years ago.

I feel that having the experience of completing the programme as a player puts me in a great position to deliver these workshops because I can relate to being in their position very recently. I've come through an Academy and been a professional footballer, so I understand exactly what it takes to get to where they want to get to.

My own journey of being released and then having to retire early through injury dictates my delivery. I can speak from several different perspectives having experienced many ups and downs in the game and I can give them an understanding of how things could pan out for them as young footballers.

Ultimately, I got involved because I want to help the next generation of young footballers and give them the best chance possible of becoming professional. Hopefully, the players can take something away from every session that gives them that extra 1% of development.

It's great to be able to pass on my knowledge and it's nice to have received a positive response from the players and Club staff so far.

FRASER FRANKS

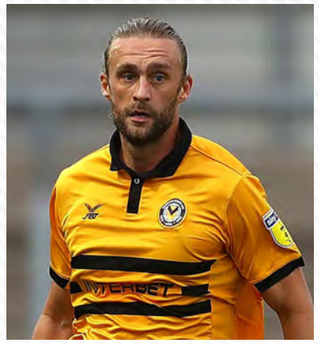
FORMER EFL CLUBS: BRENTFORD, AFC WIMBLEDON, LUTON TOWN, STEVENAGE & NEWPORT COUNTY

I absolutely loved my time as a scholar at Brentford FC and have always been fascinated by the different journeys and directions that a youth team will go on to in the future.

As a young player, I struggled mentally and didn't really know who I was as a person. My aim is to help these young men see themselves as more than a footballer and help to equip them with the tools to thrive with their wellbeing, as well as their career.

I'm very open with the players with how I felt at their age. I allow myself to be very vulnerable when speaking to these players as I know how much it can help them. A lot of the time, these are very insecure young men who are finding their way in life, but feel they have to portray a character. It's about allowing them to find their authentic selves and explore their emotions.

I think it's so helpful for them to resonate with someone that knows their journey. I try to relate to the



players like an older brother or like a senior professional that could be in the same team as them in a couple of years. You just try to share experiences and expand their thinking and hope they absorb the information. Once they realise that it can make them a better player, as well as enhancing their long-term wellbeing, they seem to buy in!

Becoming a mentor has allowed me to find out who I am and what I actually enjoy doing. I didn't really know what my values were, what my interests were and even that there was a life and opportunities away from the football bubble I'd always lived in. It allows me a healthy outlet that is beneficial for me.

LINVOY PRIMUS

FORMER EFL CLUBS: CHARLTON ATHLETIC, BARNET, READING & PORTSMOUTH

I got involved with LFE at the start of 2022 as I believed in the work to promote personal development and wanted the chance to help young players have a rounded view of themselves.

The game itself hasn't changed much – it's still a ball and two nets – but what has changed is life outside of the pitch. The stresses that surround the game are far more intense now than they have ever been.

I knew support was there if I wanted it as a player, but I wouldn't leave my comfort zone and ask for help. I believe if I had a face-to-face meeting, like the workshops that are



delivered on the mentoring programme, I may have felt more comfortable to speak out.

In my playing days, personal development was only really talked about when an injury had already happened, or your career was over. I hope in years to come we can witness the positive impact that will come from this work in the world of football, with players more open to developing broader identities at an earlier age alongside their football.

MARK ROBERTS

FORMER EFL CLUBS: CREWE ALEXANDRA, CHESTER CITY, ACCRINGTON STANLEY, STEVENAGE, FLEETWOOD TOWN, CAMBRIDGE UNITED & FOREST GREEN ROVERS

I feel very fortunate that I have been at the forefront of this exciting project since its inception in 2018. To see how it has grown and to have played a pivotal role in that evolution process has really helped me to make my own transition out of the professional game.

This season, I am mentoring 10 different Clubs and find it incredibly rewarding to have the opportunity to make a positive impact on an industry that has given so much to me.

I realise I don't work with the lads on the training pitch and may never see them perform on the field, so I choose to focus my energy and effort on developing the person because that is a fundamental factor in player development.

Of course, I take note of the players that do and don't make it and there is no coincidence that those that succeed often demonstrate a professional mindset in my sessions, well before that elusive first contract is signed.

However, I'm also quick to point out to them that football is a game of opinions, with limited opportunities, and that is why I am confident that the support we provide can act as a catalyst for individuals to thrive, whether they remain within the game or explore their options outside of it, too.

I stress that personal development is not limited to formal education and by encouraging these young players to pursue their other interests, hobbies and passions, we are opening their minds to the possibilities available to each and every one of them.

Personal development had such a profound impact on my football career, but I class myself as a lifelong learner who is striving to be the best version of myself. That journey continues, and my mission now is to empower others while inspiring them to do the same!





TOBI SHO-SILVA

CURRENT CLUB: CARLISLE UNITED
FORMER EFL CLUBS: CHARLTON ATHLETIC & SUTTON UNITED

I am passionate about using my voice and unique experiences, as a current player, to speak with current apprentices about how they can use their time to maximise their personal development, in life and particularly in education.

Since my involvement with the programme began during the 2021/22 season, I have experienced many personal benefits. It allows me the space to engage in activity outside of football, which enables me to switch off from it and creates a better work-life balance.

I have also been able to garner much knowledge from the teaching, which has allowed me to grow in confidence, enhance my ability to lead and has further improved my communication skills.

Furthermore, delivering these workshops has provided me the opportunity to gain experience in an area which I would like to explore further when I transition out of football. I believe there's great value in going out and doing things that you are passionate about, rather than merely thinking about them.

Being a mentor has impacted my performance as a current player in the EFL in many ways. We often speak about transferable skills and how individuals might develop in areas such as resilience, patience and empathy, which are essential in the game of football and applicable to players at any stage in their career.

Additionally, delivering the content of this programme and receiving challenging questions from the lads has driven me to want to improve my own game and helped to establish a solid foundation of theory which also underpins my performance.

I view being able to mentor at my own Club as a privilege. I am able to build good relationships with the boys at Carlisle in workshops and then also go to their games and be a presence and source of additional support beyond the personal development sessions.

Also, mental health is important to me and being able to provide a safe space where others can feel comfortable to open up and ask questions is one of the most rewarding parts of mentoring at my own Club.

I can't speak highly enough of the work that LFE is doing to provide vital support for younger players in this industry. Helping players understand their identity and using a variety of different and creative methods to share the importance of personal development, not just in football but in life, is very much needed. We won't be footballers forever and it is important that it is understood that life doesn't end when you hang up your boots.

As the first current player to get involved with delivering this programme, I highly recommend that more current players, with an interest in mentoring and delivering different workshops, get involved with the Personal Development programme as a means of pouring into the younger generation and furthering their own personal development.



MEET THE TEAM

Football Services

Following the retirement of David Cookson earlier this season, **Andrea Brown** was appointed as Director of the Football Services team.

Andrea's career began at Preston North End, where she held the role of Community Development Manager before joining the League in 2008 as Events Officer, organising the five showpiece finals at Wembley Stadium. From that role, she moved on to be Customer Services Manager, then on to Club Relationships Manager and finally, Head of Football Services before being given the opportunity to lead the Football Services team.



Coming from that Club background has really helped her to be empathetic to the demands facing Clubs when putting on matches. Moving forward, she aims to develop a strong and supportive Football Services team who deliver successful competitions, while supporting Clubs as much as possible.

The Football Services department is made up of five different teams:

Fixtures and Competitions Team

Head of Football Services, Paul Snellgrove, supports Andrea and leads the Fixtures and Competitions team. Having worked at the League for over 20 years, he brings a wealth of experience and is supported by Alex Neary (Fixtures Officer), Louise Owens (Broadcast Operations), Kersten August (Fixtures Administrator) and Will Cookson (CEFA Administrator).

The Fixtures and Competitions team manage the compilation of all EFL fixtures, including the Sky Bet Championship, League One and League Two, Carabao Cup, Papa Johns Trophy, Youth Alliance, Central League and Community & Education Football Alliance League.

In addition, they deal with competition rules, broadcast match selections and act as a conduit between the League and PGMOL.

Events Team

Headed up by Xsara Sharples, the Events team are responsible for organising all EFL events, from Club meetings and seminars to the EFL Awards and the five EFL Finals.

Xsara is supported in organising the events by Events Officer, Anna Williams and Events Administrator, Greg Murphy.

The team spend a lot of time liaising with Wembley Stadium to discuss staging of Finals, including ticket plans, segregation arrangements, hospitality arrangements, matchday activations and media, broadcast and EFL title sponsor requirements.

Club Relationships Team

As Club Relationship Manager, Gemma Bailey-Hall leads the team of four Club Relationship Officers to provide support to Clubs on a day-to-day basis. Having worked at Everton and Wigan Athletic, she understands what support Clubs require and has developed a team to assist with this.

Debbie Anyon and Shelly Burt support Clubs with their matchday obligations regarding commercial delivery. They assist Clubs in ensuring they have the correct sponsor branding in place and facilitate meetings where Clubs can share best practice.

Daniel Osmond and Hasnain Mohammed provide operational support around compliance and regulations in specific respect of stadia and matchdays. They also provide support to National League Clubs in their application for EFL membership.

Security and Safety Operations Team

With prior experience as a Chief Superintendent at Lancashire Constabulary, Bob Eastwood – Head of Security and Safety Operations – leads on all matters in respect of safety and operations.

Supported by Martin Kennedy and Steve Dowson, he provides advice to Clubs on matters connected with their matchday operations, such as policing and security costs, timings of kick-offs, local relationships with emergency services and local authorities, investigation of hate crime and any other crime-related issues.

He is the EFL Lead for counter terrorism matters and represents the EFL on a number of football safety and security issues.

Medical Team

The work of the EFL's Medical Advisors, Dr Richard Higgins and Dr Subhashis Basu, has been invaluable over recent years, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their support and guidance ensured that Clubs were able to safely return to training and playing football matches and fans could return to grounds.

Working closely with the Club Relationships team, they offer guidance to Clubs and medical staff within Clubs in relation to the EFL Regulations, providing guidance and sharing of best practice across a number of areas, including but not limited to, cardiac screening, concussion management and brain health, medical equipment, matchday medical operations and qualifications of medical staff.

They represent the EFL on medical committees and ensure there is a balanced approach to implementation of medical policy.



Dealing with Diabetes

"There's absolutely nothing in the way that should prevent you from becoming a professional footballer. I haven't let diabetes get in my way, so you shouldn't let it get in yours."

That is the advice of Jack Muldoon who, at the age of 33, is performing as well as ever – some would say against the odds.

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

As a 12-year-old, the Harrogate Town frontman experienced symptoms of chronically high blood sugar levels and was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. He remembers the time vividly.

"I was away on a school trip and when I came back and got off the bus, my mum noticed that I had lost a lot of weight and I had really pale skin," he recalls.

"My dad's got diabetes, so she had an inkling straight away. She took me to hospital and a couple of tests later, I was diagnosed. I stayed in overnight and was shown how to do my injections and then cracked on from there."

Being part of the 8% of people in the UK to have the serious and lifelong condition, Muldoon could've been forgiven for feeling disheartened and disillusioned. But instead, he refused to be defined by his illness.

"When I got diagnosed, the first thing I looked at was how it would hinder me," he reveals. "The only thing I couldn't do was go in the army, because you stay out in the field for days at a time without a constant food supply.

"The dietician said that the best form of medicine for diabetes, aside from insulin, is fitness, so I just kept on going. I was in hospital on the Friday and then by Sunday morning, I was back on the pitch playing for Scunthorpe schoolboys."

Managing type 1 diabetes can be challenging, but Muldoon adapted quickly and was never fazed by his adversity.

After 21 years, he has found carb counting to be the most effective method of calculating the correct insulin dosages.

"I've had it for so long now that it's just second nature," he reflects. "I wouldn't say my life drastically changed, I just have to be well prepared and make sure my bag is stocked up with everything I need, such as insulin, energy drinks, bananas and Mars bars.

"I have a long-acting injection every day – it's a 24-hour injection that I take every morning. Then, I carb count, so I'll take a shot of insulin for every 10g of carbohydrates that I eat.

"For example, I have three Weetabix and a banana in the morning, and that's about 35g of carbohydrates, so I'll inject three units of insulin. Prior to a game and around 12 hours afterwards, you're meant to slice that by half because it's an intense workout.

"I've also got a Libre device, which is a sensor in my arm that connects to an app on my phone and takes glucose readings. It's a blessing because the traditional way to monitor your levels was to take blood by pricking your finger, so I'd advise anyone that's diabetic to try it out."

Despite his relaxed attitude towards the condition, it hasn't always been plain sailing for Muldoon, particularly during his days before professional football as a plasterer.



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"The dietician said that the best form of medicine for diabetes, aside from insulin, is fitness, so I just kept on going. I was in hospital on the Friday and then by Sunday morning, I was back on the pitch playing for Scunthorpe schoolboys"

"I worked on a building site for seven years," he reveals. "At the time, I was on a different type of insulin and I wasn't carb counting – it was just inject in a morning and inject at night.

"You're carrying a lot of heavy equipment up and down steps and it takes the energy out of you when you're grafting hard. There'd be days where I'd pass out and I'd be sat in the corridor and wake up with a couple of paramedics next to me.

"Having a hypo (hypoglycaemia) episode wipes you out completely and all you can do is lie down and do nothing for the next few hours. I got myself in them sort of scenarios three or four times, so it wasn't loads but it was enough to annoy me and that just encouraged me to get ahead of it and become more prepared to not get in that situation."

Fortunately for the Scunthorpe-born striker, diabetes has never restricted his ability to perform on the football pitch.

"Touch wood, I've never had to come off because I'm low on blood sugar," says Muldoon. "The only times it would maybe have some sort of impact is when the temperature is really high, so maybe during the middle of pre-season, but the gaffer and the physios and everyone else are aware of the situation.

"It's all about preparation; I've always been well regimented with my routines, and I think that's important. I go to the gym the day after every game, I drink two or three litres of water every day throughout the whole week and I eat well – apart from a curry or a takeaway and a couple of beers at the weekend!

"I've always got my bag stocked up, so after a game when my sugar levels are coming down dramatically, I can quickly get back to the changing room and counter that with an energy drink and a banana or a chocolate bar.

"Many people will say I've got to this point against the odds, but I don't look at it that way. I'm always well equipped to deal with my diabetes, so I don't see it as an obstacle.

"Going into a game, I obviously need to have an idea of where my blood sugar levels are at, but I'm more focused on how I'm going to perform rather than how my diabetes is going to affect me."

Although he is approaching retirement age, Muldoon is determined to extend his playing career for as long as possible, having waited until he was 31 for a proper shot in the EFL.

"I started my career at Brigg Town on £50 a week, and I remember having a sit down with the manager, Steve Housham, and said I wanted to get to the Conference by the time I was 24 or 25," he notes.

"I managed to surpass that when Keith Hill took me to Rochdale, but I snapped my groin two games into pre-season and didn't touch a ball for three months, so I ended up only playing a handful of games in League One and then dropped down to Lincoln in the Conference.

"To get back into the EFL five years later was amazing. It's been an absolute privilege to play for Harrogate in League Two and I'm really proud of what I've achieved so far. I scored the Club's first goal at this level, and I've managed to play a big part in keeping us in a secure place.

"I'm 33 now but I don't have any plans of slowing down, and my legs aren't telling me anything else at the moment! Hopefully, long may it continue."

Having worked so hard to make his mark on the pitch, Muldoon is now focused on becoming a role model off it.

Committed to inspiring the next generation, he has become an ambassador for Diabetes UK and delivers talks in schools to raise awareness of his condition.

"I'm a big believer in being a role model and using my platform to help people," he declares. "I get so many messages on my Instagram, probably three or four a week, and I always respond and have a little chat.

"I've had a few 15 or 16-year-olds message about football and I try to give them some advice, mostly about their diets and what they're eating before a game. Many people have told me that what I've suggested has worked, so I guess I'm having a positive impact!

"A lot of young people want to grow up and play football and I hope that when they watch me out there scoring and being part of the team, they understand that having diabetes doesn't stop you achieving those dreams.

"I've never let it get to me and it's never been a hindrance, so it shouldn't be for anyone else."



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SOAPER HEROES

LIFEBUOY SOAPER HEROES



EFL Partner Lifebuoy have worked with the EFL, EFL Trust and Club Community Organisations to develop their children's hand hygiene campaign, Soaper Heroes for Football Clubs.

This is part of Lifebuoy's ongoing ambition to teach over 5 million children about good hygiene habits by 2025.

73K+
Soaper Heroes recruited

100
Over 100 grassroots Football Clubs have signed up and have been using the Soaper Hero activities in their regular training sessions

1,000
children engaged with the Soaper Hero programme at Utilita Football Festivals were sessions ran by Community Club Organisations

21,500
Children additionally received Soaper Hero packs through existing Community Club Organisations' programmes



The EFL teamed up with Lifebuoy to develop the initiative, which primarily existed as a schools programme. Since early 2022, the material has been adapted to enhance the programme, using experience from the EFL and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) as well as advice from UK public health experts and schoolteachers.

Lifebuoy's cartoon mascots, Bish, Bash and Bosh, guide children through fun experiments and use catchy songs designed to embed good handwashing practices into their everyday lives. Together, Lifebuoy and the EFL have developed warm-up and clean-up activities that can be incorporated into regular football sessions with the dual aim of being engaging but also educating about hygiene. The EFL have further supported the programme by recruiting our own ambassadors, Clinton Morrison and Bela Shah.

Lifebuoy and Soaper Heroes ambassador Shah has also made special appearances at Football Festivals throughout the year. Most recently, Cambridge United goalkeeper Dimitar Mitov became a Soaper Hero by helping lead a training session with the Cottenham United Colts girls. More activity is scheduled for the remainder of the 2022/23 season.

Together, Lifebuoy and the EFL have already recruited over 73,000 Soaper Heroes through their sport partnerships and are looking forward to seeing what the partnership will achieve for the remainder of the season.

Schools and Clubs can still sign up and become Soaper Heroes! Visit: www.lifebuoy.co.uk/soaper-heroes-for-schools.html



The role of the Match Manager

With more than 240 live EFL matches broadcast in the UK during the 2022/23 season, the Match Manager role on a matchday is as important as it has ever been.

Ahead of this season, Match Manager duties were taken on by EFL staff, not only to help build relationships with Clubs that the EFL deal with on a regular basis, but also to assist and support with the priorities, challenges and increasing demands Clubs may face on a matchday for a televised fixture.

Club Relationships Officer and one of many EFL Match Managers, HASNAIN MOHAMMED, speaks to the EFL Magazine about the Match Manager role and its function.





What is the role of the Match Manager at an EFL match?

The Match Manager role covers both commercial and broadcast aspects of a live televised match.

From a broadcast perspective, the EFL Match Manager will act as a 'go-between' between the host Club and broadcaster. They will ensure that the broadcaster receives the elements they are entitled to – such as pre and post-match player and manager interviews – deliver the Player of the Match trophy and carry out contractual commercial checks ahead of kick-off.

Why is the role important?

If a fixture is broadcast live on Sky Sports, there are a number of contractual commercial obligations for collateral around the ground that feature central EFL sponsors, including Sky Bet and Sky Sports, as well as Club sponsors and partners.

The dedicated Match Manager ensures that all commercial requirements are in place and on show in the correct places for EFL sponsors to receive the agreed amount of exposure. They also ensure that all equipment required for the match to take place live on Sky Sports is correct.

How does a game broadcast live on Sky Sports differ to a normal EFL fixture?

One of the main differences for a televised fixture is the branding that is required to be on show during that game. Match Managers are responsible for ensuring that certain commercial requirements have been met and all equipment being used is correct. This includes: bespoke interview backdrops

"MATCH MANAGERS ARE THE FIRST POINT OF CONTACT FOR THE HOST BROADCAST (FOR EXAMPLE, SKY SPORTS) FLOOR MANAGER. IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE MATCH MANAGER ON DUTY TO LIAISE WITH THE SKY SPORTS FLOOR MANAGER AND BE CONTACTABLE AT ALL TIMES DURING THE GAME"

used for live broadcast fixtures only; checking that player kits have the correct sleeve badges and logos embroidered (depending on the competition); EFL branded captains' armbands are provided; match officials' time allowed boards are displaying the correct competition logos; the correct Puma match balls are being used and title sponsors, Sky Bet, have the correct branding placed around the ground.

The Club will also provide the Match Manager with their LED or static perimeter board advertising running order, to ensure that the correct commercial advertisements are being shown throughout the game.

At full-time and following the conclusion of the live broadcast, Match Managers complete a checklist supplied by the EFL to make sure that all appropriate sponsor branding and requirements have been met.

How do you work with Sky Sports to ensure a successful live broadcast?

Match Managers are the first point of contact for the host broadcast (for example, Sky Sports) Floor Manager. It is important for the Match Manager on duty to liaise with the Sky Sports Floor Manager and be contactable at all times during the game.





Upon arrival to the host Club stadium, the Match Manager will hand over the Player of the Match trophy to the Floor Manager, to allow for a presentation to take place live on air post-match. From there, the Match Manager continues to act as a 'go-between' between the Club and the host broadcaster, ensuring all pre and post-match interviews take place, discuss any additional activities the Club may have planned on the day that may interest the broadcaster and carry out all commercial checks.

The Match Manager will also make contact with the EFL's Production Partners, HD Signs, who supply all commercial backdrops for interviews to take place in front of.

What is the difference between a live Sky Sports fixture and a fixture selected for Pitch International?

A Pitch international fixture will not require any of the Sky Sports branding on the pitch, nor will the LED advertising boards or big screen require any Sky Sports advertising. In addition, fixtures selected for Pitch International do not require a post-match interview with the selected Player of the Match.

Talk us through a day in the life of a Match Manager at a live broadcast game?

As a Match Manager, you are expected to arrive at the fixture three hours ahead of kick-off. On arrival, you will make contact with the host Club representative, who will provide you with everything needed in order to complete the commercial checklist. This includes a matchday programme to check all EFL commercial adverts have been included, a match ticket and a team sheet to check competition logos and a running order of all LED and big screen advertisements.

You will then make contact with the Sky Sports Floor Manager and HD Signs representatives to hand over the Player of the Match trophy, before going on to check all sponsor backdrops are in place, player kits have the correct logos and sleeve badges, match officials' boards contain the correct competition logos and the correct Puma match ball is being used.

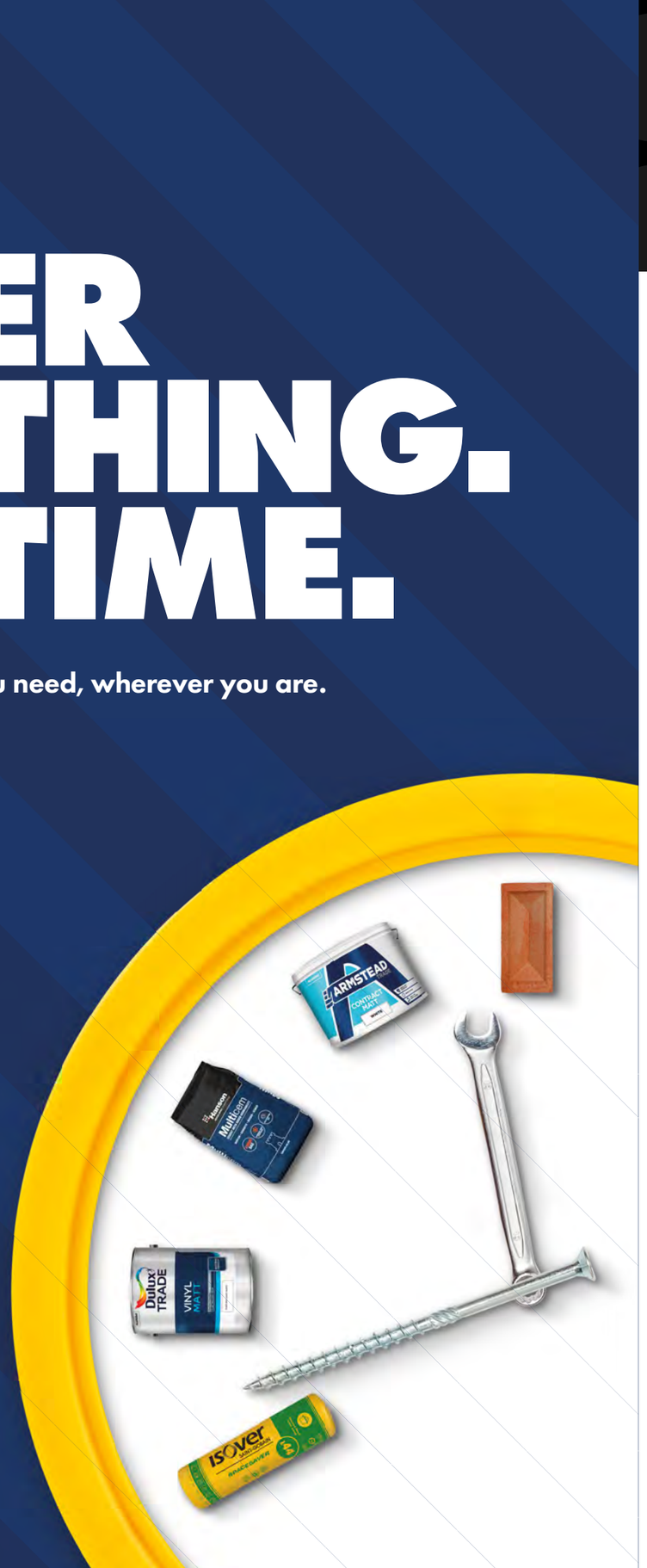
After the final whistle, the Match Manager will liaise with the Floor Manager and ensure all post-match player and manager interviews take place in front of the correct interview backdrop and the Player of the Match presentation takes place live on air, before submitting all information on the online commercial checklist. If either a Club or Sky Sports encounter any issues during the live broadcast, the Match Manager will report it.

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News in brief

Argyle unveil statue for legendary Leslie

When former Plymouth Argyle player Jack Leslie was selected to represent his country back in 1925, the Pilgrims captain was on the verge of making history by becoming the first black player to pull on an England jersey.

However, when his name didn't make the teamsheet for the Three Lions' game against the Republic of Ireland, the opportunity was taken away from him.

Almost a century later, Leslie has been honoured in the form of a statue outside Plymouth's Home Park, unveiled during Black History Month in October, in front of a large crowd gathered in the port city.



Greg Foxsmith, Co-Founder of The Jack Leslie Campaign, noted: "Such was his prowess that he got called up for England in 1925 but then, controversially, his name was dropped, so he should have been the first black footballer to play for England, rather than just being selected for England.

"We want to acknowledge that injustice and celebrate his achievements. What really overwhelmed us was that this hasn't just been supported by people from Plymouth – although obviously they have in huge numbers – but across the South West and the country as a whole."

A true football pioneer, Leslie played 400 times for the Pilgrims, scoring 137 goals between 1921 and 1935, earning his legendary status among the Argyle faithful.

Leslie, who passed away in November 1988, also received an honorary cap which was presented to his granddaughters – Lesley Hiscott, Lyn Davies and Gill Carter – who were present on this special day.



COBBLERS WIN AWARD FOR LONELINESS PROJECT

In November, Northampton Town Community Trust won the European Football for Development Network's (EFDN) More than Football Award 2022.

The award honours the best social initiatives in sport across Europe, delivered by a European Football Club, League or FA.

Developed by the Northampton Town Community Trust, the Tackling Loneliness project was initially developed during the first COVID-19 lockdown to support older fans who may be at risk of loneliness or isolation. It has helped 1,210 people aged 50+ to reduce the feeling of loneliness and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

After seeing off competition from finalists FC Twente, Newcastle United and Athletic Club de Bilbao, Club Chairman Kelvin Thomas said: "We are exceptionally proud. To win this European wide award is simply unbelievable.

"A huge well done to Phill Smith and all of the staff at the Northampton Town Community Trust, as well as Scott Desborough and all of the Trustees, for their work and the difference they make to so many lives. This particular project was a Club wide effort, and I am so proud of everyone involved."

In addition to receiving recognition for having implemented the most innovative and impactful Community and Social Responsibility programme in European football, the Cobblers' Community Trust have also won a complete Mini-Pitch System™ modular sports solution.

The Club-branded mini-pitch will be developed in partnership with the winning organisation, EFDN and Musco.



FOOTBALL FAMILY SUPPORTS SPURR

Football Clubs, players and supporters across the country have come together to show their support for former EFL player Tommy Spurr, whose young son Rio was diagnosed with a rare kidney cancer in April, which has also spread to his lungs.

The three-year-old suffers with a stage-four Wilms' tumour – a condition that only around 80 children are diagnosed with in the UK each year – and has undergone intensive courses of chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Almost £80,000 has been raised via a GoFundMe page, with people rallying around the Spurr family by organising various charity events, such as cricket and football matches, auctions and bike rides.



One of Tommy's old Clubs, Doncaster Rovers, held a charity match dedicated to Rio, involving many ex-pros and celebrities, at the Eco-Power Stadium in November, while Colin Hendry, Kevin Gallacher and David Dunn were among the list of ex-players to appear for Spurr's Legends against Ribchester Rovers FC.

Elsewhere, a host of names connected to Preston North End – another of Tommy's former employers – including current players and staff, featured in a cricket fixture between a Tommy Spurr XI and a PNE XI.

"It's difficult getting through every day at times, but we try to cherish every moment that Rio is feeling well because we don't know what's going to happen in the future," said Tommy.

"The amount of surgery, having his kidney removed, biopsy, having a Hickman line fitted, the chemotherapy, injections, all the rest of it, nobody should have to go through that. He does it with a smile and still wants to be a normal three-year-old.

"We are so overwhelmed and blown away by the support and kindness we have been shown since we shared the news about Rio. Thank you to every single person who has sent messages and donated. We appreciate everything and we couldn't be more grateful."



BLUEBIRDS PAY TRIBUTE TO CLUB LEGEND

Cardiff City celebrated the life of one of the Club's greats at the end of November, as the Bluebirds took on Aston Villa in a memorial match for the late Peter Whittingham.

The EFL legend, renowned for his spectacular left foot, scored 96 times in 457 appearances for the Welsh outfit, having also represented Villa on 66 occasions in all competitions, but tragically passed away at the age of 35 in March 2020.

Proceeds from an emotional night at the Cardiff City Stadium went to the newly established PW7 Foundation, which was established last year by trustees and Whittingham's close family members, serving as a lasting legacy to the former City number seven.

The Foundation aims to support three key causes: the Cardiff City FC Foundation, Winston's Wish – the UK's childhood bereavement charity – and King Henry VIII Senior School – which Whittingham attended as a pupil.

A crowd of 10,027 all took part in a poignant minute of applause with seven minutes on the clock, as both sets of supporters paid their respects while watching Cardiff claim a 3-1 victory over their Premier League opponents.

Peter's elder brother, James, explained: "Peter was always first to comment on how fortunate he was and how lady luck had shined on him and how his life evolved; many will say Peter gave a lot, but he always felt he received a lot back.

"We wanted to give back via the PW7 Foundation to some of those establishments that Peter benefitted from during his life, in terms of Cardiff City Foundation and his old school; then there's Winston's Wish, who have been tremendously supportive.

"I'd also like to think that one day, his boys may even run the Foundation and I love the idea of it taking on a life of its own so that in time they can fly the flag themselves in his memory."



New Kids on the Block

Over the years, the Utilita Kids and Girls Cup has been responsible for giving the next generation a once in a lifetime opportunity to grace the National Stadium.

For some former winners, including Premier League star Will Hughes, it gave them the taste for more.

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**



Crystal Palace midfielder Hughes came through the ranks at Derby County, making his professional debut in October 2011, but the 27-year-old had been prepared for the big stage long before he announced himself for the Rams.

In May 2006, as Leeds United and Watford geared up to battle it out for a place in the top flight, Hughes was ready to step out onto the turf at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff ahead of the 2006 Championship Play-Off Final.

"The Final itself, I can remember going the day before and all of our families were there, and we had a nice meal," he recalls. "On the day, I remember being on the coach and everyone was excited. Thankfully, we came out victorious in the end."

As the crowd filtered in, there were over 60,000 fans in attendance that day as the Hornets cruised to a 3-0 victory and a proportion of the attendance watched Hughes and his team-mates – a side which also featured former Burton Albion man Matt Palmer – in action, as the Rams secured their own 4-0 win over Leeds in the Final.

"We were playing before the Final, but you get the buzz of the atmosphere of the game itself," Hughes explains. "There were a lot of people milling about. It was the Millennium Stadium, and you see how big it is and the aspirations you have to want to go on and achieve that.

"My biggest learning curve playing for Derby at such a young age in the EFL was that I had to grow up quickly. At that age, you're not really playing in stadiums, so it gave me a good experience to go on and achieve that in the EFL itself.

"You never know who's watching, especially on a day like that when the Play-Off Final was quite soon after. It could put people on the map."

Another notable name to feature in the competition is Bayern Munich and Germany star Jamal Musiala, who turned out for Brentford in the 2013 Final before claiming a second successive victory with AFC Wimbledon in the 2014 Final, scoring an excellent first-half hat-trick in a 7-1 victory.







The following year, the competition would discover Blackburn Rovers talent Adam Wharton, who made his bow for the Lancashire side earlier this season. At 18 years of age, the midfielder can already profess to lifting a trophy under the arch – not bad going!

But it was a sprint for the youngster to make it to Wembley Stadium in time to play his part in the triumph.

"It's a funny story, actually," he says. "We were playing on a Saturday or Sunday and I was on tour with Blackburn at the time in Holland. We were flying back to Manchester the night before, so I wouldn't have been able to make it probably.

"Thankfully, one of the coaches said he'd fly to London with me on a separate flight from Holland, so I was able to get to the hotel late that night and play. It was a close call, but we got there!"

Wharton, along with his school friends, relished the opportunity to take a few hours out of their studies to play in the tournament at Blackburn's Community Trust's sports centre, the BRIC, just a stone's throw from Ewood Park.

"It was my whole life back in the day and it still is," he continues. "It's great to be able to play and enjoy yourself, especially as a kid.

"We played in the tournament every year with a bunch of schools from Blackburn. When you win that, you go onto another tournament where you represent Blackburn. We went to Bolton Academy for the next tournament, where we played other Clubs from the Championship at the time with schools representing them, such as Wigan and others.

"We won that and went to the Final, where we played at Wembley against a team representing Bournemouth before the 2015 Play-Off Final on the pitch. We won on penalties 3-2 and then got to watch the Play-Off Final."

In August, the teenager made his Rovers debut in the Carabao Cup before making his league entrance later that month, notching his first senior goal for the Club in October, but Wharton's experience of playing in the Kids Cup Final is still one that will take some topping.



"It was one of the best moments of my life at the time," he adds. "I'll never forget the day. It was a great moment and something I look back on, for sure. Those are the moments that stick with you, no matter what you go on to achieve in your career.

"The more kids that can experience them moments, the better."

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Carabao in the Community

Former League Cup winners David James and Louis Saha embarked on an emotional visit to Thailand alongside Carabao and the EFL last month.

The pair visited the Child Protection and Development Centre to donate football equipment – including nets, cones, footballs and bibs – to a group of underprivileged children aged between six and 18.

James and Saha also took part in a kickabout with the children during their time with the Human Help Network Foundation Thailand.

"It's been a bit of an eye-opener in a lot of ways," explains James. "Once again, it's another illustration of how wonderful football is at bringing people together.

"These kids have been through a lot of really negative influences in their very tender years, so the way that football can give them some joy, we're proud to be able to do that.

"Hopefully, this Foundation will give these kids a better future and hopefully, one day, this Foundation won't need to be here anymore."

Saha was also keen to make an impact and spread positivity during his short stay in Southeast Asia.

"I felt very lucky and very small at the same time, because I've got children," Saha adds. "I looked at David's face and it was the same. It was important for us to be there and realise that and see if we can change things in small ways or big ways.



"We wanted to contribute and try to help, so it's important to us as individuals to be there to give joy to the children and give them hope. That's the main thing because if they have hope then they can have no fear."

The pair also attended the Final of Carabao's national seven-a-side tournament – which involved over 500 teams from across the country and saw just 32 teams qualify for the Final.

Up for grabs was a trip to the Carabao Cup Final 2023 at Wembley Stadium, as well as a London tour package, a trophy and medals, presented to the winning team by the former footballing stars.

Additionally, James and Saha took part in a five-a-side celebrity all-star tournament – a 15-minute match-up involving the duo, a host of influencers and Carabao.

Both Ambassadors lifted the League Cup during their playing careers. Former England stopper James won the competition in 1995 with Liverpool, while French goalscorer Saha achieved the feat with Manchester United in 2006.

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Jay Stansfield plays in front of the Adam Stansfield Stand at Exeter City's St James Park while wearing the iconic number 9 shirt worn by his late father, who passed away aged 31 in 2010.
(Photo: PPAUK)

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