THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE

EFL MAGAZINE

ISSUE EIGHT // SUMMER 2023

EFL

INSIDE



RICHIE WELLENS
Building a winning culture

+

SHARON BRITTAN

CREATING SUSTAINABLE SUCCESS

Let's club together for Loneliness Awareness Week

12 – 18 June 2023

This June, the British Red Cross and the EFL are working together to bring people closer through football.



Fun activities for schools: We're working with the EFL and EFL Trust to deliver a national initiative for young people in schools. The activity pack encourages children to positively combat loneliness by focusing on kindness and togetherness.



New bespoke EA Sports FIFA 23 kit: Look out for our Let's Club Together kit, available in-game during Loneliness Awareness Week.

Find out more at redcross.org.uk/EFL

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[EFL COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR]

WELCOME...

...to the Summer 2023 edition of the EFL Magazine, which comes at the conclusion of a thrilling campaign of football and an important season off the pitch.

The following pages will not only reflect on a range of footballing accomplishments from last season, but will also spotlight some of the remarkable stories from around the EFL and its 72 Clubs.

The League is built on the strength of the people who care for their Clubs every day, and there is no greater example of someone who deeply understands the needs of their football team, its supporters and its community than Sharon Brittan.

Since becoming chairman of Bolton Wanderers four years ago, Sharon has led the Club along a path of progress, with sustainable ambition in mind. She takes us into the inner workings of how everyone at the Club has worked tirelessly to pull together and rekindle the connection between the team and fans. Bolton's story is representative of many examples, from across the EFL, of Clubs finding ways of responsibly building competitive sides.

Another Club experiencing renewed success, Ipswich Town's promotion back to the Sky Bet Championship is well documented, but the Suffolk side's ever-expanding work in the community deserves equal recognition, and we take a look at how the Tractor Boys' players have signed up to become actively involved with the people in the town and the county.

Among these pages, you will spot the familiar face of former Everton and USA forward Landon Donovan, who gives an insight into why he has "fallen in love" with Lincoln City since taking on a role as Strategic Advisor at the LNER Stadium.

The EFL welcomes back two historic Clubs next season, as Wrexham AFC and Notts County prepare for life in Sky Bet League Two. Paul Mullin, the Red Dragons' top scorer and talisman, details life under the regime of Hollywood owners Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney, while we take a look at what both Clubs need to know before they step back up to League football.

Joining them in League Two will be EFL stalwart Richard Wood, as he continues his footballing tour of South Yorkshire by joining Doncaster Rovers, for what will be his 22nd season in the professional game. He will discuss the next chapter of his career, and we also speak to Richie Wellens, who provides a riveting insight into his pursuit of success, after winning the League Two title with Leyton Orient.

There's an opportunity to get a closer look at the inner workings of the EFL, as our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team map out some of their vital work in providing education on important issues, and we say goodbye to Dave Wetherall, who departs as Youth Development Director after 12 incredibly successful years of service.

Issues such as booming attendances and the ongoing approach to crowd behaviour are also discussed, new PGMOL Chief Refereeing Officer Howard Webb details his vision for the future of refereeing, and there's even time to see what Chris Watkins, the Head Chef at Swansea City, is cooking up for his players!

Life across the EFL is diverse, colourful and captivating, and we hope you enjoy the small part of that vibrancy we've tried to capture in these pages.

MARK ROWAN
EFL Communications Director

Josh Windass celebrates with his Sheffield Wednesday team-mates after scoring in the final minute of extra-time to win the Sky Bet League One Play-Off Final at Wembley.

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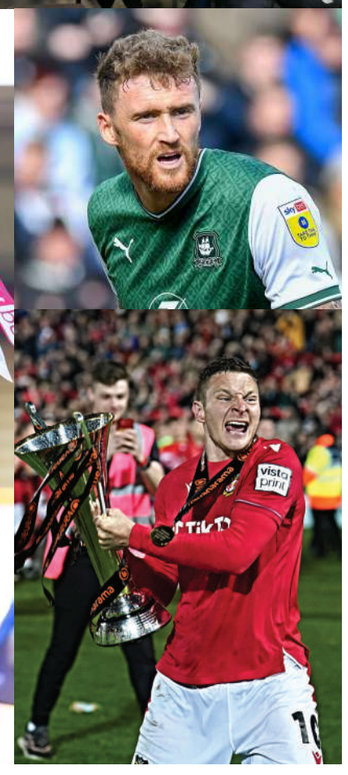
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IT'S ONLY LIVE ONCE

sky sports





DAVID PRUTTON

A view from the sidelines...

WHAT ANOTHER GREAT SEASON IT'S BEEN. WE SAY IT EVERY YEAR, BUT ONCE AGAIN THE EFL HAS DELIVERED ACROSS ALL DIVISIONS.

It never loses its appeal. It's a wonderful set of divisions to cover and I call it a privilege and a pleasure to be able to cover it. The drama that we've seen has almost been unparalleled, whether that's with the final day of the Championship season and teams sneaking into the Play-Offs on goal difference, or in the Play-Off Final weekend at Wembley that saw plenty of drama, with late goals, extra-time and penalty shoot-outs.

'A good advert for the EFL' is an overused phrase at times, but it's so appropriate for so many occasions in the EFL. Not least, Luton Town, whose promotion to the Premier League following their Play-Off Final win over Coventry City has to be the story of the season.

We've said a fond farewell to a team that has been an integral part of the pyramid over the years, having dropped out of the League and going the most scenic route possible to make it to the top flight. It's a story we've all loved, it's a journey we've all followed, and they're a Club full of really good people who deserve a crack at the Premier League.

But there have been so many standout moments and stories, like there are every year. I don't think any other professional league delivers the stories we get here.

Sticking with the Championship, a special mention from me must go to Burnley. We all wondered what Vincent Kompany would do as a manager in England on the back of being such a wonderful player, but he seems to have turned his hand to it straight-forwardly. And how lucky are we that he chose the Championship to start his managerial journey in English football?

They've been a wonderful team to watch this season, and it's not easy coming into a new team that have worked under a manager for so long and be able to quickly put your stamp on things. For him to do that and for them to get promoted in the style that they did, it's been really impressive.

The standard in League One continues to get better and better each year. Great credence has got to go to the top two in Plymouth Argyle and Ipswich Town – two big Clubs that are excellently supported by their fans. The level of consistency they both showed throughout the season to finish on 101 points and 98 points respectively, in such a relentless division, is absolutely incredible and both thoroughly deserve their place back in the Championship.

I've had the pleasure of speaking to both their managers numerous times this season and in Steven Schumacher and Kieran McKenna, both Clubs have two young managers they can be really proud of. They've done things their own way and done a really good job of it. And to do it in their first full seasons as managers too, it's a huge success and further proof that the EFL continues to be a breeding ground for managers and players.

In League Two, we've seen some equally wonderful and romantic football stories. I think my particular highlight was seeing Paul Simpson celebrate at Wembley after winning promotion with Carlisle United 17 years after he last won promotion with them. What a wonderful story.

For him to return to the Club he knows so well and the Club that loves him, has been great to see. And he's overcome adversity too, finishing 20th last season to go on and achieve promotion in the most dramatic fashion this season. It epitomises everything the EFL is about and the stories it produces.

And of course, we welcome two great Clubs back to the EFL in Wrexham and Notts County, both of which fully deserve their place and will make League Two even more competitive next season and a really interesting watch.

Finally, we have to mention the fans this season. A record number of supporters have attended games this season – 19.8 million across the League and Play-Off action. We've seen so many supporters turn out, but it shouldn't be an assumption that people go to watch their football team week in, week out, especially in a cost-of-living crisis.

We've seen over the course of the season, and especially across the Play-Off Final weekend, there is no substitute for seeing live football in the flesh. It's what makes the game great and to adapt, survive and thrive in tricky circumstances shows how resilient the EFL is.

There's been a lot of talk about the pyramid in recent times, but it's alive and kicking in every sense and it's a real pleasure and a privilege to be a very small part of it.

CROWDS TO BE PROUD OF

It's been a record-breaking season for attendances in the EFL.

At league games, at the Play-Offs, at the Carabao Cup and Papa Johns Trophy – wherever you look, numbers are up.

Even Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola, who has seen it all at the highest echelon in football, was blown away by what he saw when 31,835 fans watched Sheffield Wednesday overturn a four-goal lead against Peterborough United in the Sky Bet League One Play-Off Semi-Finals.



"The crowd, live on Sky, no other countries do that," said the former Barcelona and Bayern Munich manager. "They respect the top Clubs a lot, more followed than other ones, but here the respect for lower divisions is hats off. That's why this country is special. 33,000, full and crazy after 4-0.

"In other countries, 4-0? No chance. It's 4-4! And after, 4-1, 5-1, penalties – this is England! That's why it's unique! That's why it's so special, and that's why I'm a long time here. I love it."

That moment, and the numbers that had assembled at Hillsborough to witness it, was representative of the drama and action that keeps pulling in the crowds across the EFL.

The aggregate attendance for the 2022/23 season in the Sky Bet Championship, League One and League Two was 19.4 million, the highest since the fourth tier of professional football was introduced all the way back in 1958.

The figures are all the more impressive when compared to other countries across European football, with the Championship, League One and League Two all featuring in the top 13 attended leagues.

Aggregate attendance for the Championship was over 10 million, the first time that milestone has been broken since 2018/19 and only the 11th time it has happened in the history of second-tier football.

This made the Championship the fifth most-watched league in Europe, behind only the Premier League, Bundesliga, La Liga and Serie A, and ahead of the top-flight divisions in the Netherlands, Portugal, Belgium and Scotland.

League One was the eighth most-watched league in Europe, with nearly six million in attendance, ahead of the top divisions in the Netherlands and Portugal, while League Two was in 14th place, surpassing top divisions in Scotland and Belgium, with cumulative crowds of over three million for games in the fourth tier.

And then the lure of the drama of the Play-Offs drew record crowds, with the total attendance of 443,765 across all 15 Sky Bet Play-Off matches being the highest in history.





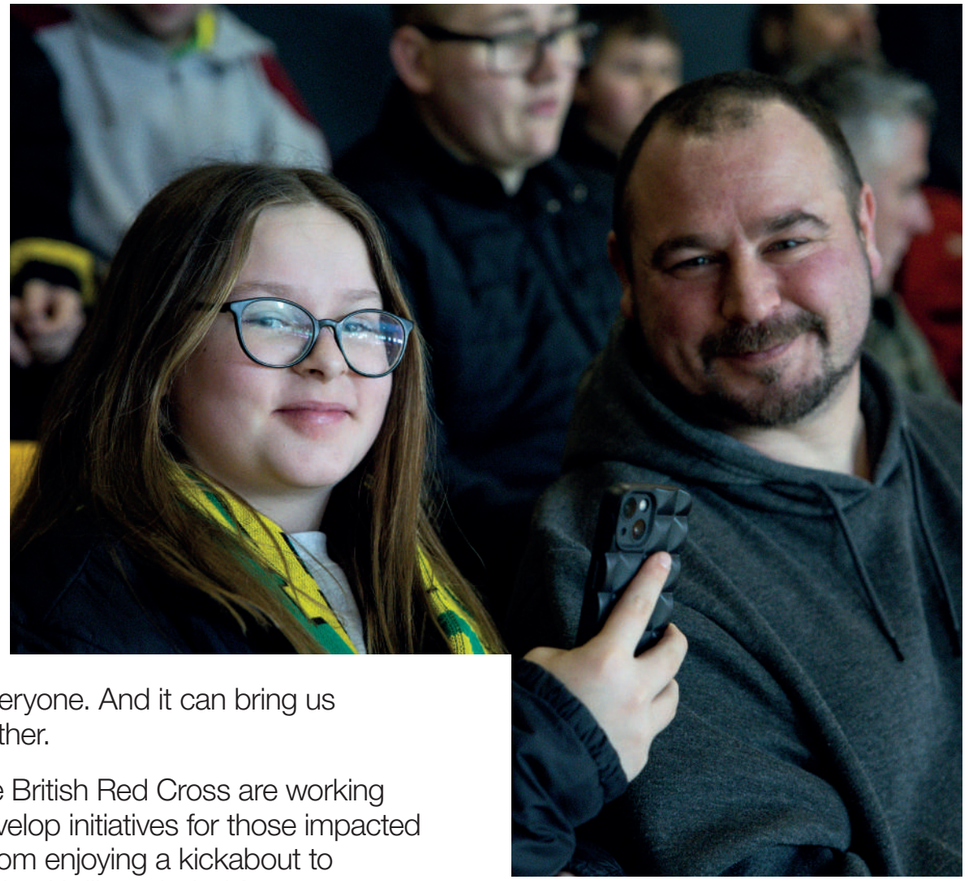
Strong attendances were also evident across the EFL's other major competitions. The appetite for the Papa Johns Trophy continued to rise, with the Final between Bolton Wanderers and Plymouth Argyle watched by 79,389 fans in Wembley Stadium as Ian Evatt's side ran out 4-0 winners in what was the highest attended fixture in European football that weekend. This bumper crowd saw the total number of fans attending the competition over the course of the season breaking the 300,000 barrier.

And in the Carabao Cup, 87,306 supporters from Manchester United and Newcastle United filled Wembley Stadium for the Final, the tournament's highest Final attendance since the 2014/15 season. The total number of fans attending a Carabao Cup fixture this season was almost at 1.6 million, with an average fixture attendance of 16,685, both the highest since 2001/02.

So, while football fans have more options than ever before to consume the sport they love, one truth evidently remains the same – nothing matches watching a game live.

“Having that dedicated time with Ruby was really special. It felt fantastic watching her playing football with the other young people.”

Gary and his daughter, Ruby, attended a game at Norwich City. They are both carers for Ruby’s sister, Hollie. Ruby also enjoyed a kickabout with fellow fans before the match.



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

The EFL and the British Red Cross are working with clubs to develop initiatives for those impacted by loneliness. From enjoying a kickabout to watching a match with like-minded fans, we want to help people make meaningful connections and new friends in their community – all through the power of football.

Let’s club together.
For more information visit: redcross.org.uk/EFL

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Tackling Crowd Behaviour

Crowd behaviour continues to be a priority issue, not just for the EFL and its Clubs, but across football.

Twelve months ago, scenes of fan disorder at some Play-Off Semi-Finals enhanced the already existing need for stronger action, alongside continued communication with supporters and stakeholders, and this season has seen multiple steps taken.

“Over the course of the season, we undertook a number of activities with the objective of reducing such instances,” says the EFL’s Chief Operating Officer, Nick Craig.

“That included launching high profile public facing campaigns alongside the FA and Premier League, holding an online fans forum to engage with individual fan groups, and a more comprehensive reporting regime at Club level.

“Given the lack of data for prior seasons, it is too early to identify specific trends, but the data analysis we now have will help us advise and support Clubs and recommend targeting of resources to key risks.”

The joined-up approach across football saw the EFL, FA, Premier League and WSL collaborate to land the Love Football, Protect the Game messaging in a statement and through social platforms in April.

This coincided with a successful example of supporter behaviour, when Sheffield United’s fans enjoyed their side’s promotion to the Premier League while remaining in the stands, just a few days after the Protect the Game activity.

EFL Chief Executive Trevor Birch described the occasion as “wonderful scenes”.

“By successfully managing these risks, it gave both the players and coaching staff the opportunity to celebrate their fantastic achievement in the immediate aftermath alongside the supporters,” Birch added at the time.

The EFL’s Match Experience Fans Forum in March addressed the issues around fan safety, and came three months after the release of new sanctioning guidance for EFL Clubs.

“No-one wants to see fans banned from attending football games,” said the EFL’s Head of Security and Safety Operations, Bob Eastwood, at the event. “We want to educate, rehabilitate and work with supporters and ultimately eradicate any unwelcome behaviour for the benefit of everyone attending our fixtures.”

Kevin Miles, CEO of the Football Supporters’ Association, added: “We have a huge interest in making sure the experience for fans is as positive as it can possibly be. We don’t want to lose any of the passion that creates such a good atmosphere in grounds, but all of us know there is a line we shouldn’t cross, and we all have a responsibility to make sure it stays as positive an experience as it can be.”

While work continues and progress is made, there have still been concerning instances this season, particularly with mass incursions at matches towards the back end of the campaign.

“Unfortunately, this season has once again seen several mass pitch incursions with further instances of match officials and players being harassed by fans on the pitch,” says Craig.

“It is now clear that there is an ‘expectation’ among fans that they have an entitlement to be on the pitch in celebratory moments, but it is almost impossible to manage that safely and will continue to present risks to staff, players and match officials.

“There are several ongoing FA investigations in relation to recent events and the work between stakeholders will continue, with the intention of further levelling-up the public messaging around crowd behaviour.”







MAIN INTERVIEW | **SHARON BRITTAN**

[MAIN FEATURE]

SHARON BRITTAN:

Creating Sustainable Success

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

Caring, committed and courageous, Sharon Brittan is living proof that Football Clubs can achieve sustainable success under the right leadership.

Bolton Wanderers' chairman has conviction in her beliefs and refuses to compromise in her pursuit of taking the Whites back to the top flight, while maintaining a stable economic structure.

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She explains: "I was very clear on how I would run a Football Club, with the right people doing the right job in the right way, with ethics, morals, principles, trust and transparency at the heart of everything.

"You need people who are bought into the vision and the journey, because this is a business that is full of noise. We want the noise to be on the pitch, with peace and quiet off the pitch, so we can all get on with our jobs and have fun.

"Each and every component has to come together for success. One thing that is a guarantee is that there will be highs and there will be lows – we share them all as one.

"We've got a culture here. It sounds a bit of a cliché, but I feel that we have created a family at Bolton Wanderers Football Club. We certainly feel proud of it and a lot of people from within the football world and outside of the football world are talking about it, which is really positive."

In 2019, Bolton Wanderers was in freefall, with a desperate financial situation, a disengaged fanbase and a detached relationship with its community.

Fast forward to the present, it's a Club reborn, with a foundation in place to rise and rise. On and off the pitch, its future looks healthy.

Brittan recalls: "I will never forget the day I walked into this Football Club in August 2019. Devastation seems like a really powerful word, but it was devastation. People had not been paid. They were unable to pay their mortgages. They were unable to pay their rent. Their anxiety was heightened. Their mental health and wellbeing had suffered.

"I'm not sure that people ever realise quite how much goes on behind the scenes in the running of a Football Club – the amount of work is enormous. It's a huge responsibility to own a Football Club and people need to be very, very clear on that before they do this.

"We know what happens when a Club gets into the wrong hands. Here, we're responsible custodians and I know that the EFL, because I've worked closely with Rick Parry, are doing everything they can to ensure the owner's fit and proper test is rigorous."

Almost four years on from saving the Club's existence – with the help and support of a key group of initial investors – Brittan is admired and adored by the Wanderers



> I'M NOT SURE THAT PEOPLE EVER REALISE QUITE HOW MUCH GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES IN THE RUNNING OF A FOOTBALL CLUB – THE AMOUNT OF WORK IS ENORMOUS

faithful. Win or lose, they know they're on the right track with her at the helm.

She continues: "When I came here, people had lost faith – the staff, the fans, the stakeholders, the community, everybody had fallen out of love with this Football Club. We had to come in and start from the bottom, and that doesn't happen quickly.

"I thought the only way I'm going to earn the trust of the fans and the community is by being visible. They need to see me, they need to know me, they need to understand me, they need to hear me. Being an invisible owner wouldn't have worked for the journey that we want to take the Football Club on.

"I have a lot of communication with people in the community, with people at the university, with people at the Council. This is one of the largest towns in the UK and we should be singing from the same hymn sheet. I think the fans seem to be loving it now and we're all proud of this journey.

"When I left Barnsley after the Play-Off Semi-Final Second Leg, I was waiting to be let out and our fans were leaving in the coaches and they were banging on the windows, shouting at me saying the most wonderful things – and we'd just lost! We weren't going to play in the Final and they were still shouting messages of support. That's really, really special."

The financial sustainability of the game has been the focal point of discussions

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> IT'S REALLY HARD WORK TO MAKE A FOOTBALL CLUB SUSTAINABLE, BUT IT'S OUR DUTY TO RUN THE FOOTBALL CLUB IN A SMART WAY



for a long period, with the Fan Led Review White Paper on Reforming Club Football Governance representing a once-in-a-generation opportunity to address the systemic issues that football has been unable to sort itself over the last 30 years.

Brittan has implemented her own measures to protect the future of the Greater Manchester Club.

"It's really hard work to make a Football Club sustainable, but it's our duty to run the Football Club in a smart way," she admits. "I respect everybody's money and I want people's investment to be well spent. I think we've got a proven record of doing just that.

"Four years in, we are running a sustainable Football Club in an organised and responsible manner. Doing that avoids the scenario of having the huge highs and then when the owner funding stops, you collapse. That's what can't happen.

"I've talked to so many of our fans and I think they appreciate our approach. They've said to me, 'Sharon, we want responsible owners – we don't want the boom and bust'.

"I am a great believer, first and foremost, that while we're on the pitch for 90 minutes, there is no-one more competitive than me. I really like to win. But outside of that, we should all be collaborating and working together to ensure the future stability of the pyramid."

In constructing her financial model, Brittan has been innovative in her methods to raise funds.

Wanderers launched an investment bond in May for supporters and other interested parties to support the future development of the Club. Within eight days, the funding target of £3.5 million had been achieved.

"When you do initiatives like the Wanderers Bond – in order to maintain our financial position and be competitive – it will only work if you've got trust around you," she adds. "To have raised so much in such a short space of time just completely humbles me, and every single penny of that will go back into this Football Club, every single penny.

"My original four investors in 2019 – and our wonderful Swiss consortium who joined us in early 2022 – thought I was having a midlife crisis. However, thankfully, they bought into the idea that we were going to do things differently in football, alongside creating a platform to do good.

"Suddenly, we've got people coming to us with money, because they believe in what we're doing and they want to be part of this movement and this journey. We're fully funded for the season ahead, and it's extraordinary from where we were.

"I think the fans know me well enough now to know that I'm very driven, I'm very determined and I know exactly where we want and need to be. I have enjoyed the last two seasons, but next season, we want to start in the right way and finish in the right way."

On the pitch, the Trotters continue to go from strength to strength under the leadership of manager Ian Evatt.

Having secured promotion from Sky Bet League Two at the first time of asking in 2020/21, Wanderers have made gradual progress in the third tier, finishing ninth and fifth, although Play-Off success evaded them in May.



"We were disappointed that we lost to Barnsley, but when we look back and reflect, we're very happy with our progress," Brittan notes. "Next season, I want us to have automatic promotion – that is our aim.

"I am very ambitious and I'd like to take this Club from the brink of liquidation back to the Premier League where it belongs. That's the journey we've subscribed to and I, more than anyone, want to fulfil that."

Although they fell short of promotion, Evatt's side did deliver silverware in the form of the Papa Johns Trophy, with the comprehensive 4-0 victory over Plymouth Argyle at Wembley Stadium marking a significant milestone in the Club's resurgent run.

"It was an utterly magical, perfect day," Brittan recollects, gleefully. "It couldn't have been scripted any better. It showcased Ian, the players, the fans, the Club, the togetherness, the journey. It was a day I will never forget.

"In my mind, I thought about what I saw when we arrived in 2019. Then, to see the number of fans there and the success we had on the pitch at Wembley, I was very, very emotional."

The Club's welcoming culture at the top has filtered down into the dressing room, with Brittan and Evatt sharing a close bond, while loan players like Conor Bradley and James Trafford have been able to flourish in a settled environment.

"I have a very close relationship with Ian Evatt," she states. "Somebody gave me some advice very early on to not have a close relationship with the manager, because they're transient and they come and go. I thought that's the opposite of what I want to be.

"I don't want our manager to feel that he's transient and that it's only a matter of time before he's gone. I want our manager to feel that he's part of a journey, and that's where I think we are different.

"When you build a culture, you build relationships, and that's exactly what we've done. We've built relationships with Liverpool, with Manchester City, with Manchester United. They know that this is a trusted place for their players to come to.

"We want them to progress here, so that when they leave, they're in a much better place than when they arrived. I think that's very clear to see with a few of the players we've had this season and that's enhanced our relationship with those Clubs, so that we can talk again and hopefully they'll see us as trusted custodians of their players."

From the outset, Brittan made no secret of her desire to use the Football Club's platform to do good in the local area.

In July 2021, she appointed Neil Hart as the new Chief Executive Officer, with his prior experience at Burnley FC in the Community viewed as a key factor in bringing community focus to the forefront of the Club's priorities.

His efforts were recently recognised at the Football Business Awards, where he was named League One CEO of the Year.

> IT WAS AN UTTERLY MAGICAL, PERFECT DAY. IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN SCRIPTED ANY BETTER. IT SHOWCASED IAN, THE PLAYERS, THE FANS, THE CLUB, THE TOGETHERNESS, THE JOURNEY. IT WAS A DAY I WILL NEVER FORGET

Alongside Bolton Wanderers in the Community CEO Phil Mason, there is now significant collaboration between Club and Trust, adopting a 'One Club, One Community, One Town' identity.

"I always felt that the Club and the Community Trust should work together and be intrinsically linked," says Brittan. "The bigger the platform we can get, the more good that we can do, and the community side is equally as important to me as the football.

"There are a huge amount of initiatives that are delivered to appeal to everyone in the town – all ages, all genders, all faiths, all cultures. Everyone is welcomed and embraced through the doors of this Football Club.

Keen to put her words into action, Brittan often attends community events and has spearheaded multiple charity walks that have raised funds that will be put towards a new Wellbeing Hub.

"I absolutely love the community activities – I love the walks and I love keeping fit," she says. "We have this amazing interaction and I see the impact of the events and the programmes on the people in this town for their mental health and wellbeing, which is fabulous because people are struggling.

"It was hard before the pandemic and now everybody's anxiety and mental health and wellbeing has been heightened. I think if we can provide a space which is safe for people to come to, it's brilliant.

"I also had an evening with the Muslim community during Ramadan, where we broke the fast together and the tickets for the evening were taken up within 24 hours. More of the Muslim community are coming to games and engaging with the Club now – it's brilliant.

> THERE ARE A HUGE AMOUNT OF INITIATIVES THAT ARE DELIVERED TO APPEAL TO EVERYONE IN THE TOWN – ALL AGES, ALL GENDERS, ALL FAITHS, ALL CULTURES. EVERYONE IS WELCOMED AND EMBRACED THROUGH THE DOORS OF THIS FOOTBALL CLUB





"I also hear from supporters all the time who write to me or approach me to tell me their stories and explain what Bolton Wanderers means to them.

"It's a regular occurrence that men and women alike will become incredibly emotional when they talk to me about what it means to see the place full of life again after coming so close to losing the Football Club they love so much.

"So many have gone from desperation to once again enjoying football with their families and friends. Their stories never cease to amaze me. Things like that are very rewarding and make the work we do worthwhile."

In all aspects, the Bolton Wanderers model is a blueprint to follow.

A sustainable financial standing, a thriving community programme, an award-winning supporter engagement strategy – scooping the EFL Fan Engagement Award in April – and a successful team on the pitch, Sharon Brittan, along with her fellow board members and investors, has transformed a Club in turmoil into one primed to prosper.

"My ambition is to make a difference to people's lives and to ensure that this Football Club is on a firm footing – because it's going to be here a long time after me – and ensure that it never, ever finds itself in the place that it was in when I arrived," she affirms.

"The next steps are to continue to progress, and that's what we're planning for. That's what I'm working at with my team of incredible people. On the pitch, we want to get to the Championship. Off the pitch, we want to continue to make a difference to people's lives who need help in various ways.

"Everything we're doing is for a reason. We have 300,000 people living in Bolton and how this Club is run impacts on their lives. I will not let them down."

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Ofsted Outstanding Provider

Outstanding Ofsted Result for LFE

Following an inspection in February, the EFL's education partner, League Football Education (LFE), has been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted.

The report, published in April, judged LFE to be 'Outstanding' in all areas, with inspectors stating that learners and apprentices "consistently demonstrate extremely positive attitudes towards their learning" and are "highly enthusiastic and motivated to achieve" in what was described as a "calm and focused environment for learning".

Established in 2004 by the EFL and the PFA, LFE delivers the Apprenticeship programme to 16 to 18-year-olds at EFL Clubs and places a focus on a player's on and off the pitch development, aiming to leave them in the best possible position for the future, whether that be in the professional game or outside it.

LFE works with 64 of the EFL's Clubs to deliver the Level 3 Sporting Excellence Professional Apprenticeship Standard to almost 1,200 apprentices, as well as a partnership with 13 EFL Club Community Trusts to provide the Level 3 Sports Coaching and Development programme to nearly 600 teenagers.

The educational programme that scholars undertake has been specifically designed for elite athletes and is geared toward nationally recognised qualifications, consisting of the following elements:

- Sporting Excellence Professional (Level 3)
- BTEC Sporting Excellence and Performance (Level 3)
- Functional Skills (Level 2)
- Certificate in Coaching (UEFA C)

Personal development and life skills are also a key focus, covering topics such as mental health and wellbeing, equality and diversity, finance and social media.



LFE's transition expertise was also highlighted with Ofsted, noting that "learners and apprentices receive high quality specialised careers advice and guidance", which inspectors said "prepares them extremely well for their futures", allowing them to "make informed decisions about their next steps".

There are numerous examples of players who have left the game who have gone on to be very successful in a wide variety of industries, utilising many of the skills learned during their apprenticeship.

- After completing his apprenticeship in 2020, Joe McWilliam swapped Wigan Athletic for the glittering city of Dubai, where he works as a Real Estate Agent, dealing with multi-million-dollar properties.
- Having transitioned away from professional football in May 2015, former Oxford United apprentice Drew Ricketts is now protecting his local community as a firefighter at Solihull Fire Station, and was the recipient of a Pride of Britain nomination after saving a man's life in November 2020.
- Oliver Smith left York City back in 2014. After pursuing a route into aviation, he has secured a job as a Boeing 737 first officer for a popular budget airline.
- Using many of the skills he developed in Millwall's Academys to adapt to a new working environment, Lewis West is now a fully qualified Network Rail Engineer, with big ambitions to progress in the industry.
- From Doncaster Rovers to Down Under, football has helped Cam Foulkes forge a life that would otherwise have been unattainable. Having progressed from scholar to Academy coach at the Eco-Power Stadium, he earned the chance to become a player-coach on the Gold Coast in 2022.

Inspectors also found learners and apprentices "develop high levels of confidence and resilience", adding that many "progress to higher levels of study at university".

Meanwhile, LFE was also recognised for its commitment to safeguarding, with the Ofsted report stating: "Leaders place a very high priority on the safeguarding and wellbeing of their learners and apprentices. They effectively record and monitor safeguarding referrals and welfare concerns and put support in place swiftly."

LFE Chief Executive, Sarah Stephen, said: "Once again, we are extremely proud that Ofsted have rated us 'Outstanding' in all areas, an achievement that confirms all our staff and stakeholders are committed to providing outstanding, tailored education programmes for all young people and go above and beyond in everything we do."

A Broadcasting Milestone

May saw EFL Clubs unanimously approve a record domestic broadcast rights deal with Sky Sports. Running from season 2024/25 to season 2028/29, the £935 million deal will see more than 1,000 EFL matches broadcast each season – a record number of games for any Club football agreement.

The new deal represents a 50% increase on the current rights value and will see significantly enhanced exposure for all EFL Clubs, with an uplift in coverage across all divisions. Games will be broadcast on existing Sky Sports channels or via a Sky Sports streaming destination that will be accessible on both TV and mobile devices.

Why did the EFL renegotiate its broadcast rights?

With the EFL's current five-year agreement with Sky Sports expiring at the end of the 2023/24 season, the EFL issued a Request for Proposal for interested parties in respect of its broadcast agreement. Rights for all 1,891 matches across the EFL, Carabao Cup, EFL Trophy and EFL Play-Offs were made available to respective bidders. The purpose of the RFP was to see what ideas existed in the market, with the aim of taking a fresh and new approach to this latest cycle, inviting proposals that embraced innovation to cater for changing audience habits.





"This is a landmark broadcast deal for EFL Clubs, establishing the League as a premium partner with a world-renowned broadcaster in Sky Sports. The increased investment and coverage from Sky Sports will showcase much more of our compelling action to fans, while delivering record rights values as we seek to make Clubs sustainable at all levels.

TREVOR BIRCH
EFL CHIEF EXECUTIVE

HOW MANY LIVE GAMES WILL THE NEW DEAL INCLUDE AND WHAT IS THE BREAKDOWN?

1,059
FIXTURES PER SEASON WILL BE BROADCAST

328
SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP

248
SKY BET LEAGUE ONE

248
SKY BET LEAGUE TWO

15
SKY BET PLAY-OFFS

93
CARABAO CUP

127
EFL TROPHY



Why has the EFL chosen to go with Sky Sports?

After running a comprehensive process, including an RFP and ITT, Sky Sports offered the best deal in the market for the EFL for premium coverage, genuine commitment to all EFL competitions and an innovative approach to evolve EFL output. Sky Sports is also a platform which provides further commercial benefits.

"For decades, Sky Sports has been a fantastic broadcast partner for both the EFL and English football, helping our sport grow through its sustained support, so we are delighted to announce this innovative agreement that combines the strength of an established brand with a modern streaming service for the benefit of EFL Clubs, fans and Sky Sports alike."

TREVOR BIRCH
EFL CHIEF EXECUTIVE

How does the broadcast income vary between divisions with the new deal?

The Club Basic Award is distributed in accordance with the League's Articles of Association. The formula splits the League's distributable revenue depending on the values sourced from broadcast and other income, but the current effective share is approximately: Championship, 70%; League One, 18%; and League Two, 12%. Weighting is given to Championship Clubs as primary drivers of rights values, with Clubs agreeing the distribution formulas up to certain levels. According to the existing distribution formula, Clubs in the Championship will be approximately 46% better off and 25% in League One and League Two, respectively.





Will matches still be available to stream or watch on iFollow?

From 2024/25 onwards, the new deal will replace the EFL's domestic video streaming option provided by iFollow or Club equivalent. But given the significant uplift in rights values across the duration of the deal, EFL Clubs as a collective will be far better off financially than if the current combined arrangement continued.



"This is a ground-breaking deal for Sky and our long-standing partners, the EFL. We believe that fans of all 72 League Clubs will benefit with increased coverage across all the leagues and competitions. With four times as many matches than we currently offer, we will capture even more of the excitement created by this unique league – and in a way that will be immediately accessible to millions of supporters.

JONATHAN LICHT
SKY SPORTS MANAGING DIRECTOR

How will the production of each live game be enhanced?

The EFL and Sky Sports will continue to work together to innovate, seeking opportunities to improve coverage. This will include significant investment in production infrastructure to enhance the viewing experience. Sky Sports will have a minimum of eight cameras for each game broadcast live on existing channels, with a minimum of four cameras being used at Championship and League One matches and a minimum of two in League Two. For those matches available to stream, Sky Sports commentary will also be provided.



"This is the biggest deal in football, in terms of the number of matches being broadcast, and we look forward to working with the EFL and its 72 Member Clubs to give fans the most entertaining viewing experience. Between Sky and the League, we're pleased to be able to make a commitment to fans that will ensure greater notice periods around the movement of matches for broadcast. There'll also be greater parity in the number of times Clubs are selected to be live on Sky Sports."

JONATHAN LICHT
SKY SPORTS MANAGING DIRECTOR

ALL

ALL OPENING AND FINAL DAY FIXTURES
ALL MIDWEEK LEAGUE FIXTURES
ALL BANK HOLIDAY FIXTURES
ALL FIXTURES PLAYED IN LEAGUE ONE AND LEAGUE TWO DURING INTERNATIONAL BREAKS



How much notice will be provided for the selection of live TV games?

Due to the increased number of live matches, the EFL and Sky Sports will introduce a new commitment for Clubs and fans which will provide longer notice periods on TV selections. All live matches up to the FA Cup Third Round will be selected before the start of the season.

This change addresses a previous criticism from fans around the current notification period of just five weeks.

Will the volume of games impact attendances?

It is believed not. It is clear that supporters want more broadcast content available to them. The EFL already makes 603 matches available to stream on iFollow or via a Club's streaming service and there is no evidence that those matches impact attendances, which are up by 12% in the 2022/23 campaign, with approximately 20 million people attending live fixtures per season. With the new deal, the EFL has protected 832 key Saturday 3:00pm kick-offs and introduced extended notice periods for fans, balanced Club selections and five weekend matches on Saturday at 12:30pm.





Will Article 48 and the 3pm blocked broadcasting period still apply?

The blocked period between 2:45pm and 5:15pm on Saturdays will still remain. This means there will be seven 3:00pm games in the Championship and 19 3:00pm games in League One and League Two combined, which will not be broadcast each weekend. The bid from Sky Sports was the strongest bid which sought to make a significant amount of EFL matches available, while protecting Saturday blocked hours.

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EDI Update

The 2022/23 campaign was one of innovation and progression for the EFL's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion department, as it marked the introduction of the new Together Strategy.

Launched in August 2022, it set in motion the beginning of the League's new EDI journey to ensure it is reflective and representative of the demographics of the communities in which it serves.

As its first season has concluded, it is time to review what has been achieved throughout the campaign and look ahead to the next steps.

As one of its core outcomes, the strategy aimed to challenge discrimination across the EFL and support Clubs in their investigations and subsequent action plans to challenge the behaviour within their stadium.

The League established a Discrimination Reporting mechanism, which collated reports from numerous sources, including Club, Police, Equality Stakeholders and referees. The mechanism has allowed the EFL to understand current trends and establish effective support tactics to ensure Clubs can develop robust action plans.

The progression of EFL Clubs on their journey is key to establish a greater environment throughout the game, as well as a newly designed and supported Equality Code of Practice. The new Code will provide additional resource support to Clubs, as well as continue to challenge their journey and ensure reflective representation across the Club at all levels.

Recruitment remains a key element to ensure workforces are representative and reflective, and 32 Clubs have made the commitment to sign up to the FA's Football Leadership Diversity Code which, along with Premier League Clubs, saw collectively the game achieve two of the eight targets, while the 32 EFL Clubs collectively achieved six of those targets. The creation of I-Recruit, the EFL's anonymised recruit tool, will allow Clubs to effectively undertake recruitment processes.

The launch of the Together branding, which has been visible on shirt sleeves across all EFL Clubs, will continue to be seen throughout the 2023/24 season. In addition, the EFL strengthened its partnerships within Equality Stakeholders and supported campaigns of Kick it Out,





Women in Football, Her Game Too, Football v Football and Level Playing Field. The supporting of stakeholder campaigns has allowed the EFL to further promote the work of Clubs and the League, as well as ensure it is positioned as an opportunity for all.

The key advancement during the 2022/23 season has been the work undertaken by the Clubs throughout the EFL. The commitment to improve their environment and provide greater opportunities for their communities has allowed the EFL to make great strides in promoting the League and making the League accessible.

The EFL and its EDI team are very proud of the work that has been undertaken throughout the season since the launch of the 'Together' strategy, but there is a clear understanding that there is more development and evolution to come in order to achieve the mission and vision.

Meet the EDI Team

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

Sophie Jefferson and Tom Jefferson are part of the EFL's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, responsible for the delivery of many elements within the Together Strategy.

Here, they explain their roles and responsibilities, assess the work that's been done so far and reveal plans for future development.

First of all, just introduce yourselves...

SJ: I'm Sophie Jefferson – I have worked at the EFL for over five years, in a variety of roles, and in October 2022, I was appointed as Systems and Education Inclusion Manager. I work as part of the Inclusion team to assist with the delivery of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion education to our 72 Member Clubs and also provide training and support with iRecruit, the new HR ATS system rolled out to Academies during the 2022/23 season.

TJ: I'm Tom Jefferson and I've been with the EFL for four-and-a-half years in different roles across the Inclusion department. I started my Inclusion journey as the Inclusion and Safeguarding Administrator and then went onto support the Code of Practice assessments as an Inclusion Officer.

With the introduction of the new Together strategy last year, how has that impacted your workloads?

SJ: It was addressed in the Strategy that the EFL, along with its partners, are to provide a comprehensive programme of education to EFL Clubs, ensuring awareness and understanding which allows for the removal of barriers. During the 2022/23 season, the EFL Inclusion team, EDI stakeholders and partners have delivered 48 online webinars to Clubs. These have ranged from EDI specific topics to Club best practices, and we will continue to build on the topics delivered to broaden Clubs' knowledge and understanding in this area.

iRecruit has been developed to assist Clubs with anonymous/blind recruitment practices. The system has become a mandatory requirement for Clubs to use for Academy coaching positions requiring a UEFA A and B licence qualification, in accordance with Regulation Minority Candidate 115, whereby Clubs are asked to provide feedback on each recruitment process.

The system allows Clubs to advertise vacancies, review and shortlist candidates, arrange and invite candidates to interview and also select the successful candidate. An anonymised report enables Clubs to monitor the underrepresentation within each stage of the process and how improvements can be made for future recruitment processes, if needed.

TJ: Through the new Together strategy, my main roles and responsibilities as Engagement Inclusion Manager are to capture and challenge both discrimination and behaviour within stands and on social media, as well as to support Clubs with the process.

Alongside this, I have been working with Clubs throughout the EFL on a number of key initiatives to aid engagement with communities and to implement the EFL's Together Vision, which is for the EFL and its Clubs to be reflective and representative of the communities in which they serve at all levels of the game.

What has been the impact so far from this work?

SJ: The Together Strategy's aim was for Clubs to complete 5,000 hours of collaborative EDI training over the course of the following five seasons. During the 2022/23 season alone, Clubs have attended 3,801 hours of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion education webinars and completed a total of 2,325 hours of Playing for Inclusion online module training. This is a great achievement and credit to our Clubs for their involvement and participation within the EDI space.

iRecruit has now been live since Tuesday 12 April 2023 and a number of EFL Clubs have begun to use it for their Academy Coaching recruitment processes. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Clubs for their involvement and feedback. From the application data we have received so far, 92% of the applications received were from candidates that currently work within the football industry and 87% of those candidates held a UEFA A/B licence qualification.

TJ: The 2022/23 season is the first season the EFL has captured and reported on discriminatory reports and the engagement from Clubs has been fantastic. Through this season's trends analysis, we have noticed the leading reporting mechanism has been Clubs reporting discrimination incidents via the Matchday Operations Summary. This mechanism will allow the EFL and its Clubs to deal with incidents more efficiently and effectively to notice trends in future matchdays and ultimately lower the risk of incidents reoccurring.

In May 2023, the EFL Inclusion Team hosted a number of conferences to help support Clubs and to share best practice, which I think is vital in any Club's development. The first conference was aimed at Inclusion Leads within Clubs and Trusts, including presentations and panel discussions held around Inclusion Lead needs, education requirements and diverse fan groups.

The second conference was the EFL Disability Access Officer conference, which was in partnership with Level Playing Field. Disability Access Officers from across all Clubs discussed key topics, including Away Fan Experience, Fan Engagement, Facilities and more.

The final conference was the Her Game Too conference, which involved Club ambassadors, aiming to support Her Game Too and their future strategic objectives, while gaining valuable consultation for the EFL in the needs and wants of female supporters across the League.



So, what about next season and beyond?

SJ: Following Club consultations and feedback on this season's delivery of education webinars, I have started to devise the education programme for the 2023/24 season, introducing new topics, stakeholders and reducing the number of online sessions to 30. We have also taken into consideration Clubs' busy periods to enable more Club staff to attend.

The Playing for Inclusion online module, which has been available for Clubs to complete since the 2016/17 season, is in the process of being updated and from the summer, will be available for Club staff to complete on the new Learning Management System. We also envisage further courses relating to EDI being made available to Clubs next season on the system and details of those will be shared prior to the 2023/24 season commencing.

Clubs will also be able to use iRecruit to advertise the remainder of Academy roles, Club and Community Trust vacancies. This isn't mandatory, but will give the opportunity to Clubs to standardise their recruitment to the one system, as we appreciate the process so far has been to incorporate Academy Coaching positions only.

Currently, iRecruit only allows Clubs to select the successful candidate and any onboarding documentation and processes need to be completed outside of iRecruit. However, our aim is to add the onboarding module to iRecruit, dependent on current Clubs' HR processes and the integrations of APIs to the variety of systems Clubs currently use.

TJ: Firstly, the EFL and the Inclusion Team will be updating the Discrimination Reporting mechanism on the EFL website to make this more accessible to fans. This will also allow the EFL to closely monitor direct reports of discrimination and increase efficiency in Clubs handling investigations.

Clubs can also expect to see the creation of a Discrimination Action Plan guidance document, which is aligned with the five pillars of the Together Strategy – Support, Educate, Communicate, Embed and Listen. The guide has been written to support Clubs in the establishment of a Discrimination Action Plan, which will support Clubs' efforts to challenge all forms of discrimination.

The establishment of a specific action plan for challenging discrimination allows Clubs to clearly understand their needs and set responsibilities to ensure effective management of any reports of discrimination and therefore can be effectively handled in a timely manner.

PLAYER INTERVIEW | **RICHARD WOOD**

WOOD YOU BELIEVE IT?

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Nobody knows the South Yorkshire circuit quite as well as **RICHARD WOOD**.

After nine years, the 37-year-old – practically a part of the furniture at Rotherham United – pulled on the red and white of the Millers for one final time.

Little did he know, his next opportunity was right around the corner, almost quite literally.

In May, it was announced that the veteran defender had penned a one-year deal with local rivals Doncaster Rovers, taking him into his 22nd season in professional football.

"I've known Grant McCann for years," he reveals. "I used to live on the same street as him back when I played for Sheffield Wednesday and he played for Barnsley at the time. I've always got on well with him.

"It made sense to do it. They're local to me, which is a good thing because I don't have to move anywhere or travel too far or stay in hotels. That's what fans don't see a lot of the time, but players are travelling and being away from their families. It's a great life to have and everyone wants to be a footballer, but it's not an easy ride.

"I'm looking forward to a new, fresh challenge because I've been at Rotherham for that long, but I'm going to have to walk





into a new dressing room now and prove myself all over again to the fans and to the rest of the staff and players at Doncaster."

After it was confirmed that Wood wasn't going to be offered a new deal with Rotherham, some might have expected him to call time on his playing career, but it wasn't even a question for the man himself.

"There wasn't a doubt in my mind," he answers. "I knew if I had to leave Rotherham that I'd definitely carry on playing. At my age – I'm 38 in July – I want to keep going as long as I can until there are no Clubs coming in for me – that'll be the time to hang up!"

As it transpired, he received plenty of interest and his age wasn't a deterring factor for newly appointed Rovers manager McCann.

"People say that when you hit the other side of 30, it's downhill," says Wood. "People look for the young and energetic players, which are good and you need, but you also need a balance and you need older players with experience and know-how. It does count massively.

"Everybody says you'll regret it if you finish your career too early or retire too early. If you can keep playing, why don't you? I speak to a lot of ex-pros and they all say they miss that side to it. They don't miss how their body feels and the aches and pains, but I don't mind that; I'm happy to keep getting them and keep playing.

"I like to think I've looked after myself. I've got to know my body a bit better as I know what I can and can't do, but I'm still learning now."

West Yorkshire-born Wood came through the ranks at Sheffield Wednesday. He was handed his debut in a 1-1 draw at Brighton & Hove Albion in April 2003, aged 17, but it happened to be the day that the Club were relegated from the second tier.

Former Owl, Glenn Whelan, announced his retirement at the end of the 2022/23 campaign, leaving Wood as the only member of Wednesday's 2005 promotion-winning side that beat Hartlepool United 4-2 in the League One Play-Off Final.

"It's strange that I'm the only one still playing, but maybe it's a good thing," Wood says. "I was 19 at the time, whereas when you're older, you take it in more. At 19, I was just on the crest of a wave.

"I've got an affiliation to them now. When I signed for Wednesday when I was 11 or 12, we got free tickets to games, so I used to go and watch them when they had Di Canio and Carbone in the Premier League years!"

His time at Hillsborough coincided with a call-up for England Under-21s but, after suffering an injury, his international career never got off the ground.

"I got a call-up and got the letter," he continues. "The week before, we played

> PEOPLE SAY THAT WHEN YOU HIT THE OTHER SIDE OF 30, IT'S DOWNHILL. PEOPLE LOOK FOR THE YOUNG AND ENERGETIC PLAYERS, WHICH ARE GOOD AND YOU NEED, BUT YOU ALSO NEED A BALANCE AND YOU NEED OLDER PLAYERS WITH EXPERIENCE AND KNOW-HOW. IT DOES COUNT MASSIVELY





Crystal Palace and I played the full game, but in the first five minutes, I felt my groin go and I was out injured then for 13 months. The England thing had just disappeared, and I was gutted about that."

It was up the M18 at Rotherham where Wood enjoyed his longest and most successful stint. However, last month, manager Matt Taylor informed him that 2022/23 would be his last season as a Millers player.

He is perhaps best remembered for scoring both goals in the 2018 League One Play-Off Final as the Millers saw off Shrewsbury Town 2-1 to win promotion under the arch.

Wood rippled the net in extra-time with the match-winner and it still goes down as the best day of the two-goal Wembley hero's playing days.

"Easily, it's the highlight of my career," he insists. "When the second goal went in, my first thought was to get to my family, so I was sprinting back and the manager (Paul Warne) thought I was sprinting back to him.

"He's stood on the halfway line waiting for me and he's got his arm up expecting a high five, but I went straight past him. My youngest boy is 12 and he has it recorded; he knows every word of the commentary."

In 2015, Wood headed out on three separate loan spells after falling out of favour. He dropped down a division from the Championship for temporary stints with Crawley Town, Fleetwood Town and Chesterfield before he was eventually called back by then-boss Neil Warnock.

"Loads of times, I thought I had to go," he says. "It's weird how football can change so quickly. I never gave up and always had the mentality to stay professional and keep going. They were definitely low points."

When the time does come for the experienced centre-half to hang up his boots, a path may have already presented itself to him.

In September last year, Wood stepped in alongside Rotherham team-mate Lee Peltier as caretaker manager following the departure of Paul Warne. The duo took charge of a 2-0 defeat to Wigan Athletic, but it did whet the appetite for Wood.

"I definitely want to try my hand at it," he states. "I really enjoyed that week, even though the result didn't go our way. I don't know if I'll be any good but I'm working on it in the background.

"Looking back in hindsight now, maybe I shouldn't have played and been on the side to see how the game was going to make changes, but my form up to that point was really good, so I couldn't not play myself. I got too into it trying to be a manager on the pitch, whereas I should've just been a captain on the pitch."

Having not been involved between January and April, he was introduced back into the fold for the final six games of the season as Rotherham secured safety against Middlesbrough in their penultimate fixture and the final home game of the season.

Wood and his famous magic hat that Millers fans sing about completed an emotional lap of honour around the AESSEAL New York Stadium – the perfect way to sign off.

"I knew it was coming around Christmastime that I wasn't going to stay," he explains. "I'd sort of got it in my head that I'd keep playing at Rotherham until I actually do retire and hopefully go into coaching that way. You can never guarantee anything in football, can you?

"It was hard to keep it in. I had to have a moment a few times and just hold it back. I'm not one to milk anything. When my song gets sung, some of the lads love it and they're jumping up and down encouraging the crowd, but that isn't my character. I just stand there and take it in."

This season, Wood will embark on a completely new challenge, competing in League Two for the first time in his career, and he's certainly showing no signs of slowing down.



EFL and Smart Energy GB Extend Partnership

In May, the EFL and Smart Energy GB agreed a two-year partnership extension, which will see football supporters across England and Wales continue to receive help in understanding their energy spending.



Smart Energy GB teamed up with the EFL and EFL Trust in 2021 and has since held a series of engaging community focused activities, showcasing the benefits smart meters can have for households.

With 72 EFL Clubs and their Club Community Organisations (CCOs) located in towns and cities across the country, the partnership provides a national platform with local reach to show fans how a smart meter and in-home display could help them better manage energy bills and household finances.

Smart meters are crucial to upgrading Britain's energy system and by having them installed at home, football supporters will also play a key role in helping the transition to more environmentally friendly and sustainable energy sources, such as wind and solar.







Ben Wright, the EFL's Chief Commercial Officer, said: "EFL Clubs and CCOs support their communities seven days a week, 365 days of the year and with Smart Energy GB focused on helping to tackle fuel poverty and making energy savings all year round, this will help, especially those who have been impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

"We are pleased to announce this extension so we can continue to help support the communities our Clubs serve."

Phillippa Brown, Deputy Director of Special Audiences at Smart Energy GB, said: "Working in partnership with EFL Clubs and their Club Community Organisations has been incredibly rewarding. The partnership has allowed Smart Energy GB to reach households through their love of football to understand how smart meters could help them better manage their energy bills.

"This has been vital for many people looking for ways to stay on top of their finances, so we're excited to continue this work and build on what we've achieved across England and Wales already."

Cathy Abraham, the EFL Trust's Chief Executive Officer, added: "We know a lot of people are finding it harder to manage their household bills. Our EFL Club Community Organisations engage with over 840,000 people every year across England and Wales, so are perfectly placed to support those people who may be struggling.

"This partnership with Smart Energy GB will further help people to make informed decisions about the use of their energy."

MANAGER INTERVIEW | **RICHIE WELLENS**

RICHIE WELLENS is a born winner and exudes an aura oozing with confidence.

Having guided his team to the Sky Bet League Two title with 91 points last season – his second promotion in four seasons – you can understand why.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

Rich with Success

There's no doubt that this season has been special for anyone connected to Leyton Orient, not least for Wellens as their manager.

Having just secured the Club's first league title in the EFL in 53 years and a return to League One for the first time since 2014/15, the 43-year-old has experienced a dream first full campaign in charge of the East London Club.

In Orient, he has found a Club that matches his ambitions, with a determined group of players that share his winning mentality.

As a player – and at times a manager – Wellens has suffered a number of setbacks; plenty of tough times, painful memories and hardship. But they are hardships that have matured him into a hard-working, thick-skinned and resilient manager whose hunger for success continues to grow.

/theEFL /EFL /efl

"One thing I am, is a winner," Wellens says, speaking a few weeks after the 2022/23 season had ended.

"If you watch our training every day and the intensity levels that the players work at, it's no fluke that we finished where we did and it's no fluke that we only lost seven games all season.

"Anyone that knows me and anyone that has worked with me knows that I have certain principles and they are: if a player isn't training to my level of intensity, if a player isn't buying into the environment we want to create and if they don't want to go forward and improve to play in the division above, then I'm not having it.

"They are my standards and that's what I demand of my players. I'm a winner and I wanted to change the mindset of the players to also be winners because it's what they should be."

It's a "streetwise" mentality Wellens has developed from growing up in Moston – a suburb of Manchester – spending his teenage years under the stewardship of Sir Alex Ferguson at Manchester United, training daily with the Class of '92 and being surrounded by "serial winners".

"I came from a council estate in Manchester, where a lot of young kids go in the wrong direction," he continues. "I had to develop thick skin. I left school at 16 and within two months of leaving, I went into a training ground with Eric Cantona, Roy Keane, Paul Scholes and so on.

"These boys had just won the double. All of a sudden, I had to hold myself in a certain way or I'd get swallowed up.

"For those five years, I was surrounded by winning mentalities and elite mentalities. The mantra at United with those players was, 'if you lose one game, you never lose two', 'if you win 1-0, why haven't you won 2-0?'

"They scored late goals, they could play incredible football, they could punish you physically and mentally and everything was about winning. They were elite in every way and the most resilient group of players I've ever seen.

"At the head of that was Sir Alex Ferguson and I was lucky enough to be at a Club that was a winning machine. It definitely rubbed off on me."

But it's no secret that Wellens was – in his own words – "a bit of a rebel". The former midfielder knew he was talented, but has openly spoken about his lack of professionalism at a young age.

"I thought it was inevitable I was going to make it," he said in a previous interview. And he did, but not at Manchester United.

He admits: "I was a rebel. I had loads of meetings with Sir Alex when I was at United and he could be ruthless and demanding – that's why United were the best team in the world.

"I wanted to be able to hold my own, but I needed to take the flack I was getting on board. I was released, but those years shaped my career. I built resilience, I learned."

Following his departure from Old Trafford, Wellens signed for Blackpool, where he won two EFL Trophies and helped them seal promotion to League One. He then moved on to Oldham Athletic, before contributing to Doncaster Rovers' promotion to the Championship, beating Leeds United along the way.





"IF YOU WATCH OUR TRAINING EVERY DAY AND THE INTENSITY LEVELS THAT THE PLAYERS WORK AT, IT'S NO FLUKE THAT WE FINISHED WHERE WE DID AND IT'S NO FLUKE THAT WE ONLY LOST SEVEN GAMES ALL SEASON"

/theEFL /EFL /efl



From there, he spent four years at Leicester City, where he was established as one of the best midfielders in the second tier, winning the Club's Player of the Year in 2011.

"They were probably my best years, between the ages of 26 and 33," he notes. "But even they forced me to build up a level of resilience.

"One minute, I was Player of the Year, the next minute, I'd done my ACL and when I came back, all the players had overtaken me because I was coming to the end of my career. That was so hard to deal with. So, I was forced to look at things a little differently.

"As a player, you're in this bubble and you think it's going to last forever. You have this euphoria that is unrivalled and it's the best job in the world.

"Management is a poor second, but I knew I had to think about it and take a different approach. So, I started coaching. I would ring up colleges and universities to coach their players, any of them. I wanted to build up my patience and resilience as a coach and I wanted to learn."

After starting his managerial career at Oldham and enjoying success with a League Two title at Swindon Town in 2020, more challenging times followed at Salford City and Doncaster. But those challenges were to be the catalyst for future success.

With Orient 20th in League Two, Wellens took over the Club in the most challenging of positions when he joined in March 2022, with relegation out of the EFL a genuine concern.

But how did his side go from relegation threatened to champions elect?

"The first thing I said to the players when I came in was, 'let's go back to when you were all little boys, when you used to play for free and with a smile on your face'. From day one, that's all I wanted to do.

"When we did that, we drew my first two games, won the next three and all of a sudden, we were safe. I stuck to my principles and I think the players respected that. We created an environment where people enjoyed coming in every day, the players relaxed and I started to see their true qualities."

By March this year, the O's were one of England's best-performing sides since Wellens had taken charge, only second behind Sheffield Wednesday in England's top four divisions for points won (95) in the 12-month period.

In addition, only Newcastle United had conceded fewer goals across the top four divisions as Wellens oversaw a rapid turnaround in the Club's fortunes.





"THE FIRST THING I SAID TO THE PLAYERS WHEN I CAME IN WAS, 'LET'S GO BACK TO WHEN YOU WERE ALL LITTLE BOYS, WHEN YOU USED TO PLAY FOR FREE AND WITH A SMILE ON YOUR FACE'. FROM DAY ONE, THAT'S ALL I WANTED TO DO"

One of his great strengths is his communication – with players, fans and the Board of Directors. In fact, it was his communication skills that were a key reason he landed the job at Brisbane Road back in 2022.

But it was Wellens' previous failures that made him an attractive candidate for the job, according to Chairman Nigel Travis. Having gone through "the most complex process of any manager", Travis took the view that you learn from every situation and one of Wellens' best attributes was his willingness to learn, and with that, improve.

Wellens reveals: "In my interview, Nigel asked me why I'd had success in the past and why I'd had failures. I was honest, and that's always been a great thing about our relationship – we're honest and our communication levels are really high. That's so important in football and maybe where it's gone wrong in previous jobs.





"I'm always open and honest in everything I do and hopefully the supporters, players and the owners see that I'm authentic in that way and maybe can relate to me because of that. Every decision I make is for the benefit of the group of players here and the owners back me with that and trust the process.

"The people here are some of the most approachable and knowledgeable people I've ever worked with. They're really good guys. You never know where you're going to be next in football. If you lose your next five games, you could be gone, but I will consider these people friends for life."

Did Wellens feel like he had something to prove after the spells at Salford and Doncaster? "Maybe," he says. "I wanted to win.

"I wanted to prove I could manage a group of men and people knew what I could do. Twice now I've pulled a team from 20th in the league and within 15 months we've won the title. I take massive satisfaction in that."

There's no doubt that this is an exciting time for Leyton Orient. And this is just the beginning, according to Wellens.

"Under no circumstances am I going to sit on my laurels," he affirms.

"The Club had a six-year plan and this was the last year of that plan. We've achieved promotion in that final year, so now I want a new plan; where are we going and what comes next?

"I thoroughly enjoyed what's gone, last season was absolutely amazing and I'll go on holiday in the summer, but as soon as I come back – I can already feel it now as I'm talking – I want to win again.

"I can feel that desire and hunger inside of me. I love that taste of champagne at the end of the season and I love lifting trophies. I've only been a manager for five years and I've lifted three trophies. That's what I want.

"So, we need to come up with a new plan, we need to recruit well, make sure we're not in any relegation trouble next season and show that same hunger, that same quality and those same principles that got us to where we are now. If we do that, it will stand us in good stead going into 2023/24."



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KNOW YOUR REGS

WORDS // **CHRIS OSBORNE**

Every summer, across the country, the EFL Handbook lands at all 72 EFL Clubs, as well as with every stakeholder.



It may seem a fairly inauspicious moment before the start of the season, but the publication – which is also available online – is one of the most important documents the League issues, containing all the regulations for the new campaign.

The ultimate reference guide, it lays out the rules by which the EFL, its Clubs and its competitions are governed.

And while the core of the text stays consistent season to season, there are updates, changes and additions each year, including the inclusion of new regulations or adaptations of existing ones.

But how does a regulation come into existence and end up on the page, confirming it as part of the EFL's rules?

Geoff Cunningham, Head of Legal (Regulatory) at the EFL, explains the process from start to finish, and gives an insight into what makes a regulation.

WHY ARE REGULATION CHANGES OFTEN NEEDED?

Regulations can require an update when new legislation is created, for example, various legislative changes brought about during the COVID-19 pandemic, or because of a new issue that requires regulating.

WHO TENDS TO SUGGEST THE PREMISE OF A NEW REGULATION OR A REGULATION CHANGE?

New or amended regulation proposals usually originate from one of three areas – suggestions from our Member Clubs, recommendations of the EFL Executive or proposals of the EFL Board.

WHO DECIDES IF A NEW REGULATION SHOULD BE DRAFTED AND WHO IS INVOLVED IN THE EARLY CONVERSATIONS?

A Club can propose a regulation change in accordance with the EFL's Articles of Association. Otherwise, on instruction from the Executive and/or the Board, I will mostly likely draft regulation changes for the Regulations Committee, which is made up of representatives from each of our three divisions, the FA and the Premier League, to critique before such regulation proposals are voted on at an AGM or EGM by our Member Clubs.

ARE THERE ANY LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH NEW REGULATIONS?

New or amended regulations are considered more widely against the legal framework in England and Wales. This ensures regulations are legally enforceable and also makes sure they're not in breach of an applicable law.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN FOR A NEW REGULATION TO BE APPROVED?

Amendments and new regulation proposals are sent via email to Clubs, together with a notice of a meeting. It will also include a proxy, so Clubs who are unable to attend in person at the meeting can still vote.

For a regulation to be approved, it must have support from the majority of our Member Clubs, plus majority support from the 24 Championship Clubs. If the requisite majority support is not obtained, then the proposal will fail.

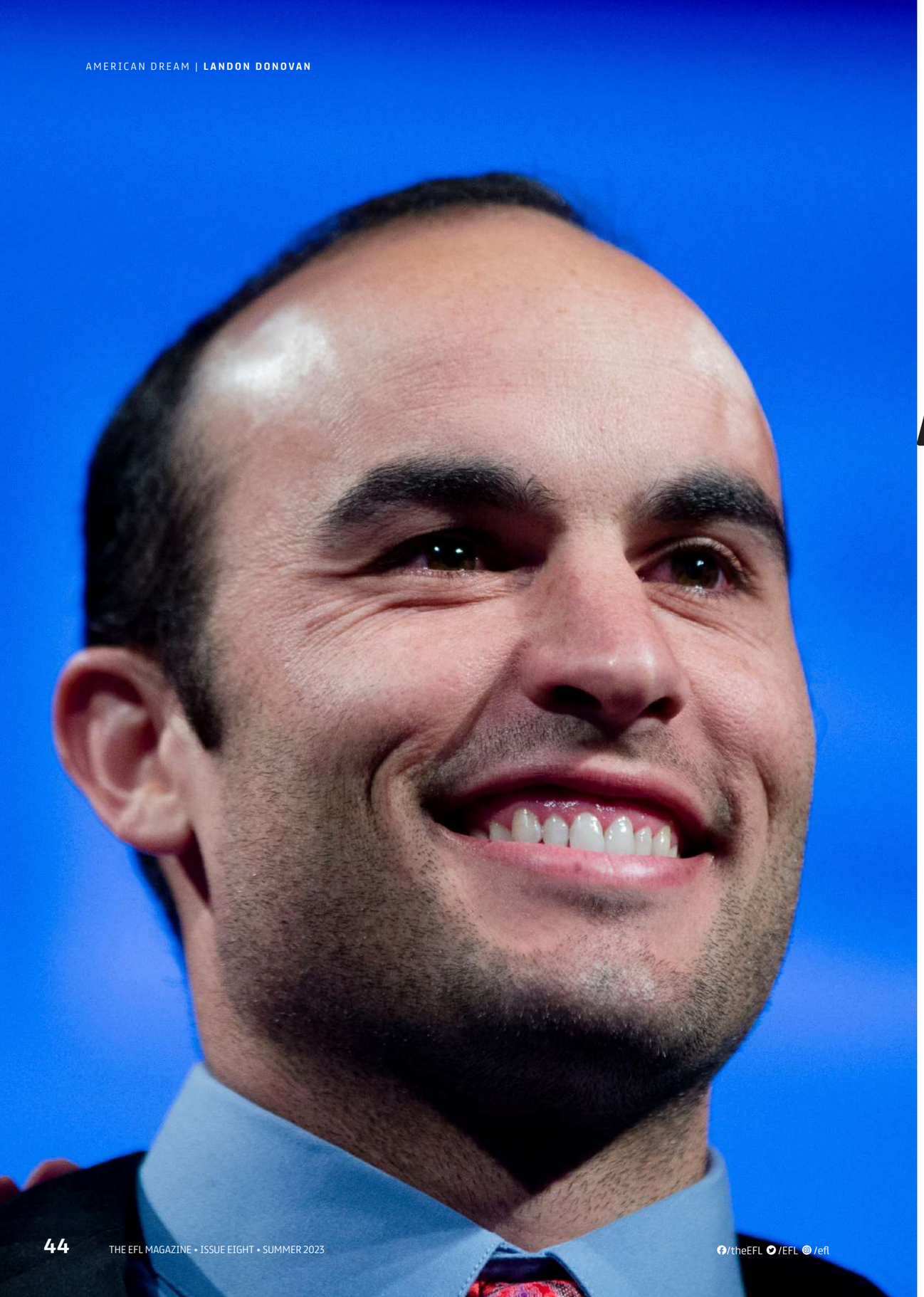
IF A REGULATION IS AGREED, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

If a proposed regulation is approved by our Member Clubs, it will come into force immediately thereafter, unless otherwise stated.

Once Clubs have voted on regulation proposals, I will be in contact to communicate the outcome and if approved, the new/amended regulations will appear online promptly thereafter and in the next hard copy of the EFL Handbook.

WILL YOU GIVE GUIDANCE ON CHANGES OR ADAPTATIONS CLUBS MIGHT HAVE TO MAKE AFTER ANY REGULATION UPDATES?

Where guidance is needed on the application of a regulation, the League will often provide this in blue text under the relevant regulation or section of the regulations, but should Clubs require any further assistance, they are welcome to contact me.



AMERICAN DREAM | **LANDON DONOVAN**

In 2021, Lincoln City were handed a financial boost, as the USA-based Jabara family became shareholders of the Sky Bet League One Club.

AMERICAN Dream

It was US football icon and former Everton forward, **LANDON DONOVAN**, who alerted his good friend Harvey Jabara to Lincoln City, and subsequently introduced Jabara to Imps Chairman, Clive Nates. Following the successful Jabara family investment of the Club, Donovan took on the role of Strategic Advisor to the owners and has since "fallen in love" with the Club.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

"A mutual friend of ours thought myself and Clive Nates (Lincoln City Chairman) would really hit it off," Donovan explains.

"From the minute I met Clive, I knew he was a really good human being and the more I learned about him, Lincoln City and the job he's done there, the more I thought what a remarkable story it is, and not only that, but a story that a lot of people overseas probably wouldn't know about."

Arizona-based businessman Jabara has owned a small stake in San Diego's Major League Baseball side, the Padres, since 2012, but in 2021 expressed an interest in football.

"Harvey is a close friend of mine and he was always asking me about opportunities to invest in Football Clubs in Europe," Donovan continues.

"When I met Clive and Liam (Scully) of Lincoln, I knew everyone would click and get on really well, so I put them in touch. Harvey invested and as part of that relationship, I couldn't help but fall in love with Lincoln City and the people of the Club."

Since retiring as a player, Donovan has become the Vice President of the San Diego Loyal Soccer Club in North America, a second-tier USL Championship side he co-founded in 2019, and that remains his focus, with the Lincoln City role an opportunity to enhance the Club's networking and relationships across the pond within North America.



There to lend a hand if needed, while also keen to learn about how the Club operates, the 41-year-old may only be involved from afar, but his influence is not to be sniffed at.

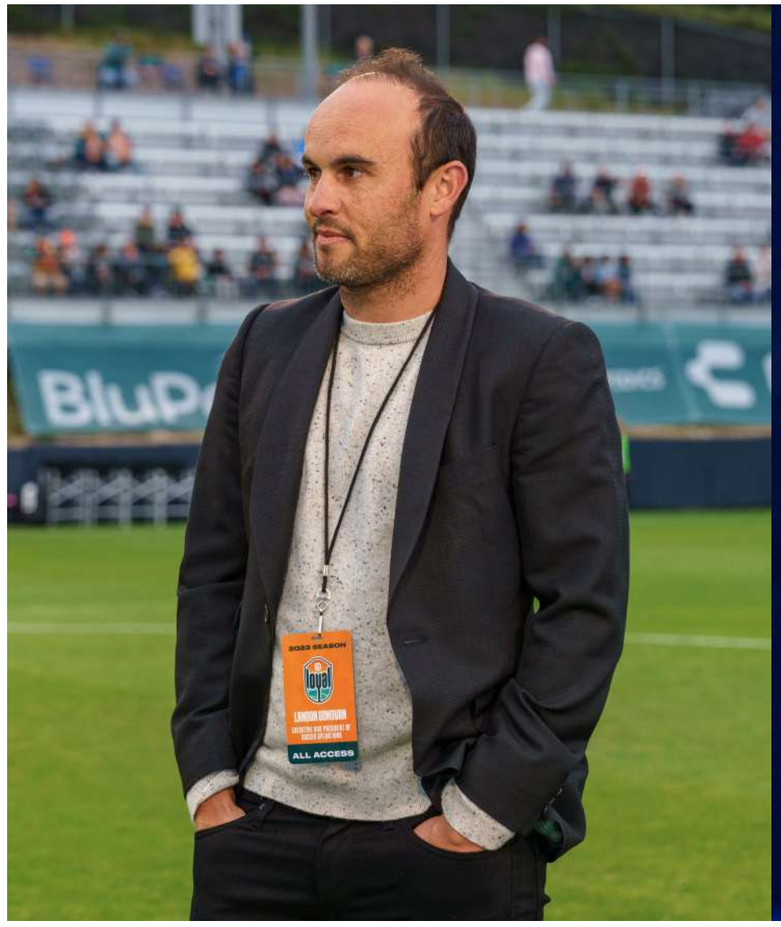
"The term 'advisor' can sometimes be misconstrued," he says. "I'm very conscious that I don't have the luxury of being inside the Club every day, and football in the UK is so unique, so for the first year or so I was very quiet and just observed what was going on to take it all in.

"On the flip side, I see things from afar that people maybe don't see every day because they're in it. Sometimes, when you're so engrossed in something, you can't see the wood for the trees, so if I see something clear and obvious, I'll say it. Otherwise, I try to get more context, ask the right questions and just understand the process.

"I wanted to support in a meaningful way to the Club, but also invest money and be a part of it. So, I help where I can, I speak to Harvey a lot and help him understand the footballing world, because that's something he doesn't have a lot of experience in, in the UK.

"And the relationship works both ways, because Clive and Liam can be advisors for me over here – I trust them a lot. It's been a really good relationship so far and I'm really excited to see it grow."

It's hard not to be impressed by Donovan, who speaks of Lincoln City and English football generally with knowledge, passion and respect, and it's clear that both his and Jabara's involvement in the League One outfit is a long-term commitment.



"I'M A FAN, THERE'S NO QUESTION. MY KIDS HAVE LINCOLN JERSEYS, I'M UP AT 7:00AM EVERY SATURDAY MORNING WATCHING THEM ON iFOLLOW AND SOMETIMES IT'S PAINFUL TO WATCH, BUT THAT'S PART OF BEING A FOOTBALL FAN!"

"I've really grown to love it," he admits. "I'm a fan, there's no question. My kids have Lincoln jerseys, I'm up at 7:00am every Saturday morning watching them on iFollow and sometimes it's painful to watch, but that's part of being a football fan!

"I love the people, they're really special and when you see how far the Club has come in recent years, it really is remarkable. Almost 9,000 fans watching them at home every week, you can sense the pride the fans have for their Football Club and how important it is to them.

"Football is a way of life in the UK, that's how I describe it to people over here in the US. People save up money all week to be able to go to the match at the weekend and that's their way of life. It's hard for Americans to relate directly to that.

"Yes, we have die-hard sports fans here, but it's sometimes an entertainment option. In the UK, this is literally a part of their life and for some fans, it's the most important part of their life. That's why



"I ALWAYS SAY, 'SUCCESS IS NOT AN ACCIDENT' AND WHAT LINCOLN HAS IS REALLY SPECIAL. EVERYONE DOES A PHENOMENAL JOB."



it's such a joy to be a part of it, especially at Lincoln. I always say, 'success is not an accident' and what Lincoln has is really special. Everyone does a phenomenal job."

December 2022 saw the Imps join forces with San Diego Loyal SC after the Jabara family increased their stake in Lincoln. With the intention of growing the international fanbase in the USA, the partnership has seen the two Clubs collaborate on community initiatives, merchandise and even online content.

"The relationship helps all parties," Donovan explains. "We want to build the Club globally, of course. Nobody could argue that being relevant in the United States is great for Clubs and I think there's a lot of value in being globally known, but we know how great Lincoln City is, we know how great the city is and the most important thing is to be sustainable.

"Lincoln were out here last summer and spent a week in San Diego to see what our training environment was like, what our matchdays are like here and to see if there were any takeaways to take back to the LNER Stadium. It doesn't mean that if you see something happen at our stadium in San Diego, you're suddenly going to see it happen at Lincoln City, but I think we can all learn from each other.

"For example, Harvey is unique in that he has a lot of experience in baseball. And I'm sure people in the UK might say, 'what does baseball have to do with English football?' But there are best practices we can all learn, just by understanding how things are run as a business. There are lots of ways to be successful and if we can all help each other, that can only be beneficial."

As a Club, Lincoln has been on an upward trajectory since its promotion from the National League in 2017. An EFL Trophy victory at Wembley in their first season back in the EFL in 2018 was followed by the League Two title in 2019 and since then, the Club has established itself in League One, narrowly missing out on promotion to the Championship in 2021 after a Play-Off Final loss to Blackpool.

So, what next for the Imps?

"A question I ask a lot is, 'can we think past this weekend and can we think past the next transfer window and think more bigger picture'?" Donovan concludes.

"Understandably, you do sometimes have to take one step at a time, but the goal in my opinion should be to continue to build the squad and the Club in a way that gives the Club continuity from season to season, and that includes manager, staff and players.

"With that, I think you'll slowly build, slowly get better and achieve success. Here in San Diego, we've got eight or nine people who have been at the Club since day one and that level of continuity really, really helps. Of course, there will always be turnover, I know that, but continuity gives you the opportunity to become better.

"I've learned a lot from English football, people work so hard to stay in their respective division or to win promotion and that's where we want to be, but we've got to build something that gives us a real opportunity to be sustainable with it."

Rams Set Safeguarding Standard

WORDS // JACK WYLIE

Last year, the EFL launched its new three-year safeguarding strategy, demonstrating the League's commitment to promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk.

As part of the pledge to uphold best practice, all EFL Clubs are audited against safeguarding standards, with Barnardo's commissioning independent checks since August 2019.

In alignment with these standards, the 2022-25 strategy has seven pillars – leadership, governance and culture; roles and responsibilities; prevention, policies, procedure and practice; educating and empowering; protection; working together; and listening culture.

Scrutinised against these elements, Derby County proved their safeguarding processes are of the highest calibre by achieving a rating of 'very good', which is the top grade possible.

"For us to be awarded 'very good' is a sign of the importance that has been placed on safeguarding by the Club, from top to bottom," says Tony Brittan, Derby's Designated Safeguarding Officer.

"Without the top to bottom response to safeguarding, the process would fail because it can't escalate up and can't be managed down. It's important that safeguarding becomes part of the culture of the Club. It's not just about football, it's about everything that goes with the football.

"Our focus is solely on the young people and their parents. What do they think about us and our environment and the pastoral support of safeguarding when they're not on the football pitch?

"I believe our young people and parents are able to articulate clearly who they can approach to report any issues or receive support or guidance."

The Rams take a multi-disciplinary approach when it comes to safeguarding, with clear and regular communication between various areas of the Club.

"For us, it starts with the Board and our CEO, Stephen Pearce – who is also our safeguarding lead," Brittan continues. "Then, aside from the safeguarding team, you've got the head of medical, the head of Academy recruitment, the head of education, the player care manager and the Academy manager, who all show their commitment and knowledge regarding delivery of safeguarding in the workplace.

"That's our process and then underpinning that is all the coaching staff. The communication across the whole team is really important.

"Ultimately, it's about making sure our young people are happy in our footballing environment. We care about our staff, our young people, their parents and anyone who comes into our Football Club, in a pastoral sense. This whole team is prepared to support the footballing journey of each young person, and we think it's a positive place to be for the kids to enjoy themselves."

Senior Safeguarding Lead, Sarah Edwards, adds: "It is a bit cliché to say that it's embedded in the Football Club, but I do believe that's why we got the result we did. Safeguarding has always been a priority and that makes a difference.

"We always talk about making sure we know who the children are, so they're not just the numbers on the back of their shirts. They are individuals with individual needs and from a safeguarding team perspective, it's about knowing who we've got in the building and where we might need to focus.

"It goes back to that multi-disciplinary approach of communication from coaches upwards to flag anything they think might just not seem right, but they're not quite sure why, so there's a conversation to be had."

The publication of Clive Sheldon QC's report in March 2021 illustrated the devastating impact that child abuse within football has had on survivors and continues to have on their everyday lives.

For Derby, it provided an opportunity to appraise and develop their robust regime, as opposed to sparking wholesale changes.

"We had the infrastructure ready, but the Sheldon Report recommendations were there to refocus us and all Football Clubs on safeguarding," Brittan explains. "The processes were embedded here prior to the Sheldon Report coming out, but it allowed us to evaluate our efforts and be innovative around the delivery of safeguarding.

"But I try to keep the message simple, if the parents and kids are confident of reporting, whether that be a welfare or direct safeguarding issue, and you have the people, the policies and processes in place to manage that, you'll get it right."



One Club, One Community

It's a long-standing tradition that Football Clubs are the beating heart of their local communities.

Change-makers and a powerful collective that transform and save people's lives, Clubs continue to deliver initiatives that make a positive impact on a daily basis.

Whether it's through refugee football sessions, knife crime education, disability football or tackling loneliness through coffee mornings for the elderly, EFL Clubs are providing local solutions to local challenges.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**



One Club where community is at the heart, both on and off the pitch, is Ipswich Town. Led by Chief Executive, Mark Ashton, community is an ethos followed by every person associated with Ipswich Town and a culture running through the Club from the top down.

"My passion and belief is that Football Clubs can impact their local communities in ways that no other organisation can," Ashton told the PFA in a recent interview.

With a one Club, one town, one community mentality, the Suffolk Club does things differently. Community engagement is not just delivered off the pitch, it is a huge part of the first-team manager and players' day-to-day lives too.

With first-team players on the Board of the Ipswich Town Foundation, it provides a direct link between Football Club and Club Community Organisation, with the player representation allowing first-hand insight into the work being delivered in the local community.

Head of Ipswich Town Foundation, Dan Palfrey, explains: "The players' job is to drive the agenda back into the first-team dressing room and reiterate the importance of the work being done, and I've seen first-hand that it really is working and paying dividends.

"The relationship works both ways, the players are the conduit between the Foundation and the first team. As Mark (Ashton) has mentioned before, when we sign players for this Football Club, they're told from the off that they are expected to give back to the community and how important that work is, setting the tone from the start.

"And the players take a genuine interest, too. It's not a chore for them and that's because of the type of players we sign. They come back inspired and the work they do in the community has an impact on them just as much as it does on the people in the community."

First-team player Conor Chaplin and Ipswich Town Women forward Natasha Thomas joined



the Foundation Board in 2021, with the aim of driving the Club's presence in the community, while providing added structure and vision to the Foundation.

While football may have changed over the years, Clubs remain pillars of their communities and players themselves have long understood that they are the most powerful and immediate representatives of a Club's commitment to its communities.

With more than 48,000 player engagements taking place across the EFL in the last three seasons, players share the belief that they are role models with responsibilities to support and advocate, and in Ipswich Town's case, the support given to the local community isn't a tokenistic gesture. They demonstrate a real desire to make a positive difference.

"It was a really positive move by our Club," Ipswich forward, Chaplin, says. "Our voice as players is important and we can set an example and set the standard of what should be done in the community.

"It's a learning experience for me being on the Board, but it's great to be in those meetings every week and hear how passionate people are in wanting to make a change. It's something the Chief Executive is really passionate about and I think success on the pitch comes with success off it – it all goes hand in hand."

Chief Executive Ashton believes community is at the heart of football and outlines the key building blocks necessary to generate support from both the team and the wider community.

"It's always been my undying passion," he told the PFA.

"I tend to buck the trend. For example, when I appointed Kieran McKenna, I knew he was a good coach, but I was more interested in what his values are, what his work ethic is like, will he fit into the community ethos and will he genuinely believe in that and buy into it with his team of players?

"To me, what mattered most was whether his values





match those of this Club off the pitch as well as on it."

This aligned thinking comes from a change in ownership at Ipswich Town, who are now funded by United States pension fund, ORG, and whose interest in the community is as great as that on the pitch.

"The owners might call me about results on the pitch, but they will also call me and ask for a report on our community engagement," Ashton added.

"They want to see what the players have done, what the manager has done and what we as a Club have done. They want to see how we're impacting the lives of those in the community, how we're working to reduce crime, improve mental health, what we're doing with refugees and so on. It's a very different ownership approach."

And this was summed up in the summer, when the Ipswich squad received a visit from a former Arizona policeman, who suffered life-changing injuries while on duty.

"He was one of the most inspirational people I've ever met," Ashton explained. "He was horrifically injured but managed to continue living his life and progress. He is a pension holder of the organisation that funds Ipswich Town, so we are who he represents and that's what I tell the players and staff."

As a reminder of the community they represent, the words 'run towards adversity' feature around Ipswich Town's training ground and are sewn into the first-team kit, and it is a set of values Ashton believes will see the Club succeed in years to come.

"When a player joins this Football Club, the manager does all the football stuff," he said. "But I take them for a walk around the pitch and I talk to them about their involvement in community. I tell them exactly what is going to be expected of them and what they're signing up to. And then I say, 'if you don't want to engage and genuinely work with our local community and that isn't for you, it doesn't matter how good you are on the pitch, join another Club', because they're not the players we want here.

"Those values are what I believe will see us run towards adversity on and off the pitch when difficult times come."



CHIEF REFEREEING OFFICER | **HOWARD WEBB**

Behind the Whistle with HOWARD WEBB

The appointment of former referee Howard Webb to Chief Refereeing Officer at PGMOL is a progressive move for football, as the organisation drives to positively enhance officiating across the Leagues.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

One of the most successful referees in the English game, at the peak of his career, Webb took charge of a Champions League Final and a World Cup Final, and has spent the last five years overseeing match officials in America's MLS.

In December, the 51-year-old returned to England to become the PGMOL's first-ever Chief Refereeing Officer.

"It's a really exciting time to be involved," Webb says. "There's a lot of investment coming into our part of the game to enable us to enhance the standards across the Leagues that we serve. With that investment, there's a new feel to the organisation and there are some exciting and new opportunities, too."

Upon returning to England in the new role, Webb made his aims clear: utilise that increased investment to better the game and its officials, increase transparency, and enhance communication. But how?

He admits that PGMOL is working at great length to make things clearer for everyone involved in the game and has identified a number of tactics by which to achieve such aims.

"I hope to be more progressive," he admits. "I hope to push the boundaries in a way that we maybe haven't before and do things in a new way – to innovate.

"Enhanced communication between officials, participants, fans and the media is key.

"What we've been doing more recently is drawing the curtain back and giving people an insight into a side of the game they might not have seen or heard before, and we want to continue engaging in this way. That transparency allows people to gain greater insight and better understand the decision-making process. In doing so, we're also humanising the officials."

Such enhanced communication is something that was positively implemented in the MLS on a regular basis under Webb's leadership, which included Webb, staff and officials in the States regularly meeting a pool of broadcasters to talk through several key decisions, including playing in-game audio.

"The engagement with broadcasters and journalists was high over there," he explains. "We'd talk them through certain situations to give them real insight so it could inform their narrative going forward. We've started doing that here recently too. It's important we don't run before we can walk, but it's something we'd like to do more of going forward."

Steps were taken last season across the EFL to enhance the communication between officials and the public, with a new weekly feature, 'Behind the Whistle' – hosted on Sky Sports' website – discussing key decisions after each weekend.

In December, Sky Sports were also granted 'Access All Areas' to a League One fixture between Wycombe Wanderers and Portsmouth, which saw enhanced communication live on Sky from both managers, but also access to pre-match meetings between players, managers and officials.

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Sky Sports' David Prutton also attended a Select Group 2 training day at St George's Park to experience first-hand what it's like to be a match official.

Webb continues: "Any engagement with media or members of the public which allows the opportunity to look at the rationale for certain decisions is a benefit, I think we've seen that so far. We're keen to do it much more.

"For example, I'd love to get a match official on the EFL Highlights show on a Saturday to either talk through some decisions or even just speak about what it's like to be a referee.

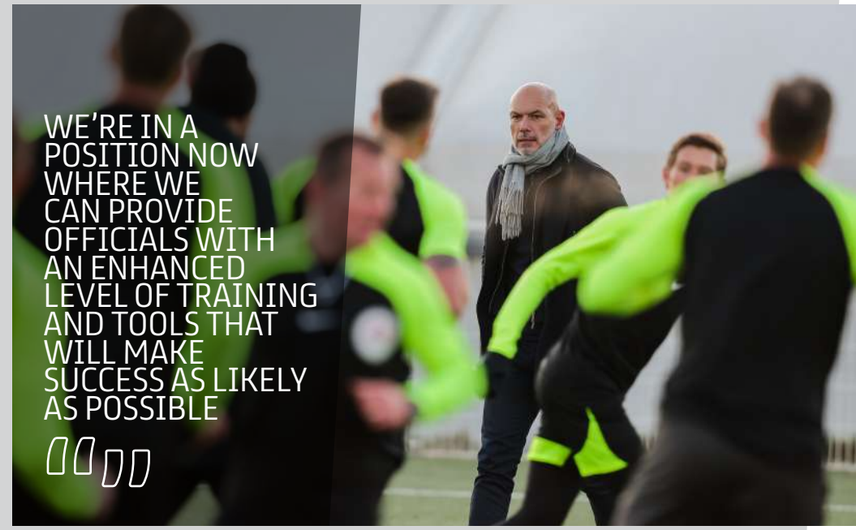
"We don't want to make them celebrities, but we want to give the football public an insight into the type of people our officials are and give some inclination into how they come to their decision-making in a live situation."

In addition to enhanced communication and greater transparency, Webb hopes the formation of the Elite Referee Development Plan (ERDP) will change people's perspective on becoming a referee, with increased investment providing officials with greater wrap-around support in an elite-performance environment, including enhanced coaching and performance analysis in which to be successful.

"It's about giving officials the best support they need and the ability to be successful," adds Webb.

"Candidly speaking, not enough people choose to be referees. We're only as strong as the people who decide to take the refereeing path and we need more, it's as simple as that. I believe there's an untapped talent pool out there and the more people that start the journey, the more officials we're going to have and therefore, the higher the quality will be.

"We're in a position now where we can provide officials with an enhanced level of training and tools that will make success as likely as possible. That comes in a range of forms, such as investing in the best technical equipment, increased coaching, specialists in performance sport, sports science, psychology and analysis to name a few.



"We want to make refereeing more accessible for people and provide the best opportunities for officials to more quickly progress through the ranks. When you look at the way player development has changed in the last 10 years in terms of investment, we're looking to replicate something similar.

"People have complained about officiating for a long time, but that's all they've done – complained. Now we're starting to see real investment like we've seen in playing and coaching and we're confident it will reap similar rewards."

Webb also states that, as part of the ongoing drive to enhance performance standards and broaden the pool of diverse and talented officials, he hopes to attract former players into becoming referees.

"I've said openly that I'd love to see more former players get involved in officiating," he says. "I think that lived experience in the game can be advantageous and there's an opportunity for someone to be a real trailblazer and take that first step from player to official.

"Football is a sport that hasn't seen that yet. One of the reasons is the time it takes from when you start training as an official to get to the top. It took me 13 years before I was refereeing in the Premier League, so if a player retires at the age of 36, they don't want to wait until they're 49 until they get into the professional game.

"With the ERDP and the additional support and development opportunities we're putting in place, based on an ex-player's natural ability and lived experience of the game, we're hoping to squeeze that timeline to three or four years and accelerate the promotion to the professional game. If we can do that, hopefully it'll entice more former players to want to do it."

Webb speaks passionately about his desire to enhance the refereeing landscape for the better. It may take time, but there's no doubt that under his leadership, things are going from strength to strength.

He concludes: "There are a lot of new people in the organisation leading from the top, all from different backgrounds, which is really valuable. We're supported by a Board who are fully invested in what we're trying to achieve and that made this role really appealing for me.

"The game really matters in this country. Yes, it matters everywhere, but football is engrained in the fabric of society here. We're here to serve the game in a way that is credible and I want to make a difference, but we need everyone's support to do so."

A League of its Own

It was only fitting that Josh Windass' 123rd-minute winner at Wembley Stadium in the Sky Bet League One Play-Off Final came with almost the last kick of the game for the 2022/23 season, squeezing every last thrill out of what has been a rollercoaster of a campaign.

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**



Sheffield Wednesday took the third and final promotion spot, joining Plymouth Argyle and Ipswich Town in ascending to the Sky Bet Championship after spending half of the season undefeated.

A 1-0 win over Charlton Athletic at The Valley saw Wednesday set a new record of 20 games without defeat in the league, overwriting a long-standing unbeaten streak from 1960/61. The Owls equalled a Club record a week prior at Hillsborough with a 5-2 victory over MK Dons before going one better.

The 23-match run, which lasted between October and March, eventually came to an end when Darren Moore's men slipped to a 4-2 loss against South Yorkshire rivals Barnsley, but that defeat would be avenged at the National Stadium in May.

Wednesday also recorded the highest points tally of a team to finish in third position in League One, tallying 96 points to secure their Play-Off place, falling just short of a top-two finish.

Moore's men might have had to do it the hard way, but they broke further records in doing so. After the first leg of the Play-Off Semi-Final, they found themselves 4-0 down at half-time to Peterborough United, with their promotion hopes slipping away.

Before the Owls, no team had ever overturned a four-goal deficit, but they were about to produce one of the greatest comebacks in the competition's history at Hillsborough. Liam Palmer's 98th-minute equaliser took the tie to extra-time and, after finishing 5-5 on aggregate, Wednesday won 5-3 on penalties to book their place in the Final.

Elsewhere, with fourth-placed Barnsley overcoming fifth-placed Bolton Wanderers 2-1 over a two-legged Semi-Final, Wembley was poised for an all-South Yorkshire showdown in the League One Play-Off Final.

The Owls finished the season 10 points clear of Michael Duff's Barnsley side, but they couldn't be separated in 120 minutes under the arch until a last-gasp winner sealed the deal for the blue and whites.

Exactly 15 years and five days after his father, Dean Windass, scored the winning strike for Hull City against Bristol City in the 2008 Championship Play-Off Final, Josh Windass netted the deciding goal for Sheffield Wednesday against Barnsley. The 29-year-old's diving header saved them the fate of a penalty shoot-out.

Over 74,000 travelling fans were packed into Wembley as the season came to a thrilling conclusion on Monday, while it was no surprise that Wednesday's 1-0 home victory over eventual champions Plymouth Argyle drew in the biggest crowd of the regular season back in February.

The average attendance across the board of 10,611 was higher than the 2021/22 season, while Derby County's average attendance across the term was 19% higher than the campaign









prior when the Club were in the Championship.

A promotion tussle made up the shortlist for Manager of the Season, with Ipswich's Kieran McKenna, Argyle's Steven Schumacher and Owls boss Moore all shortlisted for the prize.

It was title-winning Pilgrims boss Schumacher who scooped the award on the night, having made quite an impression in his first full season in charge. And the 39-year-old was among a host of young and up-and-coming bosses to grace League One this season, including the likes of Duff, McKenna and Bolton Wanderers' Ian Evatt.

Argyle set the tone for the season as Schumacher's side got off to a flying start with nine home league wins on the bounce, marking a new Club record before losing 2-0 to Port Vale at Home Park.

Fast forward to the final day of the regular season when Argyle were crowned champions, they ended the term three points clear of Ipswich in second place to put the finishing touch on an impressive campaign for the Pilgrims.

After falling behind early on against the Valiants, it looked as though the Tractor Boys might pip them to the post, but it didn't take long for Plymouth to find their feet in the game. Homegrown talent Adam Randell equalised in the first period before captain Joe Edwards turned the scoreline on its head, and standout loanee Finn Azaz completed a 3-1 win in the second half.

With 101 points, the 2022/23 season marked Argyle's second-highest tally in the Club's history, falling just one short of their 102-point haul in 2002, when they won promotion from League Two. It was also the Club's first title in 19 years, having last gone up as champions in 2004 when, coincidentally, they ascended from the third tier.

Elsewhere, Ipswich narrowly missed out on becoming the first team to do the double and register both 100 points and 100 goals. The Tractor Boys were held to a 2-2 draw away at Fleetwood Town on the final day, meaning they finished up on 98 points, scoring 101 goals in the process.

At the reverse end of the table, the battle for survival went right down to the wire. With Forest Green Rovers already down, Milton Keynes Dons, Morecambe and Accrington Stanley were relegated after matchday 46 as Cambridge United retained their League One status for another year.

The division's Golden Boot was jointly shared between Ipswich's Conor Chaplin and Peterborough's Jonson Clarke-Harris – both netting 26 goals apiece. Town forward Chaplin fired his side to automatic promotion, while Clarke-Harris put Posh in Play-Off contention on the final day of the season, beating Barnsley 2-0 to edge Derby County out of the top six.

Meanwhile, Ipswich's Christian Walton won the second Golden Glove of his career, ending the season with 23 clean sheets. It was a sense of déjà vu for the stopper, who also won the coveted prize back in 2017/18 with Wigan Athletic when the Latics went up as champions.

It's almost time to do it all over again and if 2023/24 lives up to its predecessor, the unbridled drama and excitement that follows will be unmatched.

Rising Scarr

WORDS // JACK WYLIE

Life could've been so different for **DAN SCARR**.

Just over six years ago, he was playing for Stourbridge in the seventh tier and working towards a career as a Personal Trainer.

Now, he's preparing for life as a Sky Bet Championship player, having helped Plymouth Argyle secure the Sky Bet League One title in May.

He recalls: "Back when I was a Personal Trainer, I'd often have midweek games at 7:45pm at night and then I'd have a spin session at 6am the following morning. It was tough at times, but I didn't really know anything different.

"I didn't ever think I was going to go professional in football at any point, I was just enjoying what I was doing. To go from that to where I'm at now is incredible!

"If you would have told me a few years ago that I'd end up being a Championship player, I'm not sure I would've believed you. But we've done it, so it's time to enjoy the summer and then get back to work and give it a go."

Scarr was never part of a professional Academy growing up, instead featuring for non-league Clubs Worcester City, Causeway United, Redditch United and Stourbridge.

The dominant defender didn't reach the elite level until the age of 22, when Birmingham City offered him the life-changing opportunity to make football his full-time job.

Having experienced life outside the football bubble for so long, he believes that perspective has given him a mental edge during his professional career.

"It's hard to be working a 9 to 5 and then still try to play non-league," he says. "I know what that life is like. That's why I have the mindset now to take every opportunity you can and not let it go to waste. I don't take anything for granted.

"I trained with Worcester's first team for a bit while I was at college – they were Conference North at the time. I was like 16 or 17 and I remember turning up to training and thinking, 'there are some big geezers here'. I thought if I could play at that level, I'd be happy.



"But while I was at Stourbridge, we played FA Cup games against the likes of Northampton Town, Wycombe Wanderers and some Conference teams and we beat some of them. At that point, I didn't feel like it was too much of a step anymore and that's where the belief in myself started to grow."

Not forgetting his roots, Scarr decided to use his platform as a professional footballer to make a difference by co-owning Kixx Academy, which provides football classes for boys and girls aged from 18 months to 10 years.

"It's back in my hometown in Birmingham, where I grew up and went to school," he explains. "I still know some of the people of a similar age to me, who are now parents and taking their kids.

"I go up every now and again on a Sunday to show my face and get involved. It's good to get everyone together and hopefully we can continue to do more things and get more kids involved.

PLAYER INTERVIEW | DANIEL SCARR

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"Everyone's got to start somewhere, and I went through grassroots myself. It's nice to be involved in someone's first steps in the game."

Argyle's number six is also committed to engaging with the local community in Plymouth.

"We try to get out a lot and do stuff with the fans and at schools," he adds. "There is a real togetherness here and you can see the love for the Club in the crowd.

"All the players have got time for everyone, and we're encouraged to do a lot of stuff with the locals. That just helps the whole city connect even closer."

That relationship between the Club and its supporters created a fortress at Home Park throughout the 2022/23 campaign.

Steven Schumacher's side collected 61 points from a possible 69 at home in League One, more than any other team in the EFL's three divisions, while their overall tally of 101 is the highest in the division since Wolverhampton Wanderers nine seasons ago.

"The fans have a massive impact, especially when we play at Home Park," Scarr admits. "Even when we play away, they do some stupid miles travelling all over the country and they just love it – they're the best fans in the country.

"In some of our games this season, we've really needed them and they've given us a push. Around the city, everyone wants to speak to you and their support is really appreciated by the team – they're our 12th man.

"As players, we felt like we'd let the fans down by missing out on the Play-Offs last season. We had a big day out at Chelsea in the FA Cup, but we didn't quite get anything out of the season. To give them something back, especially after the Wembley performance, it's unbelievable."



A tight-knit bond has also been developed within the Pilgrims squad – a pivotal factor in their success on the pitch.

"The togetherness here is like nowhere I've been before," he reveals. "Everyone is mates and that helps with little connections all across the pitch. Especially as defenders and goalkeepers, we all get on and do stuff outside of football with our partners as well."

The first-team group has proved to be a welcoming environment for many of Argyle's younger players too, with five current Academy players featuring at senior level.

"In training, we try to help them as much as we can and then during the games, we're regularly talking to them," says Scarr. "Hopefully, they're able to pick up things off us and bring it into their own game.

"We've got some good players coming through and they've done really well. It's nice for them to come into the side, play in front of the fans and gain that experience."

Surpassing 100 points in such a highly competitive division represents a significant feat for the Devon outfit, while their run to the EFL Trophy Final was another impressive accomplishment.

Although Argyle's third Wembley appearance in their history ultimately turned out to be a forgettable one – being brushed aside by Bolton Wanderers – it still serves as a milestone moment in Scarr's footballing journey.

"I remember always watching Play-Off Finals and Cup Finals at Wembley and I never thought I'd ever be playing there from where I've come from," the 28-year-old confesses.

"I brought a lot of my family and friends, and also the coaching staff that I had when I was back in the seventh tier at Stourbridge, so it was a very special occasion.

"I try to give 110% every time I step out onto the pitch. I'm not always going to get it right, but I'll always try my hardest. We let the fans and ourselves down on the day, but we focused on setting it right in the league and we've managed to do that."

From a career that almost never started to one that continues to progress on an upward trajectory, Dan Scarr is a case in point that anything is possible with hard work and dedication.

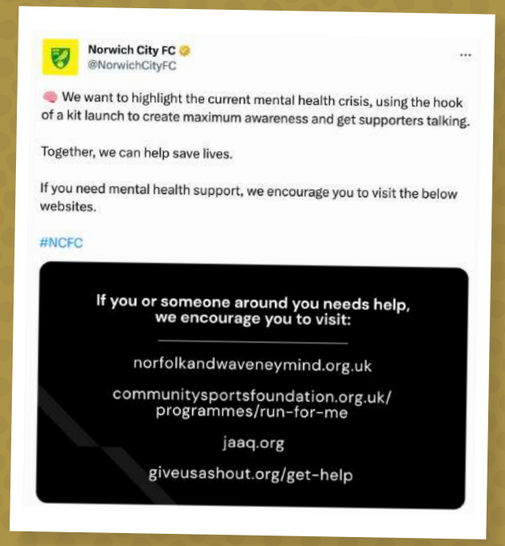


The Social Clubs

EFL Clubs across the board are harnessing the power of social media to engage with supporters, with creative, emotional and fun concepts that strike a chord with fans.

The 2022/23 season was no different, with a phenomenal range of content being produced by Clubs.

We took a look at three examples from across the divisions, covering campaigns, signing announcements and player accessibility, and asked the media teams involved to tell us more about the process.





NORWICH CITY
'Not Just Another Kit Launch'

We used the much-anticipated kit reveal ahead of the 2022/23 season to drive maximum awareness of the 'Not Just Another Kit Launch' campaign. The reveal of the new home kit was used as a hook to drive maximum viewership as we instead surfaced a Stephen Fry-narrated message outlining a number of statistics related to suicide. Fans' expectations were managed and the voiceover confirmed the kit would instead be released 48 hours later, but fans were asked to continue to listen to what was a hugely important message

This all started when we uncovered a hugely powerful and contextual data point – the age of those most likely to take their own life correlated to the average age of our season ticket holders. In one year alone, 518 people in East Anglia took their own life and data shows that the average age of our season ticket holders (49) is in the bracket of people most at risk.

We then reached out to Norfolk and Waveney Mind, who provided a number of additional shocking statistics. It was at this point we knew we had to play our part in the fight against the mental health pandemic.

We recognise that with all the best intentions, we aren't the experts in this area. That's why we felt it was important to collaborate with charities such as Norfolk & Waveney Mind and Samaritans. Our annual home kit launch is always the most highly anticipated piece of content each year, so it provided the perfect platform for a piece of meaningful content.

Unlike many campaigns, this had no commercial KPI – just a sincere desire to ensure we were providing the right provisions for our fanbase. Receiving feedback from fans confirming the campaign had given them the prompts to get the support they needed for their mental health meant this has been a success in our eyes.

GAVIN BEARD
Head of Marketing

CAMBRIDGE UNITED
Player signing announcements

We wanted to create some engaging, original content for our January transfer window announcements and much credit must go to our superb video content intern, Taylor, who now works full-time at West Ham United.

One of the key factors to success was effective and honest dialogue between ourselves in the media team and those making decisions on transfers from the first team. We felt that once we made one or two of these videos, the pressure was on to ensure that each of the remaining incomings would receive the same treatment, so knowing how many players are likely to come in was very important, enabling us to plan ahead and do the majority of the work before the players arrived for their media.

The final video – of George Thomas completing the sticker album – was a nice way to round off the announcements as it coincided with our season-long sticker book theme, which began with our season ticket campaign and carried on throughout the season in physical and digital formats.

DAN BRANOWSKY
Head of Communications









BRADFORD CITY
Matchday mascot behind-the-scenes footage

Last season, there was active debate about the interactions professional footballers have with fans – particularly younger supporters – of their respective Clubs. We knew that the players in our squad give a lot of time and energy to our mascots on a matchday, so we thought it would be an ideal time to shine a spotlight on this.

Usually, on a matchday, our players enter the stadium and make their way to the changing rooms by coming through one corner of the ground and walking to the changing rooms via the technical area/dugouts. Our mascots are seated within one of the dugouts, so that they can grab autographs/pictures with the players as they walk past.

I usually hover around this area on a matchday to film the players arriving anyway, so I figured if we'd like to shine a spotlight on our players interacting with mascots, I could film our arrivals video as normal, but with a particular focus on mascot interaction.

Across our social channels, this video drove more engagement than our usual 'player arrivals' videos, reaching nearly 17,000 users on Twitter alone, with comments on how sweet/wholesome the interactions between our players and mascots were.

One of our primary ambitions as a media department heading into the 2022/23 campaign was to bridge the gap between players and supporters, and to allow the supporters an insight into our squad as people, not just as players. This video and the engagement that followed helped us to continue to fulfil that ambition.

ETHAN PICKERING
Digital Content Creator

Back Again



WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

This season, Wrexham AFC and Notts County rejoined the fold after winning promotion back to Sky Bet League Two.

Over the course of the campaign, the two teams began the process of re-entry into the League ahead of the 2023/24 term.

Here is an insight into the process of submitting an application for EFL Membership.

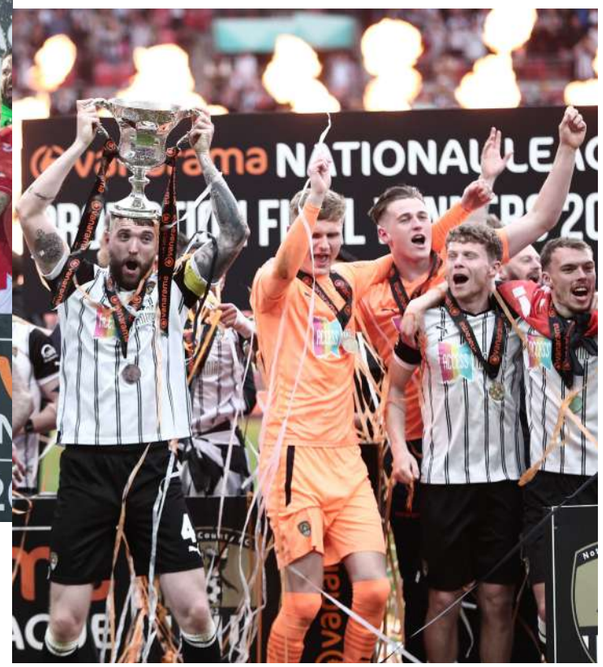
Both teams finished the 2022/23 season with over 100 points on the board as Wrexham – who were relegated from the EFL back in 2008, were crowned National League champions courtesy of a record-breaking 111-point haul, which ended the Red Dragons' 15-year stay in non-league.

Notts County finished in second, trailing the league leaders by four points after conceding the battle for automatic promotion. The Magpies beat Boreham Wood in the Semi-Finals of the Play-Offs after a last-gasp equaliser took the tie to extra-time, before overcoming Chesterfield on penalties in the Final at Wembley.

As attention turns to the new season, there are inevitably steps to take as part of an Application for Membership to the EFL under EFL Regulation 7.1 for newcomers.

The process begins with information packs being issued to Clubs via the National League, including a bespoke survey link and WeTransfer file details. Surveys must then be completed and submitted by a November deadline.

Bespoke feedback is provided to each Club, with discussions ongoing in order to collate all evidence required, before a bundle is produced to determine Club eligibility for membership.



Up-to-date summary documents are used to prepare the bundle document which is continuously updated and reviewed based on Club correspondence and feedback.

Meetings are scheduled with the Governance department for mid-February when accepted, rejected or conditional decisions are to be agreed, and final decision letters are delivered by March to new Clubs.

"Any club that wishes to be promoted from the National League to the EFL at the end of a season (whether by way of automatic promotion or by way of any approved Play-Off competition approved in accordance with Regulation 10.1.3) (an Applicant Club) must, by 30 November in that season, have lodged with the League such documentation and other evidence as may be required to satisfy the League."

One of the main components of an EFL Club's Membership is the stadium requirements, with promoted Clubs subject to a full site visit and an inspection from STRI.

There are a number of capacity considerations to take into account, as a new Member Club must comply with the Qualification Criteria. Clubs have until 30 April in their first season to meet with the Admission Criteria and until 30 April in their third season to meet with the Membership Criteria.

All Clubs must make provision for 10% of capacity for visiting supporters and travelling fans must be offered at least 200 seats undercover – at least 100 of which must be seats.

	CAPACITY	SEATS
QUALIFICATION CRITERIA	4,000 (with ability to reach 5,000)	500 (with ability to reach 1,000)
ADMISSION CRITERIA	5,000	1,000 (with ability to reach 2,000)
MEMBERSHIP CRITERIA	5,000	2,000

Other general points of issue include the following:

SECURITY OF TENURE

National League Clubs must demonstrate they own the freehold to the stadium or demonstrate 10 years security of tenure via lease or license.

DRESSING ROOMS

Clubs have until 30 April in their first season to ensure that their dressing rooms are compliant with regulations.

PITCHES

Any Club with an artificial pitch must commence pitch works as soon as reasonably practicable after promotion has been secured. The pitch must be operational for the first game of the season.

FLAT STANDING

No flat standing is permitted behind the goals; flat standing on the touchline will be permitted for a maximum of three years following promotion.

SEGREGATION

Migration is not permitted between any of the stands – Clubs must be able to segregate all individual stands and terraces.

Other considerations for newly promoted teams include **floodlights**, **medical provision** and **managerial qualifications**.

FLOODLIGHTS

A minimum floodlight requirement of 500 lux average and 300 lux minimum at any one point for the start of the season has been set for Clubs.

MEDICAL PROVISION

All Clubs must have medical provision in place, including a team doctor (GMC registered), a senior therapist (HCPC registered) both with an ATMMiF Qualification for pitchside care and extrication from matches, along with a paramedic for on-field matters.

MANAGERIAL QUALIFICATIONS

All managers in League Two must hold a minimum of a UEFA B Licence to take charge of a team.

In addition, newly promoted teams must comply with all areas of Appendix 1 Part 3 by 1 July. Some of these include parking facilities, turnstiles, toilets, disabled facilities, first aid facilities, press facilities, directors' box and PA system, to name a few.



/theEFL /EFL /efl

PLAYER INTERVIEW | **PAUL MULLIN**

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

At home in Hollywood

This season spells a welcome return to the EFL for both Wrexham AFC and their headlining frontman **PAUL MULLIN**.

After winning promotion back to the League following a 15-year absence, Mullin, whose 46 goals in a single campaign helped fire Wrexham to glory, has been determined to keep the celebrations alive, even if it meant sneaking in a power nap in an uncomfortable setting.

"We had a party at the Club and that went on until all hours," he laughs. "I ended up on a physio bed having a sleep for 20 minutes until they came in singing my song and that was the end of that!"

The city of Wrexham was starstruck in November 2020 when acting duo Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney completed a takeover of the Welsh side. Mullin now finds himself rubbing shoulders with the famous pair – who fly over from the United States on a regular basis – and even starred in a television advertisement alongside Reynolds.

"They genuinely care," he says. "It's not a façade or fake for the television; it's nothing like that. They'll text and ask how the family are, or how you're feeling going into the next game and general chit-chat to keep in touch.

"They feel they need to be accessible to the players and communicate with them, being big superstars. They are human-beings like everyone else, but people perceive them differently and they're not."

Two years ago, Mullin turned heads when he rejected the offer of a new deal from Cambridge United in favour of dropping down to the National League with the Red Dragons.

The striker needed some convincing to leave the EFL behind, even if only temporarily. The 28-year-old had seemingly cracked the code at that level, finishing up the 2020/21 term with 34 goals in 50 outings for the U's as Cambridge won promotion, but he passed up a season in Sky Bet League One to join the Wrexham revolution.

"They had to win me over in terms of what the plans were for the Club," he explains. "I had to buy into that and believe what they were telling me. Everything they've promised me, they've stuck to.

"I want to play as high as I can in football, as anyone does, but when this opportunity arose, it was the best for me as a family man, who wanted to be close to home. It was the perfect solution for me rather than moving away to play in higher leagues. I care about my son more than that."

Worlds collided when the footballing philosophy of Phil Parkinson met the cameras of Hollywood, but the players – including Mullin – have soon adapted to having film crews hiding in their shadows.

In December last year, The King and Queen Consort paid a visit to the Racecourse Ground as ❯



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part of a trip to the area to celebrate Wrexham's newly bestowed city status.

"The gaffer has been unbelievable in dealing with it," Mullin notes. "There was a time this season when the King came to visit the stadium the day before a long away trip to Eastleigh. Obviously, he would have just preferred to go to the game as usual.

"He's so good at dealing with those situations and helping the lads out with it as well and trying to make everything as seamless as possible. We haven't let it affect us and it's only made us perform better. He kept us all aware that the main job is on the football pitch."

A new documentary – Welcome to Wrexham – shone a spotlight on the Club who were forced to endure a lengthy wait to make their long-anticipated return to the EFL. After suffering relegation in 2007/08, it's been a rocky road back for the North Wales outfit.

"The whole attention and the media spotlight and pressure has all been ramped up a thousand times," Mullin adds. "My life hasn't changed – I'm just me and I stick to being me. What you see is what you get.

"It becomes a bit strange at first getting used to it, when you walk into a supermarket or a shop in the town centre and people ask for photos. At first, you stand back and you're like, 'Me?! Why would you want a photo with me?'

"It's a great thing for the Club and even us as individuals to have the attention we've received this year. Obviously, if you're not playing well, that attention isn't going to come, so first and foremost, you have to play well in order to achieve it.

"Everybody's talking about us every day and we're on the news. You've got everyone saying, 'Are they going to do it?' or 'Are they going to fall away?' The owners being the owners, they like to build up a bit of suspense, so they'll be tweeting that we're top of the league and things like that."

After finishing rock bottom of League Two in 2007/08, Wrexham's 87-year stay in the EFL came to an end as the Club found itself in the non-league pyramid.

Following on from last season's Play-Off heartbreak, the Club finally clinched promotion back to League Two as National League champions with a 3-1 win over Boreham Wood in late April – a fixture in which Mullin bagged himself a brace – amassing a record-breaking 110 points in the process.

"There's pressure, but none more so than the fans; they're coming into the games wanting to win and wanting to get promoted so badly that sometimes you can feel the nerves coming off them while you're playing," Mullin acknowledges.

"That wasn't the case in the last game when we won the league. We went 1-0 down after 30 seconds and the whole stadium erupted, singing for us that we're going to win the league.

"We knew what it meant to the people of Wrexham to get promoted. To deliver it, it was emotional. You could see the smiles on their faces and the tears in their eyes as they're celebrating that they've wanted this for so long."

Now, Mullin and Wrexham are eager to see what the script has in store for the 2023/24 campaign.



"We knew what it meant to the people of Wrexham to get promoted. To deliver it, it was emotional. You could see the smiles on their faces and the tears in their eyes as they're celebrating that they've wanted this for so long"



Farewell Wethers

Upon hanging up his playing boots in 2008, former Leeds United and Bradford City defender **DAVE WETHERALL** happened upon a new passion within the game, taking on the position as the EFL's Youth Development Director – a role he has held for the last 12 years.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

The South Yorkshire-born centre-back, who started his playing career at hometown Club Sheffield Wednesday, made over 500 appearances throughout his playing career, eventually finishing up at Bradford – a Club he also went on to manage and coach – before taking his career in a new direction, accepting a role within the Bantams Academy setup.

"Within two or three weeks of taking that role, I knew Youth Development was where I wanted to be," Wetherall said in a previous interview.

After two years with the Bantams Academy, Wetherall assumed the role of the EFL's Youth Development Director and for more than a decade has led the Youth Development department and a team of regional managers from strength to strength.

Across a 12-year period with the EFL, Wetherall has overseen the introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) across all EFL Academies, has negotiated significant increases in grant aid funding to further enhance youth development and was instrumental in developing the EFL's homegrown and Club Developed player policies.

Such achievements over the years have seen a record high percentage of EFL Academy players come through the Academy at that Club, appearances in the starting XI of Club Developed players increase by 18% (a record high) and a vast improvement in Clubs' high standards, creating conditions for young talent to thrive.





> WITHIN TWO OR THREE WEEKS OF TAKING THAT ROLE, I KNEW YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WAS WHERE I WANTED TO BE

Now, after almost 15 years working in Youth Development at both Bradford and the EFL, Wetherall will be hanging up his boots for a second time, as he considers a new challenge. But his service to the EFL and the wider game is certainly one to be celebrated.

"There has been such a big transformation in Youth Development across the EFL under Dave's leadership," Senior Regional Manager, Phil Stant, said.

"After the Lewis Report in 2007, it led to the introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan. Dave oversaw that whole process from an EFL perspective, working with 72 Clubs and getting them all up to a certain standard collectively. That programme has had a hugely positive effect on the numbers and quality of players within Clubs and even national teams.

"Obviously, there's always a lot of talk about players, because the majority of players in the EFL have come through a youth programme. But what people also don't realise is the work Dave has done in mentoring coaches that have gone on to bigger and better things.

"For example, Coventry City manager Mark Robins was an Under-18s manager and was mentored by Dave, Michael Duff the same and Darren Moore, who started in the West Bromwich Academy. They've all gone through a process and gone through the system, which Dave has played a prominent part in."

As well as raise the profile of Youth Development and its importance within the EFL, Wetherall played a huge helping hand in creating Academy conditions for young talent to thrive, helping preserve Clubs' commitment to YD by maintaining high standards and passing the necessary audits.

Regional Manager for the South West, Bob Bloomer, added: "Dave was a young player who came through the system and after his playing career, moved into coaching and mentoring. He was good at it because he had that affinity with young players and coaches, having been on the journey himself.

"Dave is a leader. He encompasses everything that is great about Academy football and is the reason the Youth Development structure across the EFL and its Clubs is as strong as it is."



Behind the Scenes:

Feeding the Swans

A five o'clock alarm alerts Chris Watkins to his early start in preparation to travel to Swansea City's training facility ahead of a busy day to come.

Breakfast is first on the agenda before getting lunch on the go – and all that comes before taking a look at the weekend's matchday menu plans.

That's just a normal day in the life of the Club's head chef, who marks 10 years of heading up the Swans' kitchen this month.

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**



Watkins, who spent nearly two decades working in the hospitality industry in the same role at a local hotel, unintentionally came across the opportunity, and the lifelong Swans supporter was quick to jump at the chance to work for his hometown team.

"I'd been there 18 years actually and wasn't looking to move on or anything," he recalls. "The Club were using the hotel to put new players in until they found accommodation in the city. Over a period of time, I got friendly with the Club's liaison officer called Huw Lake.

"One day he said to me, 'would you like to come and work for the Swans part-time at our new training ground?' That training ground is now for the Academy. I explained that I couldn't work part-time because I had a full-time role within the hotel. Since I was a season ticket holder, I didn't mind helping in any way I could to get the project off the ground.

"He asked if I could write a letter to the chairman at the time, Huw Jenkins – this was on the Wednesday. I just sent him a brief email stating that I was willing to provide any advice they needed free of charge. By Friday afternoon, I was in his office and on Monday morning, he offered me a full-time job!"

It wasn't long before Watkins went back to poach his team, including four of his chefs and two kitchen porters who joined him at Landore, which now acts as the Welsh Club's Academy base.

He and his trusted staff now operate two sites, with the Swans' first team located at their training complex in Fairwood, with five chefs running the two sites between them.

BEHIND THE SCENES | **CHRIS WATKINS**



"I COULDN'T HAVE ASKED FOR A BETTER JOB… WHEN I FIRST WALKED IN, WE WERE IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE THEN. WE HAD ASHLEY WILLIAMS AND MICHU AND PEOPLE COMING UP TO ME AND SHAKING MY HAND TO WELCOME ME TO THE CLUB. THAT SEASON, I'D BEEN CHEERING THESE GUYS ON. IT WAS AN UNBELIEVABLE FEELING"

"I couldn't have asked for a better job," Watkins continues. "When I first walked in, we were in the Premier League then. We had Ashley Williams and Michu and people coming up to me and shaking my hand to welcome me to the Club. That season, I'd been cheering these guys on. It was an unbelievable feeling.

"When you're a fan like I was for all those years, you don't really see what goes on behind the scenes. It's more so that you just see the 11 players on the pitch and the bench – a lot of people don't understand how much goes on behind the scenes at a Football Club. I never imagined I'd be running two training grounds."

Through his job, Watkins has had the chance to travel the world and sample new cuisines with the Club he supports – just one of the perks of his position.

"I always travel up in front of the team in readiness for their arrival at the hotel, so there's a smooth transition," he continues. "I link up with the chefs and send up some menus in advance to the hotels we stay at. We pretty much stay at the same hotels all around the country for every game, so we build up a relationship.

"When we were in the Europa League, I was travelling out about two months in advance to places like Italy, Russia, Sweden and Spain because their idea of catering gets lost in translation when we send our menus. It was a good learning curve going forward."

Since his appointment, Watkins has immersed himself in the community and it's something he continues to implement.

During the throes of the pandemic, when not catering for the players, he opted to put his skills to use by producing 250 hot meals for those less fortunate, including those without a home who were put up in nearby bed and breakfasts, which were then delivered by volunteers.

He notes: "When I first joined, I spoke to the chairman and said I'd like to keep everything within the community and the city. For example, 90% of the food that gets delivered to the training ground now is locally sourced, which is important because Swansea is very much a community Club and it's the heart of the city."

Now, with an increased emphasis placed on the importance of diet, Watkins has undertaken a number of courses to enhance his understanding of the topic, completing a sports nutrition diploma 18 months ago

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He says: "I've always said to my guys in the kitchen, 'you can't make a bad player good with his diet, but you can make a good player bad with his diet'. That's why we place so much emphasis on everyone getting the right food at the right times.

"It's massively vital to the players. It will eventually affect them on the pitch. It opens your eyes because fans don't really see the different diets and requirements we have during the week, but it's a good thing.

"We speak to the players and in this day and age, they're so professional and they understand everything we're trying to do and players follow trends quite a lot."

Ahead of the new campaign, Watkins – who maintains a regular dialogue with his colleagues – has taken feedback on board to ensure that the squad are performing at their best.

"Every year, it progresses," he adds. "Myself and my team within the Club try to reinvent ourselves every year. We sit down with players, sports scientists and nutritionists to see how we can bring things forward collectively as a Club for the benefit of the players.

"A lot of the players come to me to ask to take food home, especially the single guys, rather than buying takeaways, which isn't always the best option. The way they enjoy my food is the highlight for me.

"I've already had a couple of meetings with the staff and players regarding next year's travel menus."

Watkins is hoping for another successful season in 2023/24, both on and off the pitch, and it's clear that the Swans' head chef has a huge part to play in that.



"WHEN YOU'RE A FAN LIKE I WAS FOR ALL THOSE YEARS, YOU DON'T REALLY SEE WHAT GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES. IT'S MORE SO THAT YOU JUST SEE THE 11 PLAYERS ON THE PITCH AND THE BENCH – A LOT OF PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND HOW MUCH GOES ON BEHIND THE SCENES AT A FOOTBALL CLUB. I NEVER IMAGINED I'D BE RUNNING TWO TRAINING GROUNDS"

Celebrating success
EFL Awards 2023

Sky Sports presenters David Prutton and Michelle Owen were the hosts at the EFL Awards 2023, where Clubs, players, managers and fans were celebrated and recognised for their achievements during a star-studded evening at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London.






EFL Awards 2023

CONTRIBUTION TO LEAGUE FOOTBALL AWARD
Chris Kamara

SIR TOM FINNEY AWARD
Adebayo Akinfenwa

SKY BET CHAMPIONSHIP PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Chuba Akpom
Middlesbrough

SKY BET LEAGUE ONE PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Aaron Collins
Bristol Rovers

SKY BET LEAGUE TWO PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Sam Hoskins
Northampton Town

FOOTBALL MANAGER CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER OF THE SEASON
Vincent Kompany
Burnley

FOOTBALL MANAGER LEAGUE ONE MANAGER OF THE SEASON
Steven Schumacher
Plymouth Argyle

FOOTBALL MANAGER LEAGUE TWO MANAGER OF THE SEASON
Richie Wellens
Leyton Orient

EA SPORTS CHAMPIONSHIP YOUNG PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Alex Scott
Bristol City

EA SPORTS LEAGUE ONE YOUNG PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Bali Mumba
Plymouth Argyle

EA SPORTS LEAGUE TWO YOUNG PLAYER OF THE SEASON
Junior Tchamadeu
Colchester United

HAWK-EYE INNOVATIONS GOAL OF THE SEASON
Ismaila Sarr
West Bromwich Albion
vs WATFORD

LFE CHAMPIONSHIP APPRENTICE OF THE SEASON
Ash Phillips
Blackburn Rovers

LFE LEAGUE ONE APPRENTICE OF THE SEASON
Zach Mitchell
Charlton Athletic

LFE LEAGUE TWO APPRENTICE OF THE SEASON
Josh Tomlinson
Northampton Town

YOUR MOVE COMMUNITY CLUB OF THE SEASON
Wigan Athletic

EFL COMMUNITY PROJECT OF THE SEASON
MK Dons
Knife Angel: Anti-Violence Project

PFA PLAYER IN THE COMMUNITY
Omar Beckles
Leyton Orient

EFL SUPPORTER OF THE SEASON
Les Miller
Luton Town

EFL CLUB EMPLOYEE AWARD
John Clarke
Burton Albion

EFL FAN ENGAGEMENT AWARD
Bolton Wanderers

EFL DIVERSITY AWARD
Middlesbrough
Dementia Project

CSM LIVE EFL INNOVATION AWARD
Norwich City

EFL GREEN CLUB AWARD
Bristol City



CEFA Awards 2023

For the second year running, Wembley Stadium played host to this season's Community & Education Football Alliance (CEFA) Awards across the EFL Play-Off weekend.

The CEFA League is a football competition for young men and women studying a post-16 education course with their Club Community Organisation (CCO) across the Premier League and EFL, with almost 4,000 young people taking part.

North West 1
Manchester City 'C'

North West 2
Everton 'B'

North West 3
Everton 'D'

North West 4
Everton 'E'

North Central 1
Stoke City 'A'

North Central 2
Scunthorpe United 'B'

North East Central 1
Scunthorpe United 'A'

Central 1
Derby County 'A'

Central 2
Wolverhampton Wanderers 'A'

Central 3
Wolverhampton Wanderers 'B'

North Central Women's
Derby County Women's 'A'

South East 1
Chelsea 'A'

South East 2
Colchester United 'A'

South East 3
Peterborough United

South West 1
Plymouth Argyle 'A'

South West 2
AFC Bournemouth 'B'

South West 3
Plymouth Argyle 'C'

South Division Women's
Derby County Women's 'B'

Small Sided Women's
Peterborough United Women's

Men's Cup
Plymouth Argyle 'A'

Women's Cup
Peterborough United Women's

Championship Team of the Season

BEN WILSON
CONNOR ROBERTS
TOM LOCKYER
ANEL AHMEDHODŽIĆ
IAN MAATSEN
ALEX SCOTT
JOSH BROWNHILL
NATHAN TELLA
ILIMAN NDIAYE
CHUBA AKPOM
VIKTOR GYÖKERES

League One Team of the Season

MICHAEL COOPER
BALI MUMBA
RICARDO ALMEIDA SANTOS
MADS ANDERSEN
LEIF DAVIS
CONOR HOURIHANE
BARRY BANNAN
JOSH WINDASS
AARON COLLINS
JONSON CLARKE-HARRIS
CONOR CHAPLIN

League Two Team of the Season

LAWRENCE VIGOUROUX
JUNIOR TCHAMADEU
OMAR BECKLES
CARL PIERGIANNI
IBOU TOURAY
ELLIOT WATT
OWEN MOXON
IDRIS EL MIZOUNI
SAM HOSKINS
ANDY COOK
MITCH PINNOCK

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Grounds Teams of the Season 2022/23

Burnley, Derby County and Newport County were crowned 2022/23 Grounds Teams of the Season in the EFL.

Grounds Teams across the EFL work tirelessly to make sure pitch surfaces are of a high quality through all weather and conditions, and the Grounds Teams of the Season awards celebrate staff who have produced the best quality playing surfaces in each division.

Burnley, who lifted the Sky Bet Championship title in May, earned top honours for their Turf Moor pitch, which seemingly benefited the Clarets as they only suffered one home league defeat during the 2022/23 campaign.

Watford and Stoke City were also highly commended in the Championship.

Derby received the Sky Bet League One prize after hosting 29 games at Pride Park last season, while Portsmouth and Ipswich Town were highly commended.

Elsewhere, Newport County deserve a special mention, with their Grounds Team winning the Sky Bet League Two award in back-to-back seasons for their Rodney Parade surface.

Carlisle United and Stockport County were also highly commended in League Two.

To inform the decision-making, pitch marks are provided by the referee and away team manager for all EFL League matches. The top Clubs from each division with the highest divisional average are then visited by Neil Rodger, from STRI (Sports Turf Research Institute), where further assessments are carried out, which cover pitch quality, environmental conditions and usage, resources, management and sustainability.

Once all Club visits have taken place, in-depth reports and recommendations are submitted to the Playing Surfaces Committee, at which point winners are determined.

The winners of each division receive a trophy and certificate, while highly commended Clubs receive a certificate.



Championship

- Winner: **BURNLEY**
- Highly Commended: **WATFORD**
- Highly Commended: **STOKE CITY**



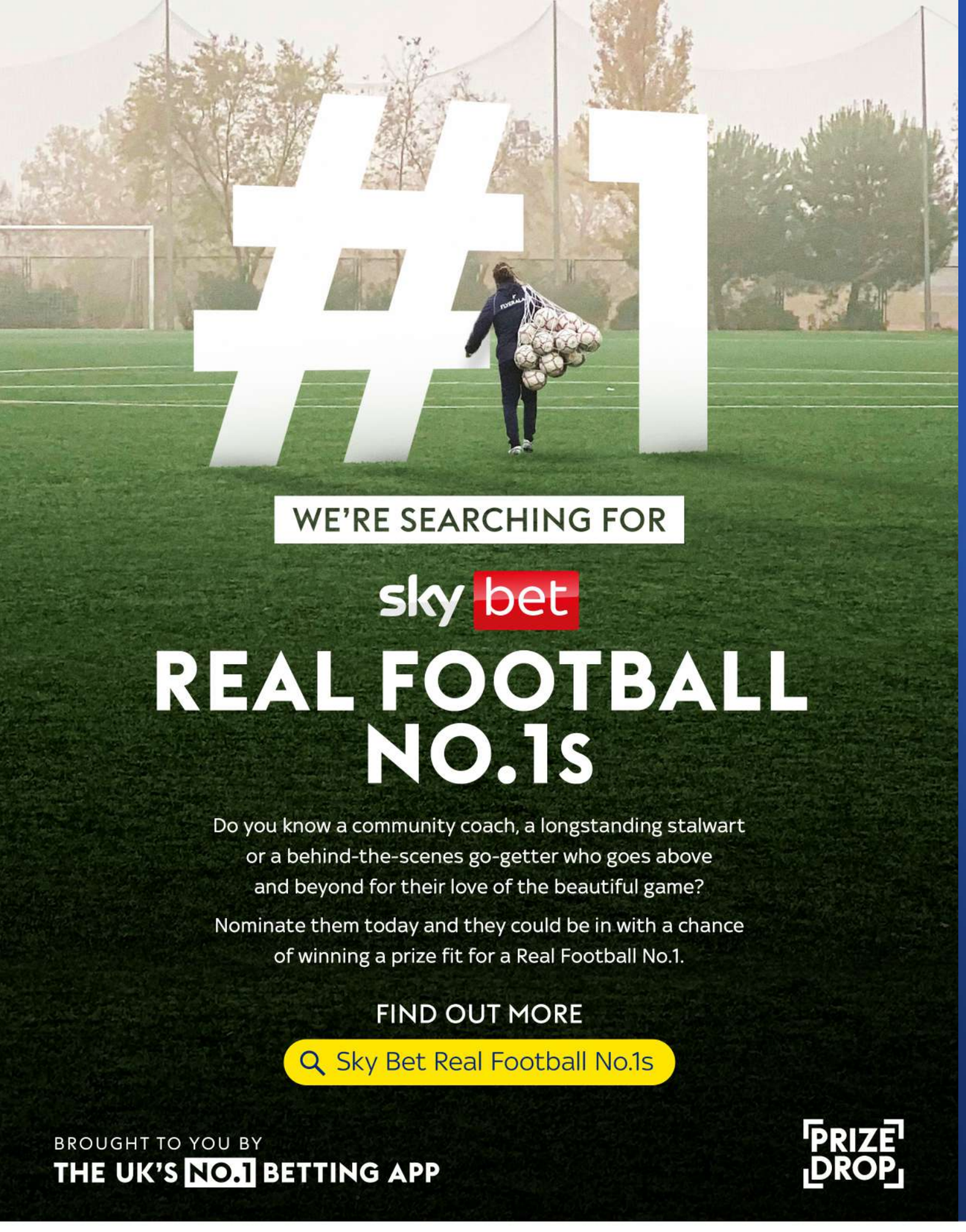
League One

- Winner: **DERBY COUNTY**
- Highly Commended: **PORTSMOUTH**
- Highly Commended: **IPSWICH TOWN**



League Two

- Winner: **NEWPORT COUNTY**
- Highly Commended: **CARLISLE UNITED**
- Highly Commended: **STOCKPORT COUNTY**



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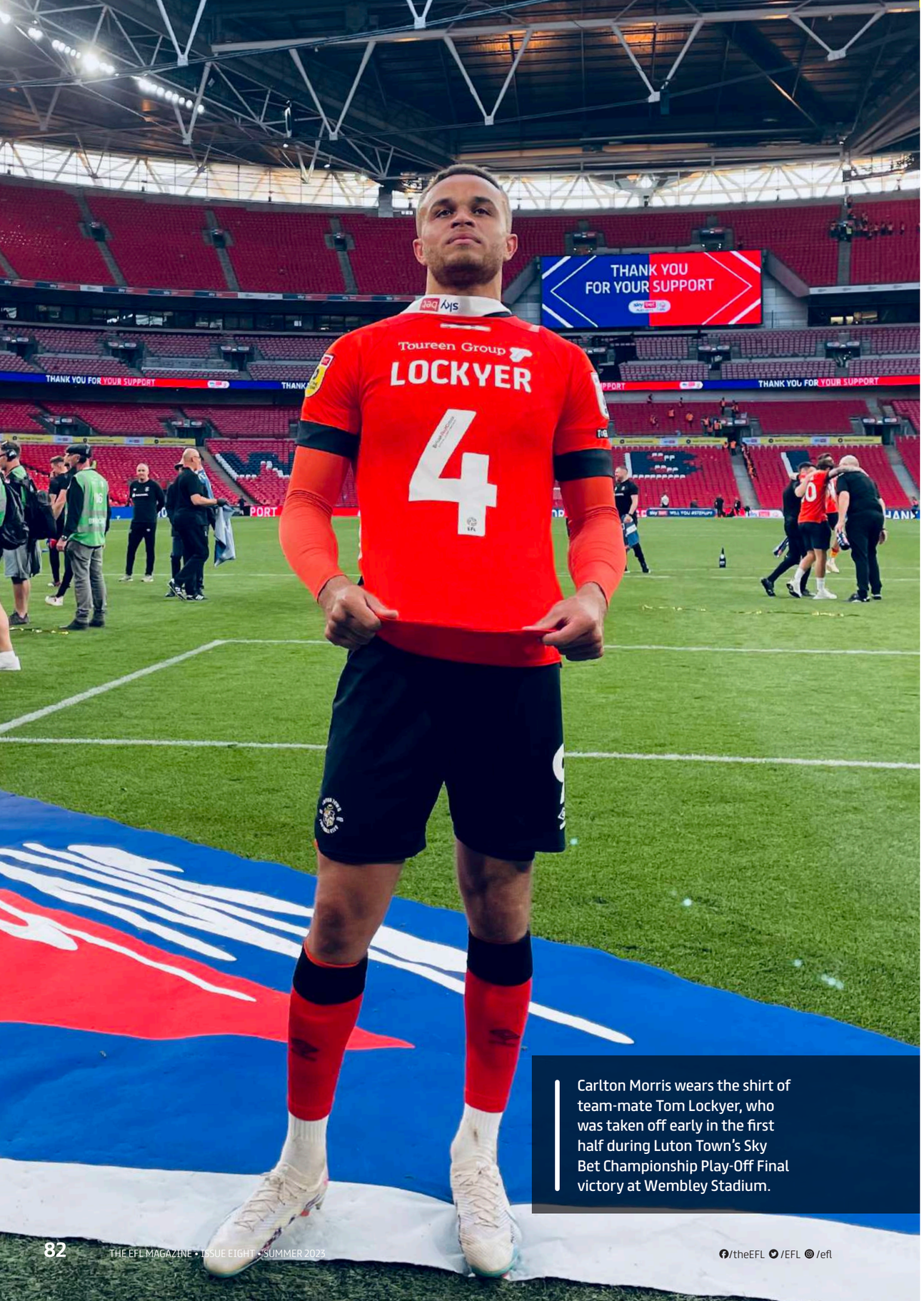
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Carlton Morris wears the shirt of team-mate Tom Lockyer, who was taken off early in the first half during Luton Town's Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final victory at Wembley Stadium.

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1883
1879
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