THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE

EFL MAGAZINE

ISSUE NINE // WINTER 2023

















EFL IN YOUR COMMUNITY

IMPACTING AND CHANGING LIVES









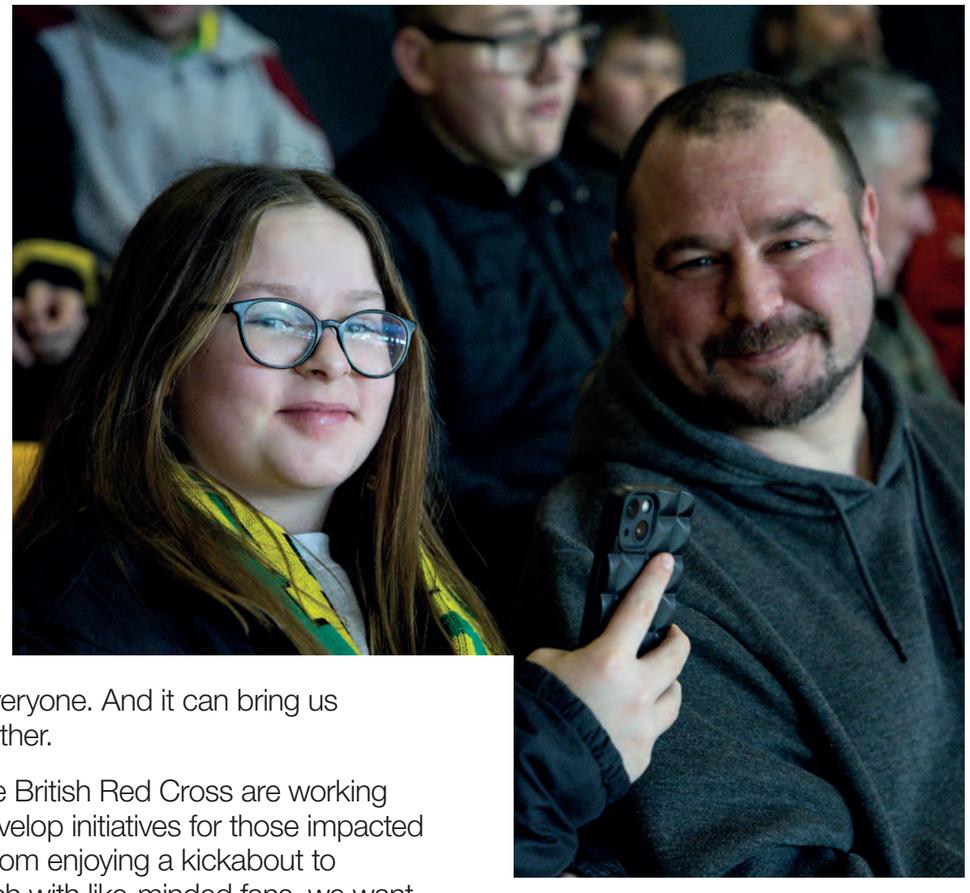






“Having that dedicated time with Ruby was really special. It felt fantastic watching her playing football with the other young people.”

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

EFL | BritishRedCross
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[EFL COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR]

WELCOME...

...to the Winter 2023 edition of the EFL Magazine, which marks the end of another eventful year of action on the pitch, as well as the tireless work that goes on away from matchdays.

Our cover story for this edition is one close to my heart, as we shine a light on the vital role our Clubs play in the lives of the people who live within their towns and cities.

Football is the heartbeat of its communities, and the link between Clubs and local people has never been stronger, which is why we decided to celebrate the depth and breadth of community activity across England and Wales by dedicating our cover story to the work of the EFL Trust and Club Community Organisations.

I would encourage you to not only take in the moving examples of the life-changing effect Club activities have on individuals, but also to consider the enormous scope, coverage and impact CCOs have when their work is combined.

Elsewhere in this edition, we explore the continued efforts of PGMOL and match officials to improve the spectacle of the game – I am certain you will find some interesting takeaways from the analysis of this season’s performances.

We hear from the EFL’s Head of Youth Development, Darren Wassall, as he settles into his new role, and there are important updates from numerous areas of the business, including safeguarding, security and internal communications.

And when it comes to the football, we have in-depth interviews with Hull City Manager Liam Rosenior, Portsmouth boss John Mousinho and Charlton Athletic forward Miles Leaburn, to name a few.



There are further stories from across the EFL, including a look at the life of a Club Photographer and a detailing of some of the EFL’s campaigns and initiatives, plus plenty more – I am sure you will enjoy reading them.

MARK ROWAN
EFL Chief Communications Officer

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The presence of EFL Clubs in the community has never been more important, with their impact on people's daily lives continuing to go from strength to strength.

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Joe Dent explains his journey to becoming Peterborough United's Club Photographer, and picks out some of his favourite snaps during his 19-year career.





EFL Commercial Growth

Interest in the EFL and its competitions continues to grow, and an enhanced sponsorship portfolio highlights that very fact.

During the 2023/24 campaign, the League has secured new partnerships with two global brands, as well as extending some long-standing associations.

EFL Chief Commercial Officer, Ben Wright, says: "Eighty per cent of the population live within 15 miles of an EFL Club and millions of fans come through the turnstiles every month, meaning the League has the ability to forge strong connections with families on a nationwide scale.

"We have sought to partner with brands where we can develop and cultivate our partnerships and create deeper, more impactful connections with fans, customers and communities."

In an exciting collaboration, Jameson Irish Whiskey committed to a four-season deal with the League, marking the alcohol giant's first foray into English professional football. Jameson will have a strong presence with all 72 Member Clubs across the Sky Bet Championship, League One and League Two, along with the EFL's five Wembley finals.

They will also leverage EFL inventory to deliver 'responsible drinking' messages and ensure that the partnership is marketed responsibly and in line with Portman Group requirements for partnerships.

Additionally, with football and cereal being part of daily life for millions of people across England and Wales, the EFL and the EFL Trust's network of Club Community Organisations have come together with cereal brand Kellogg's to positively impact the 72 communities where EFL Clubs are located.



Elsewhere, the League has also renewed partnerships with global sports brand PUMA and world-leading football management simulation title, Football Manager.

After signing on as the Official Match Ball partner of the EFL since the beginning of 2021/22, PUMA's three-year extension will see the popular sportswear manufacturer produce the official match ball for all EFL competitions through to the end of the 2026/27 season.

Meanwhile, the one-year extension between the EFL and Sports Interactive – developers of the Football Manager game – ensures that all EFL Clubs and competitions will continue to appear as fully licensed entities in Sports Interactive's newest release, Football Manager 2024.

JAMESON

"Football brings people together in so many ways and building on Jameson's existing partnerships within the grassroots community, we're excited to be supporting the EFL and its Member Clubs over the next four years."

Leanne Banks
MARKETING DIRECTOR
AT PERNOD RICARD UK

Kellogg's

"It's been our great privilege to be part of British life for more than 100 years, so it's only right we should be joining up with another iconic institution like the EFL. Both Kellogg's and the EFL are brands at the heart of communities up and down the country and this is the start of a great partnership."

Chris Silcock
KELLOGG'S UK MANAGING DIRECTOR

"Continuing our partnership with the EFL symbolises PUMA's dedication to the heart and spirit of football in the UK. Since 2021, we've been honoured to be the Official Match Ball partner for the EFL, and this extension is a testament to the strong bond we've cultivated with the League, its Clubs and, most importantly, the fans."

Bas van den Bemt
GENERAL MANAGER OF UK&I AT PUMA

FOOTBALL MANAGER

"The League's Clubs are among the most popular with our players; in FM23, more than 40 million games were played with EFL Clubs across 1.5 million unique careers."

Miles Jacobson
STUDIO DIRECTOR AT
SPORTS INTERACTIVE



Making Mental Health Matter

Norwich City #YouAreNotAlone

Clubs across the EFL used their platforms to spread important suicide prevention messages on World Mental Health Day in October, but none more so than Norwich City.

The Canaries received global acclaim for their powerful video entitled 'You Are Not Alone', produced in close consultation with mental health charity, Samaritans.

The short film features two men attending Norwich matches together, with one appearing happy and outgoing and the other being withdrawn and quiet.

As the video concludes, it becomes apparent that the extroverted individual has died by suicide, dispelling the myth that only those displaying obvious signs experience poor emotional wellbeing.

Here, the Club's Marketing Manager, Dan Williams, explains the execution of the campaign.

What was the idea and why?

Given the viral nature of our most recent video (#YouAreNotAlone), we are keen as a Club to reiterate that this isn't a flash in the pan – it's undoubtedly been the activation that's gathered the highest reach, but we've had a plan in place for the last 18 months to try and use our platform to break down the stigma of mental health.

It started for us with our award winning 'Not just another kit launch' campaign in June 2022, but has evolved into activations around key moments in the calendar, such as Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day, as well as providing resources for our supporters online 24/7.

The principle behind our latest campaign was to encourage people to 'check in on those around them' – a really simple call to action – and to signpost the correct support to people who find themselves struggling.

What inspired the concept?

We knew the importance of World Mental Health Day and have been working on this campaign for a number of months, placing the same amount of importance and resource into this as we would other key campaigns, such as kit launches or season ticket renewals.

The concept for the #YouAreNotAlone video was devised in-house by me and was managed by a small team, including our Head of Marketing, Gavin Beard, and Videographer, Tom Smith. All extras in the film were staff members who voluntarily and without hesitation gave up their time outside of work to play their part.

The inspiration came from the previous work we had already completed around the topic and a sincere desire from the Club to help as many people as possible with the platform we have. The principle of the video is that mental health does not discriminate, and no one is immune from possible mental health challenges, regardless of their personality type or perceived levels of happiness.

How did you put it into action?

The #YouAreNotAlone video was the culmination of our campaign around World Mental Health Day 2023. It started with our matchday on October 7 against Coventry City – our shirt sponsors Lotus, Turismo de Gran Canaria and Sekura.id all generously donated their shirt sponsorship to Samaritans to raise awareness of the vital work the charity does.

We then delivered an evolved concept of one we delivered ahead of World Mental Health Day 2022, where we created a fictional line-ups graphic that featured a stat on the volume of people who die by suicide each week, with player names being replaced by family members, friends or other close relationships, highlighting the importance of checking in on those around you.

When we delivered this concept in 2022, our opponents, Preston North End, were really supportive and delivered a version to their fanbase. This year, we were inspired to think bigger with an objective of increasing the reach, and so we contacted all Sky Bet Championship teams this time around, prompting them to deliver a version to their fanbase. We were so pleased that all Clubs took part, ensuring this message was delivered to fans across the country, gaining over 3.3 million impressions.

Regarding the #YouAreNotAlone video, as the campaign was fully devised and executed in-house, we were in creative control of all elements. After devising a rough plan for the campaign, the first step is to always work with experts – in this case, suicide prevention charity, Samaritans.



Lotus, Turismo de Gran Canaria and Sekura.id all generously donated their shirt sponsorship to Samaritans for the game v Coventry City

In these sessions, we are always trying to educate ourselves and also understand how we benefit a situation and provide help, rather than sensationalising anything that could jeopardise people and their mental health.

We place high importance on the due diligence here – the visual prompts delivered by the actors were as a result of consulting with experts and understanding any physical symptoms that could indicate someone may be experiencing a mental health challenge.

We sourced two local actors, Marston York and Martin Kray, who really believed in the concept and delivered a great performance. Once the storyboard was finalised and costume changes arranged, it was a case of picking a shoot day and capturing the content.

How widespread has the reach been and did you expect to receive such traction?

To date, the video has gone viral globally, so to put an exact number on its reach is difficult. We know that on our own social channels, we are close to 60 million views, but the video has been shared across multiple outlets, and once combined with user generated content, we have surpassed 120 million views on social media from over 150 countries.

Our aim at the beginning of this campaign was to do as much as we can to raise awareness and highlight support – if this helps just one person, we feel the campaign was a success. We are so proud of the content and to see the reach it's had is incredibly humbling.

What was the impact of the campaign?

Within the first week of the campaign being live, Samaritans reported that 63% of their direct messages were as a result of our campaign. We were also inundated with requests from governments, emergency services, charities, businesses, schools, places of worship and individuals asking for access to the video.

This is why we chose to give away the original video file to anyone who wishes to use it, allowing people to include it in presentations, share in group chats or view even without internet access. Any individual or business can email **youarenotalone@canaries.co.uk**, and a staff member will send the original video file alongside some supporting resources.

COMMUNITY POWER

IMPACTING & CHANGING LIVES

MORE HOURS, MORE PARTICIPANTS, MORE IMPACT; THE PRESENCE OF EFL CLUBS IN THE COMMUNITY HAS NEVER BEEN MORE IMPORTANT, WITH THEIR IMPACT ON PEOPLE'S DAILY LIVES CONTINUING TO GO FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH.

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**





A football session in Salford, an exercise class in Bolton, a crime-prevention mentoring scheme in Bristol – the community impact of EFL Clubs, felt across the country and by people from every walk of life, has never been as significant.

Uniting all ages, demographics and outlooks, Clubs, through the game of football, have a power and reach that few can match.

With 840,000 participants engaged and 876,000 hours of support provided through Club Community Organisations in 2021/22 – the highest ever for a 12-month period – football continues to be a catalyst that can influence society like no other force and Clubs continue to be the beating heart of their respective towns and cities. The importance of that cannot – and should not – be underestimated.

Be it getting people fit, bringing people together, supporting people living with illness, educating, helping people into work or simply being there to connect those in isolation, Football Clubs, alongside their Club Community Organisations (CCOs), offer something for everyone.

So how does a Football Club serve – and strengthen – its local community in 2023?

"One morning, I just said, 'I'm done'. I went down and said, 'bye mum, I love you' and I went to jump in front of a train."

Having reached his lowest ebb, Foundation 92 participant Damian left his house one day with no intent of returning home. Heading to the train station, he planned to end his life before a stranger pulled him back.

"It was probably the darkest moment of my life," he says. "But a moment I relive in thankfulness that it didn't happen."

After attending one of Salford City's '92 Shield' programmes – a session that provides a safe space for football and conversations for those who have faced various hardships – the trajectory of Damian's life began to change.

Something as simple as "kicking a ball around" on a Tuesday afternoon turned his life around. Having started as a participant and now holding down a full-time position at Foundation 92, Damian was able to turn one of his greatest passions into a career, but more than that, he received the support he never had before. For Damian, football broke down those barriers and gave him a safe space to be himself.

"Football provides both hope and aspiration," he adds. "Football Clubs are like families and this is what Salford is to me – family and hope."

Damian is just one of thousands of people whose lives have been changed by their local Football Club.

Take Rachel who, after struggling to conceive and in need of a lifestyle change, joined Bolton Wanderers' FIT FANS programme for reasons so much more than to just lose weight. Following the completion of the 12-week programme and subsequent successful IVF treatment, she and her partner recently welcomed another Wanderer, Joshua, into the world.

"I'm 7.7 kilograms lighter and 13cm slimmer around my waist," Rachel explains. "I feel loads



better and loads healthier. When I completed the course my confidence was high and I just started to feel really good about myself.

"After three and a half years of IVF heartache, I genuinely believe the weight loss and improved fitness that FIT FANS helped me achieve played a vital role in the treatment working and me successfully conceiving."

Providing support 365 days a year for local people facing local challenges, whether that be food poverty, unemployment, obesity, loneliness, disability or even people seeking sanctuary among others, Clubs and CCOs hit all the right notes in their respective communities.

"I think it's something only football can offer given the scale of the sport and the areas it touches," Chair of the EFL Trust, Liam Scully, says.

"First of all, our Clubs are anchor institutions. They are the heartbeat of their local communities up and down the country and across all counties. The Club badge, the sense of community, the cohesion and the identity that brings is so important.

"Coupled with the skilled, qualified and unique practitioners we have that understand how best to use the power of the Club badge and understand how best to use that reach and engagement in order to provide solutions for the challenges around us, we've got something incredibly important here and unlike anything else."

The affinity to the Club badge continues to be a powerful tool in helping engage people with community programmes that can positively change lives, and in some cases, save lives.

Improving participants' physical and mental wellbeing, tackling crime, teaching life skills, increasing social inclusion, helping people find employment; the benefits of such schemes are endless, but Clubs continue to respond directly to the needs of their respective communities with innovative and ground-breaking programmes, tackling some of society's biggest challenges along the way.



Take Bristol City and Robins Foundation's ADD Mentor programme, which – via a personal mentor with lived experience – works with local children who have found themselves on the wrong path and are involved in criminal activity in some of the most deprived areas of the city. Whether that's minor offences or, more often than not, gangs, drugs and knife crime, the programme offers young participants a personal mentor to help guide them away from the negative day-to-day life they are used to and involve them in something positive, ultimately taking them away from criminal activity.

"This really has changed my life," one young participant, whose identity cannot be revealed, says. "I used to be in trouble with the police all the time, it really messed my life up but I've near enough turned my life around now."



Directly impacting the lives of a number of young people who would have potentially ended up in prison or worse, the project has been an unparalleled success and has received national recognition for its impact in the local area.

"If you're in these areas, it only ends two ways," Chief Development Officer of Robins Foundation, James Edwards, says.

"These young people either get put in prison or they end up dead. That's the reality of the situation."

But with the ground-breaking ADD Mentorship programme, for these young offenders, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

The ability to find a way to make change does come up against hard limits. But, as proved during the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently during the ongoing cost of living crisis, Clubs have a philosophy of going the extra mile for their communities and the people living in it. Proof, perhaps, that they have never been more important.

"Absolutely they are," Scully continues. "There are a lot of challenges in the country at the moment and this is where we're seeing and understanding the power of football in the community. We've seen so much in recent years, especially since the pandemic, how the great British spirit self-serves and creates its own solutions for challenges, and that's what Clubs and CCOs do on a daily basis.

"Football Clubs are the focal points of their communities. They are an incredible vehicle and mechanism in which to make a difference and they are so critical to community success because of the role they play, the cohesion they create and their ability to unite everyone behind one cause and one Club badge. We've known that for a long time, but I think there's perhaps more of a need for it now and with that need comes opportunity."

The EFL's 2023 Community Impact Study served to highlight the above. The most impressive headline figure from the detailed





report was perhaps that EFL Clubs and CCOs deliver more than £865m of social value annually, but there were many other incredible numbers demonstrating that Clubs' connections with people in their areas continues to go from strength to strength.

For instance, almost 580,000 hours of community activity was delivered by Clubs and CCOs in the 2021/22 season – an 11% increase on the report conducted in 2018/19, and more than 840,000 community participants were engaged through those sessions, with the majority of participants achieving at least one positive outcome across physical and mental health. The report showed that Clubs also generated more than £101m for community investment.

If that wasn't proof enough that the work Clubs do really does matter, CCOs also employed 5,675 staff who together provided more than five million hours of support, while deploying 4,247 volunteers who provided a further 876,741 hours of support. A range of in-kind support – including subsidised facility use, match tickets and merchandise – from Clubs also mounted to a staggering value of £40m.

Together, using the power of the Club badge and the affinity that hundreds of thousands of football



fans have to their team, Clubs are continually responding to the needs of their communities at an unprecedented scale.

"The numbers are incredible when you break them down," Scully continues. "But it's about using that data and looking at how Stevenage can specifically impact their community, how Lincoln City can help their people and how Grimsby Town can make a positive difference to their community. Everyone's need is different depending on the Club and the location of that Club, but that's the power of the network and that's what makes us special.

"You hope that never changes. You look at the level of resilience the network has shown over the years and what is really clear is that this is vocational. We wouldn't achieve this level of success if it wasn't."

It is these people who represent the commitment and sense of community that makes this work a success. And with the power of football knowing no bounds, and its importance and influence only increasing year-on-year, togetherness between Club and CCO has never been so important.

"Community needs will be a never-ending cycle and we don't want our success to have limitations. The size and scale of what we can do is so vast and we want to ensure that this level of impact is here forever.

"It's about recognising how pivotal our Clubs and CCOs are in their community, responding to that ask and modernising and growing with the challenges that come up along the way. We're incredibly proud of the work we already do and the way we respond to people's needs, but I genuinely believe we've only just begun." ☒






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Ramadan Mubarak
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EFL








English
READING












2014
2019

EFL Clubs continue to secure their roles as vital civic institutions, providing spaces for communal shared identity and becoming catalysts for economic and social regeneration and development.

The vast array of work is delivered across three key areas; Health & Wellbeing, Education & Employability and Participation & Community Engagement.

Health & Wellbeing

Start well, live well, age well.

In areas surrounding EFL Clubs, many people have poor physical and mental health caused by the environment and circumstances in which they live.

Supporting people to adopt healthy lifestyles, health & wellbeing programmes enhance the quality of life for people living with poor physical or mental health, as well as those with long-term conditions, while giving them access to the support they need in order to live a healthy life.

Health is repeatedly shown to be the public's top priority. It has a bearing on every aspect of our lives, with healthy life expectancy – how much time we can expect to spend in good health during our lives – being crucial to our quality of life and our ability to do the things we value.

People living in the least deprived areas of the country live approximately 20 years longer in good health than people in the most deprived areas. Those living in the most deprived areas spend nearly a third of their lives in poor health, compared with roughly a sixth for those in the least deprived areas. The pandemic and cost of living crisis have further widened these inequalities.

With 40% of adults having at least one long-term health condition, collectively, the EFL, EFL Trust, Clubs and CCOs understand the power they have to reach and help people make a lasting change to the behaviours that impact their health, and they promote physical activity as the miracle cure. Moving more, alongside connecting with people, can help our physical health but also help combat loneliness, isolation, anxiety and depression – relieving pressure on an overstretched NHS system.

Recognising that football fans and the communities in which they live include people of all ages, programmes delivered support people at all stages of life – children to start well, adults to live well and older adults to age well.

Specifically, the EFL Trust's Joy of Moving programme helps roughly 70,000 children to move more and understand the benefits of a balanced diet and active lifestyle. The Headstart programme supports children who are showing signs of needing mental health support, but who would need to wait a long time for support from the NHS, while the popular FIT FANS programme has helped 10,000 men and women to make changes to their lives and become more active, eat better, lose weight and reduce risk of heart disease.

In addition, Extra Time Hubs are helping thousands of people to enjoy their retirement, make friends and do the things they enjoy.

At a local level, Clubs and CCOs are building strong connections with the local health system and helping to tackle local priorities from cancer rehabilitation to suicide prevention, as the EFL Trust network strives to build a healthier, more active nation.

Of the participants engaged on health and wellbeing programmes:

88%
of participants reported a reduced body mass index

87%
reported a reduced waist circumference

75%
reported a reduction in feelings of loneliness

71%
reported an improvement in their mental wellbeing

Education & Employability

Working with people of all ages, backgrounds and levels of engagement, using education to help find training and employment pathways.

Clubs and CCOs provide positive, inspiring learning environments that are used to engage the local community to develop skills for life, academic qualifications, raise awareness of important issues and open up opportunities for employment.

Surrounding areas of EFL Clubs have higher rates of people not in education or employment, as well as higher levels of people suffering from educational deprivation. Alongside the EFL Trust's strategy of raising aspirations and realising potential, programmes use the power of the Club badge to engage with children, young people and adults that traditional education programmes cannot reach.

The network engages with more than 3,000 primary schools and over 1,300 secondary schools, spanning 55 education investment areas. Through local partnerships, the Trust and CCOs work collaboratively to develop school-based interventions, to identify and support children and young people who may need additional support through their transition from primary to secondary school with their mental health and wellbeing.

Clubs also hold ESFA Study Programme subcontracts with local colleges, with over 4,000 students per year studying BTEC sports and sports coaching qualifications and the 10-year partnership with the University of South Wales enables students to continue their journey at Clubs through foundation degree and degree level programmes.

A key success of these programmes is providing routes from voluntary roles and work experience into paid employment. Many advance into professional roles in areas such as teaching, youth work, violence reduction and health sectors.





As part of the education and employability area, universal and targeted employability programmes (ESFA Traineeships, Kick Start, Adult Education) are delivered for the provision of good quality embedded information and advice.

From 2020-22 the EFL Trust also worked in partnership with the DWP as a Kickstart Gateway provider, with 714 Kickstart placements filled across the network, leading to full or part-time employment within a CCO or partner organisation across a wide range of roles (assistant community coaches, grounds keepers, digital marketing assistants). Additionally, apprenticeship pathways provide entry routes into community Club roles in coaching, media, project management, leadership, youth work and mentoring.

In the area of education and employability:

85%
reported improved school attainment

83%
improved their educational skills and knowledge

83%
reported feeling more inspired and engaged in EFL Football Club education settings

Participation & Community Engagement

Working with some of the most vulnerable people in society and using the power of football to build stronger, more cohesive communities.

With the network of CCOs uniquely positioned to positively impact the specific needs of local people, participation and community engagement programmes enable the network to create engaged, connected and more resilient communities, encourage participation in civic society, help overcome divisiveness and prejudice and unite people to recognise similarities as opposed to differences.

By identifying barriers which can hold people back – particularly those who face disadvantage – the EFL Trust seeks interventions to help them overcome such barriers, access opportunities and improve their life prospects. For example, ongoing work with the FA helps provide young girls in England the opportunity to access the Lionesses Talent Pathway and fulfil their potential towards becoming an elite athlete regardless of ethnicity, demographic or social class.

Programmes also strive to make communities safer and more connected, working with the network to reduce crime and re-offending, as well as combat isolation and exclusion. Diversionary activities for young people aim to prevent them from getting involved in criminal activity and help them avoid entering the criminal justice system. Many CCOs also work closely with offenders to help facilitate their re-entry into community life, helping them develop key life skills and improve their chances of social integration.

Finally, using their position as prominent community organisations, CCOs use football as a uniting force to increase tolerance and understanding between different faiths, cultures, generations and social groups. A variety of different programmes bring together young, old, the refugee community, armed forces veterans, people with a disability, the homeless community and those who face isolation.

More than 87% of such programmes have been delivered in 20% of the most deprived areas of the UK and along the way have supported more than 2,000 young girls to have access to regular football sessions, delivered NCS to more than 3,500 young people and engaged with more than 2,500 refugees and asylum seekers per week.

The work not only improves mental wellbeing, but reduces levels of inactivity and develops community and social cohesion. In addition, training programmes to upskill and support the network of Clubs in recognising and responding to domestic violence has led to the creation of over 30 safe spaces at Football Clubs.



Through the work being done to create more connected communities:

95%
of participants reported improved feelings of social connectedness

81%
of participants improved interpersonal relationships

86%
of participants reported greater social integration or social mixing

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EFL | PUMA

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23/24 EFL SKY BET

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EFL Together Advisory Panel

THE EFL IS COMMITTED TO ENSURING THAT FOOTBALL – BE IT THE WORKPLACE, STADIUMS, COMMUNITIES AND ONLINE – IS A SAFE, INCLUSIVE AND ENJOYABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR EVERYONE.

Inspired by this, a newly formed Together Advisory Panel was launched in October, which will guide the work of the League on issues relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

Chaired by the EFL's Independent Non-Executive Director and Chief Executive of Mumsnet, Justine Roberts, the panel features six football equality stakeholders, including representation from the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) and Football Supporters Association (FSA).

"The EFL aims for football across the League to be more reflective and representative of the communities in which we serve and the appointment of the Together Advisory Panel is a vital next step in this process, with each member bringing a wealth of experience and knowledge in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion space," says David McArdle, the EFL's Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

"Football has come a long way in recent years, but we recognise there is still a great deal of work to be done. The Together Panel will play a key role in that work going forward, advising the EFL and its Clubs on all areas of work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion."

Justine Roberts, Chair of the Together Panel, adds: "This is an important step on a journey that the EFL is on, and I'm excited in my role as Chair to be a part of a panel that will help to ensure effective and sustainable changes are made.

"It is really evident that so much great work is already happening, with many EFL Clubs delivering a wide variety of initiatives to make our great game more diverse and inclusive. The establishment of the Together Panel will bring fresh new voices to the conversation as we continue to make real progress in this area in the next few years."

The formation of the Together Advisory Panel is the latest milestone in the EFL's work on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Since the beginning of the 2022/23 season, tangible progress has been delivered.

Some highlights include:

7,000
collective hours of EDI Education delivered to over 1,000 individuals – smashing the five-year target for the strategy in the first year of delivery.

363
individuals given Mental Health Awareness Training.

2,000
diverse books donated by the EFL and its Clubs to primary schools across the country.

I-Recruit
The introduction of an anonymised recruitment tool to ensure more diverse candidates are interviewed for roles within EFL Clubs.

100%
of EFL Championship Clubs engaging with Level Playing Field to make football more accessible for disabled supporters.

65
diverse fan groups established across EFL Clubs.

120
hours of diverse stakeholder consultation in the first year of the Together Strategy.

For the remainder of the season, the Together Panel will award EFL Clubs their achieved level within the Equality Code of Practice and develop programmes.

This will allow Clubs to move forward with their newly established action plans, discuss educational advancement ahead of the 2024/25 season and develop further practices within combating and managing discrimination reports.

THE 12 TOGETHER ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS ARE:

JUSTINE ROBERTS (CHAIR)
EFL, INDEPENDENT NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SADIQ PATEL
EFL, SENIOR FOOTBALL SYSTEMS AND ANALYSIS MANAGER

HASNAIN MOHAMMED
EFL, CLUB RELATIONSHIP OFFICER

HOLLIE VARNEY
KICK IT OUT, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

OWAIN DAVIES
LEVEL PLAYING FIELD, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

LOU ENGLEFIELD
FOOTBALL V HOMOPHOBIA, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

TERRY ANGUS
PFA, EDI EXECUTIVE

LUNGI MACEBO
WOMEN IN FOOTBALL, BOARD MEMBER

NILESH CHAUHAN
FSA, FANS FOR DIVERSITY MANAGER

DR SARA WARD
CARNEGIE SCHOOL OF SPORT, DIRECTOR OF EXECUTIVE EDUCATION

CATHERINE FORSHAW
BRABNERS ASSOCIATE, NATIONAL FOOTBALL MUSEUM, TRUSTEE

GEOFF WILSON
GLOBAL SPORTS STRATEGIST AND FORMER IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Enjoying the matchday, SAFELY

WORDS // AARON GALES

With nearly 22 million football supporters attending EFL competition fixtures in 2022/23, it is a great time to be a supporter of a Sky Bet Championship, League One or League Two Club.

The supporters create the incredible atmosphere that makes English football so unique, and it is the EFL's Head of Security & Safety Operations, Bob Eastwood, who works alongside EFL Clubs, to ensure supporters enjoy the games safely and that the matchday environment is an enjoyable one for every supporter who passes through the turnstiles.

With 72 Clubs across three divisions, it can be a challenging and complex role. Bob, a former Chief Superintendent of Lancashire Constabulary, has to prioritise his team's resources accordingly. Matchdays can mean constantly monitoring fixtures while supporting Clubs and stakeholders, should an issue arise.

"We regularly attend matchdays, not only to support a Club but to share good practices between Clubs and offer any help that may be required. Clubs do some outstanding work on their matchday operations and it's a pleasure to work with them and support them in keeping standards to a high level.

"However, if something does occur on a matchday, for example, a spectator is hurt or an object is thrown from the crowd at a player or referee, we speak to the Club to see how it is being investigated. Our team has significant experience in criminal investigations, and we are there to support the Club where necessary, such as liaising with the police, Safety Advisory Group and so on."

A key part of the EFL's Safety and Security strategy is around supporting Clubs in their relationships with police forces and how they work together to tackle the risks identified during pre-match planning. However, Bob is keen to stress that this is not about everyone doing the same thing but about maintaining consistently high standards and recognising the expertise Safety Officers have.

"Matchday operations should be tailored to the specific risks of that fixture, whatever they might be. It isn't necessarily about looking for consistency of approach but consistency of high standards and effective partnership working."

To maintain these standards and to keep Clubs abreast of the challenges they could face, Bob and his team regularly engage with key staff throughout the course of a season.

He continues: "We run a number of webinars every year where we give input around specific topics and focus on some of the issues that are the most prevalent and issues Safety Officers have requested that we cover.

"It gives us a chance to share information through the guidance we issue and create learning opportunities which will benefit everyone when it comes to tackling football violence and disorder. It's also about developing a collective effort to maintain high standards across the 72 Clubs."

There have been many times when a Club has faced formal action from their Safety Advisory Group regarding restrictions to their safety certificate. Getting supporters in the ground is crucial to Club finances and when that faces compromise, Bob and his team work behind the scenes to ensure that Clubs can keep fans coming in and manage their relationships with members of the SAG.

"Our work prioritises supporting any EFL Club facing difficulties, particularly when they are facing a situation which can be challenging to their matchday operations," Bob continues.





"We couldn't achieve very much without well established and trusting relationships and for colleagues and stakeholders to have confidence in the expertise that we have. We regularly engage with the Sports Ground Safety Authority, Safety Advisory Group, Football Clubs, police forces, national police bodies and Counter Terrorism Policing to keep abreast of emerging developments which will have an impact on our Clubs."

Bob highlights two examples where such relationships have helped them to work together and find suitable solutions:

"A couple of seasons ago, we had a League One Club who faced some action by the Safety Advisory Group in relation to some risk assessments and were considering limiting attendances as a consequence.

"The Club asked me to go to a meeting to support them and we were able to ensure the SAG had confidence in the measures the Club had in place and that the SAG also took a proportionate approach to their scrutiny of the Club's operations."

On another occasion where a Club was at risk of having their Safety Certificate removed, he worked alongside the Council to find a solution to keep the Club open to fans.

"Had we not found a solution, the Club were teetering on the edge of having their safety certificate rescinded," he reveals. "If that had happened, they would have faced sanctions."

One of the key ambitions of the safety and security team's strategy is to see an increase in the number of supporters attending matches as a result of improved home and away fan behaviour, as well as supporters' perception of safety being a key factor in deciding whether they attend a match or whether parents allow their children to attend a match.

He references the Love Football Protect the Game campaign, which is being run in partnership with the EFL, FA, Premier League and FSA, which looks to challenge unwelcome behaviours and make supporters aware of the sanctions they could face if they commit an offence in a football ground.

Bob explains: "People need to have confidence in their own safety and campaigns like Love Football Protect the Game have really raised the profile of some of these matchday issues and Safety Officers have felt supported by the EFL."

The variety of the role is also something that Bob, who will have been at the EFL for 10 years in January 2024, enjoys.

"Every day is different, whether we are planning for regular season fixtures or working on safely delivering one of the Wembley Finals," he says. "Sometimes we could also be organising security to take the Bristol Street Motors Trophy on tour or working with one of the EFL teams to do some commercial activation.

"We are also actively developing systems and processes for matchday data and piloting a restorative justice approach to the sanctioning of fans. Matchday data will ultimately be a game changer as Clubs will be able to identify risks and lead to a better-informed deployment of police and steward resources on a matchday.

"We also support referees on a matchday. It might sound simple, but a number of conversations often take place, such as asking Clubs to consider where referees are able to park their cars and that they have a safe passage into the stadium or considering where the referee observer sits within the ground."

Despite the challenges involved in delivering a safe matchday experience, Bob is positive about the progress being made.

"The game has come a long way in the last couple of years. If you take pyros as an example, anecdotally we are hearing that this is becoming much less of an issue within stadiums and this is partly down to the awareness raised.

Achieving success in this area of work is not only vital for the matchday experience but also to the wider reputation of the EFL. Asked to summarise his role, Bob concludes:

"In a nutshell, we are there to maintain the standards of the English Football League in respect of the delivery of matchday operations and to make sure that they are delivered in a way that is not only welcoming to people that come to the match, but that also keeps people safe and free from harm."



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Bristol Street Motors drives EFL Trophy into new era

The EFL Trophy gained a new title sponsor in November, with Bristol Street Motors – part of the wider Vertu Motors group – agreeing a three-year deal with the League, running until the end of the 2025/26 season.

The Bristol Street Motors Trophy is a competition that supports youth development by providing opportunities for the next generation of players at both EFL Clubs and invited Under-21 sides.

Of the squad that has helped England to qualify for next year's European Championships in Germany, Declan Rice, Bukayo Saka, Reece James, Conor Gallagher, Marc Guehi, Cole Palmer and Rico Lewis all made their professional debuts in the competition.

Half of all players named in the matchday squads of Sky Bet League One and Sky Bet League Two Clubs up to and including the Quarter-Finals of last year's competition were aged 21 and under, with 64% of those qualifying to represent England.

The overall prize pot of almost £3 million, which provides significant revenue for each League One and League Two Club, will increase over the next two years with the investment from Bristol Street Motors.

More than 300,000 fans watched the competition throughout last season – a year on year increase of more than 50,000 – which ended with Bolton Wanderers winning the Trophy in front of a crowd of 79,389 supporters at Wembley Stadium – the highest attended fixture across Europe that weekend.

With the Bristol Street Motors Trophy involving Clubs across the country, the new partnership gives Bristol Street Motors – who also becomes the Official Car Dealer of the EFL – the opportunity to engage football fans and their communities (online and offline), on both a national and local level, over the course of the agreement.

Originally operating from a single dealership in Birmingham, Bristol Street Motors has grown to become one of the largest automotive retailers in the UK, with the award-winning brand rapidly becoming one of the most trusted names for anyone looking for either a new or used car purchase.

The EFL's Chief Executive Officer, Trevor Birch, says: "We are delighted to welcome Bristol Street Motors as title sponsor of the EFL Trophy in a partnership that sees further investment into League One and Two Clubs over the duration of the deal.





"With almost 22 million supporters coming through the turnstiles in all our competitions last year, a thriving community network and a landmark broadcast deal in place for next season, which will see all Bristol Street Motors Trophy fixtures broadcast live by Sky Sports, the appeal of the EFL continues to grow from strength to strength, offering a unique, valuable platform for our commercial partners."

Chief Executive Officer at Bristol Street Motors, Robert Forrester, adds: "As a national business, Bristol Street Motors is hugely proud of the connections we have developed with communities across the UK through our dealership network.

"Across the communities, football is something that brings people together, so the opportunity to join forces with the EFL and Clubs that are such an important part of life for our customers was something that was simply too good to turn down.

"We are hugely excited to be named as title sponsor of the EFL Trophy and look forward to engaging with Clubs and fans over the next three years to make the competition bigger and better than ever before."

MANAGER INTERVIEW | **LIAM ROSENIOR**

LIAM ROSENIOR

TO HULL AND BACK

Having instilled a togetherness, selflessness, fearlessness and a culture of care among his young squad, Liam Rosenior has built the perfect foundation for future success at Hull City.

On and off the pitch, it's been a year of progress for both the 39-year-old and the Club, and it feels like this is just the beginning...

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**



/theEFL /EFL /efl



"I often used to pretend I'd fallen asleep on the couch so I could just lay there listening to dad and his coaches talking about the game. It was always something I was interested in; I knew I wanted to be a number one."

For **Liam Rosenior**, managing Hull City is far more than a job. It is a vocation, a passion, a calling.

Growing up, Rosenior watched his father, Leroy, manage numerous Clubs and from a young age, he has seen management as his calling.

Even as a player, he was coaching from a young age, before jobs with Brighton & Hove Albion Under-21s and Derby County propelled him onto the management ladder.

"The best education into management and the perfect transition" – as he describes it – has perhaps led him to this moment, but there is something poetic about his return to the city of Hull.

A career planned for a lifetime began just over 12 months ago at the Club where Rosenior not only spent five years as a player, but the city where he used to spend summers as a youngster visiting his grandmother. It was an opportunity that could not be resisted.

"This isn't just a Football Club to me," Rosenior says. "I've got really strong links with the Club, but also the city as well."

Rosenior's grandmother was a season ticket holder long before he joined the Club as a player back in 2010. Having moved north from London in the 1980s, Hull very much became her adopted Club.

"It's mad because pretty much a year to the day I took the job, my Grandma passed away and the cemetery she's buried in with her Hull scarf is less than two minutes away," Rosenior reveals.

"It's actually crazy that a year after she died, I'd get this job. It's special and it's a Club that is so dear to my heart – I wouldn't have come back here as a manager if I didn't think I could make it a success."

Now competing at the top end of the Sky Bet Championship, it's been a year of progress for Hull City, there's no doubt about that. But Rosenior is quick to point out that this is just the start.

"We're on a journey," he continues. "The first part of that journey has seen progress. We've built a team with an identity and it's a young, fearless team. That was phase one and when I look at the progress that's been made, I'm really proud.

"It gives me so much motivation to keep going and if you keep that progress going, you never know where you might end up. That's where phase two begins."

But it's not just progress on the pitch that the 39-year-old is referring to. Progress off it is equally important to him as a manager, if not more.

He explains: "When talking about success, people would probably expect me to speak about results or where we are in the league, but I think our togetherness as a group has been our biggest success in the last 12 months.

"The culture that now surrounds us is a huge success and it's exactly how I wanted it to be when I took the job."

Following his appointment in November 2022, Rosenior brought with him a bout of new characteristics to the Hull dugout.

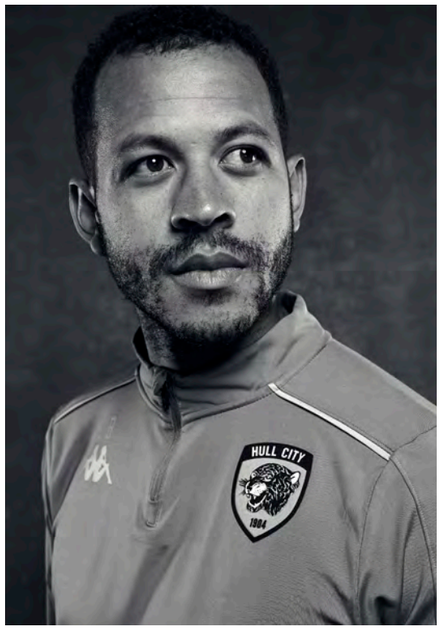
Open, honest, empathetic and sensitive; not traits you would traditionally associate with a football manager, but Rosenior is all of those things and more. And he has built a team around him that embodies those values.

"As far as I'm concerned, the person comes before the football," he says. "You have to have the right morals to play for this Club and to work with me and my staff. I look for honesty, integrity and hard work in my players and the type of person is really, really important to me.

"If you're honest, if you have integrity and if you care about one another, I think you can go a really long way."

Those principles have enabled Rosenior to connect with his squad on a different level than perhaps they are used to, while also allowing him to build a togetherness and culture that did not previously exist.

"We've changed the whole philosophy of the Football Club in the last 12 months," he adds. "But I'm still learning every day. I had to learn how to walk into a new group of players and gain their trust and respect. I had to build relationships.



ANTHONY YATES – UNMARKED AGENCY

"For me, being a manager is mainly about people skills. It's not always about the x's and o's on a tactics board, it's about developing relationships and getting buy-in from everyone at the Club in what you're trying to do.

"As a manager, you'd be crazy to come into a new Club and try to change absolutely everything, but for me the culture was the biggest thing. It's a success you can't really measure, but I wanted an environment where every single person – no matter who they are – feels important and knows they have a role to play. That's a great foundation for success."





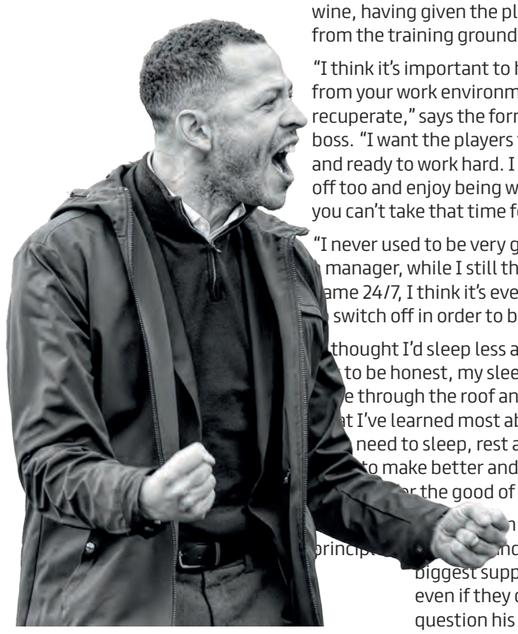


IT'S A CLUB THAT IS SO DEAR TO MY HEART – I WOULDN'T HAVE COME BACK HERE AS MANAGER IF I DIDN'T THINK I COULD MAKE IT A SUCCESS

His honesty means his door is always open, his morals result in everyone fighting for one another and he possesses a level of empathy that even allows him to give his players Christmas Day off regardless of the fixtures – a rare feat in professional football.

He recalls: "I remember as a kid I didn't ever see my dad at Christmas because he was always training or travelling, so one thing I always do is make sure the players have Christmas off. They're human-beings and it's important they spend time with their families."

Taking his own advice, Rosenior shares that he spent the most recent international break celebrating his daughter's 16th birthday with a couple of glasses of red wine, having given the players time away from the training ground to "switch off".



"I think it's important to have time away from your work environment to rest and recuperate," says the former Derby interim boss. "I want the players to come back fresh and ready to work hard. I need to switch off too and enjoy being with my family, you can't take that time for granted.

"I never used to be very good at it, but as manager, while I still think about the ame 24/7, I think it's even more important switch off in order to be at your best.

thought I'd sleep less as a manager to be honest, my sleep hours have e through the roof and I think that's t I've learned most about myself need to sleep, rest and relax in o make better and stronger r the good of the group."

n important nd his are his biggest support network, even if they do at times question his team selection.

"The kids are getting older now, so they're more emotionally invested in the team and how we're doing – they've even started criticising my selections!" he laughs.

"But they've also seen the harder times. When I lost my job at Derby, they were the most affected and I remember saying to them at the time, 'look, something good will come of this'. And it did. It showed them that in life, sometimes you have to bounce back, but they're always my biggest support away from football."

An insight into the 'modern-day manager' perhaps, but it's an approach that has earned him respect from his players and is seemingly paying dividends on the pitch.

A well-regarded player who featured in England's top three tiers during a near 20-year playing career, Rosenior is now earning praise as a member of an exciting young generation of home-grown coaches.

And the former full-back has learned from some of the best along the way. During his time coaching Brighton Under-21s, he worked alongside Chris Hughton, someone he identifies as an important figure in his managerial journey so far, alongside, of course, his father, Leroy, who managed Gloucester City, Brentford and Torquay United.

"I learned so much from Chris (Hughton)," says Rosenior. "He was an incredible manager, but even more so a person. The way he dealt with his players, the way he dealt with his staff, his humility, his transparency and the way he operated; he was probably the most influential person in terms of how I now manage a group of people.

"And I've probably taken the most from my father. He's been so important for all the obvious reasons and I can always pick up the phone to him no matter what.

They're both heroes to me to be honest."

Growing up in a football family, you could say Rosenior was destined to end up in the game, though his father had other ideas.

"He always tried to put me off going down the same path as him," the ex-England Under-21 international admits. "Firstly, in just being a footballer, he didn't want me to do it.

"I had really good grades at school and I remember sitting down with mum and dad when I was 15, they wanted me to go to university because they thought I'd have more chance of making a success of life if I did, especially because football is such a precarious industry.

"Then when I knew I wanted to be a manager, my dad didn't want me to do it. He knows the pressures and stress, he's been there. He's always still really nervous when we play and he's always calling me to check if I'm alright."

But ever since eight-year-old Rosenior spent his Friday nights going through tactics and set plays before his father's Gloucester City games, management has always been his calling.

"I love it," he beams. "It's what I've always wanted to do and every day I walk into this building, I try to show that I'm enjoying my work. If you're the manager and you're enjoying yourself, others will start to follow. I love this job and I try to remind myself of that every day.

"It's really important to me that my players enjoy playing football, they have to enjoy what they do.

"When I was a little boy, all I wanted to do was play football. That sounds really basic, but that's how I expressed myself, with a ball. I just wanted to play. Every young boy or girl who wants to become a footballer wants to express themselves with a ball at their feet and as a manager; I'm still like that now. Why should it be any different?

I WANTED TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE EVERY SINGLE PERSON – NO MATTER WHO THEY ARE – FEELS IMPORTANT AND KNOWS THEY HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY. THAT'S A GREAT FOUNDATION FOR SUCCESS

"I had periods in my career when managers didn't necessarily want to play football and I hated that, I didn't perform. I want to respect the game and see it played in a certain way. I want to encourage my players to play freely and also be free to make mistakes, as long as they learn from them and improve. All of those learning experiences are a part of my footballing philosophy as a manager today."



ANTHONY YATES – UNMARKED AGENCY

It's hard not to admire Rosenior as he talks about the Club for which he cares so dearly, and with the full support of owner, Acun Ilıcalı, it feels like the sky is the limit for both Club and manager.

"You have to dream, that's part of football," Rosenior concludes.

"I wanted to put a foundation in place here and that started with stability. Sometimes you can accelerate things too quickly and it's almost as if those foundations are built on sand, but I wanted to build them on concrete and create something that was permanent.

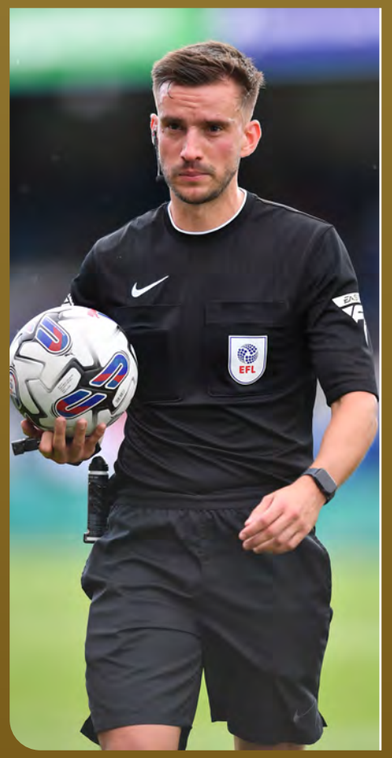
"Sometimes that takes longer, but when you set your foundations, you have something strong to work from. Then, you can move onto the next level and I believe we're ready to do that now, so I'm really, really excited."

Key Match Incidents Panel

Ahead of the 2023/24 season, a new Key Match Incidents (KMI) panel was introduced by the EFL to provide an independent assessment of on-field decision-making during matches.

The panel has seven members in total, five of which are former players and/or coaches, with one representative from the EFL and another from PGMOL.

Each week, the panel meet to discuss decisions that are deemed 'key match incidents'.



What is the Key Match Incidents panel?

The Key Match Incidents panel is an independent panel primarily made up of former players and coaches, alongside one representative from the EFL and another from PGMOL, with a goal to provide an independent assessment of decision-making during matches. It sits every week to review major incidents and assess whether the eventual rulings of decisions were correct.

When was it introduced and why?

The KMI panel was introduced for the Championship at the beginning of the 2023/24 season, after successful implementation in the Premier League from the 2022/23 season. The KMI panel greater informs PGMOL of the views of experienced former players and managers as to the expectations of football and participants on how Championship fixtures are officiated. This is an independent panel which is chaired by the EFL and provides another layer of accountability for match officials on the key decisions which directly affect the outcomes of fixtures.

What are the objectives of the panel?

The objectives of the panel are to create a new, independent process that will, in turn, continuously enhance performance and inform development of match officials. The introduction of independence also aims to enhance the credibility of the processes with Clubs, while maintaining and increasing accountability and transparency.

What are the benefits?

By utilising former players, coaches and managers on the panel, it has the potential for more informed views on refereeing by building a pool of well-informed advocates. It also increases Club engagement and understanding, while improving the performance of referees and driving the development.

How often does the panel meet?

The KMI panel sits every Thursday (subject to change if there are midweek fixtures) to discuss at length refereeing decisions that are deemed 'key match incidents'. Each KMI panel meeting comprises three former players from the pool of five on the overall panel, as well as always having one representative from the EFL and another from PGMOL.

What constitutes for a Key Match Incident?

A key match incident must fall into one of the following criteria:

Penalties (awarded/not awarded)

Sending Off (issued/not issued)

Denial of goalscoring opportunity (issued/not issued)

Second Caution/Dismissal (issued/not issued)

Goal (awarded/not awarded)

Offside Judgement leading to Goal (awarded/not awarded)

Major Application of Law

Technical Area Removal (issued/not issued)

Many incidents will cover more than one KMI category, which highlights the speed and clarity of thought involved in Championship fixtures.

Match Round	Correct Decisions	Incorrect Decisions	Total KMI'S	% Correct
1	24	9	33	72.73
2	33	3	36	91.67
3	29	4	33	87.88
4	24	3	27	88.89
5	25	2	27	92.59
6	18	6	24	75.00
7	26	3	29	89.66
8	25	4	29	86.21
9	29	2	31	93.55
10	21	6	27	77.78
11	23	5	28	82.14
12	21	3	24	87.50
13	19	2	21	90.48
14	25	9	34	73.53
15	24	6	30	80.00
16	33	6	39	84.62
Totals	**399**	**73**	**472**	**84.53**

How are reviewed incidents put forward to the panel?

A two-pronged affair, PGMOL analysts will review each fixture for key match incidents to nominate to the panel. Clubs are also able to submit incidents and decisions for review to the EFL to ensure everything is covered.

How does the panel judge decisions of match officials?

Prior to each KMI meeting, those sitting on the panel are sent clips of key incidents to review ahead of the meeting. Clips are then reviewed again in the meeting, before a discussion is had and the panel are asked to provide an indicative vote, ranking each decision by its difficulty (1-5) and whether it was in fact the correct one.

Each panel member is asked to give their view along with feedback for the match official, which is recorded in a detailed manner. Panellists are asked to use both their football experience and intelligence to determine whether a key match incident was judged correctly on-field.

The majority vote results as a correct or incorrect indication. The results of all KMIs are then provided to Clubs. This is not only used by Clubs to inform on decisions, but also the performance of match officials.

What happens next?

The KMI panel verdict is emailed to match officials on a Friday, with referees informed on each decision which way the representatives on the panel voted. Detailed additional feedback is also provided to each match official and their coach. This is important performance feedback for each official and they take the learnings and insight provided into subsequent fixtures.

The scores feed into the overall rating, which dictates an official's place in the merit table. While this does not dictate the selection process of the games in which match officials are assigned, it is one of the factors that affects referee selection decisions, made by PGMOL.



Trevor Birch

EFL CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND PGMOL BOARD MEMBER

At the EFL, we introduced the Key Match Incidents panel to allow independent assessors, which includes ex-players, to retrospectively review and look closely at key incidents in games. Having proved beneficial in the Premier League, what the panel gives us is data around in-game decision-making that we didn't have before. So far, that data is teaching us that a very high percentage of decisions being made by officials are in fact the correct ones.

VAR has created the perception that we're trying to achieve perfection, therefore people are seemingly no longer prepared to accept human error. In turn, it's promoted a questioning of every single decision officials make at all levels of football and is portraying them as the worst the game has known, which is obviously absurd. When you look at the training our officials go through, their general fitness levels and greater knowledge of the game, that can't possibly be the case. What has changed is the advent of camera technology and the scrutiny that it has placed on officials. It's created an unfair witch-hunt against match officials, which we're seeing at the moment, and players and managers have a really important role to play in managing that perception.

At present, there is no overwhelming desire for VAR to be introduced in the EFL. I'm not sure anybody wants the refereeing of our game to be taken to such a non-human level. Do people really want players being ruled offside by a toenail? As a former player, I'm a big believer in getting on with the game, accepting decisions and allow more free-flowing football. Of course, we're not oblivious to the technological developments, we are monitoring the space and our preference, if it were possible under the Laws of the Game, would be to start with a light touch VAR system that is there for instantaneous, game-changing decisions. But at the moment, we want to remain original, authentic and allow football to be played as it should be; free-flowing, at speed, with exciting moments celebrated in real time!

Ultimately, our goal is to improve decision-making in a heated, fast-paced, real football environment and we're working hard with PGMOL on the implementation of its Elite Referee Development Plan (ERDP) to achieve that. The ERDP is there to enhance the performance of our younger, high-performing referees, and the shortened pathway means there shouldn't be any delay in them being promoted through the system.

NEW APROACHES
a mid-season review

Before the 2023/24 season, PGMOL's officials were empowered by the game to deliver a series of changes in approach, aimed at improving the spectacle of the game, as well as participant behaviour.

PGMOL National Group Director Mike Jones talks us through the changes and how they have been implemented this season.

Effective playing time

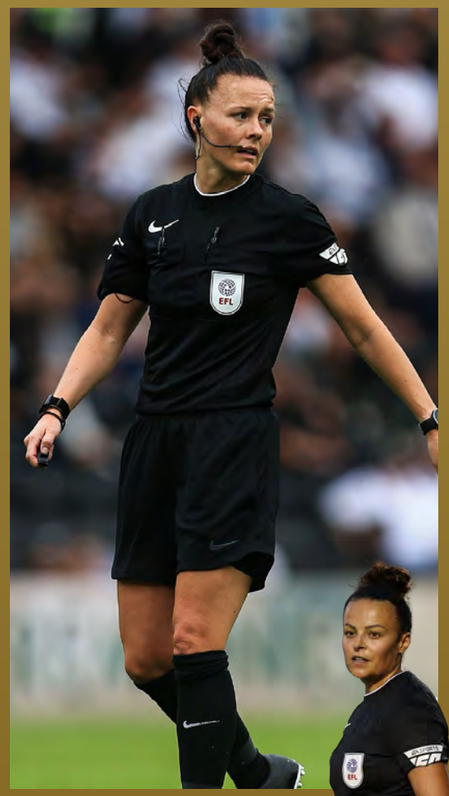
The 2023/24 season has seen a more accurate calculation of additional time, in line with IFAB guidance, and stronger measures to reduce timewasting.

Mike Jones says:

Effective playing time had been significantly reducing over a number of years, to the point where it was under 50 minutes in some divisions. We have a duty to the supporters to ensure we maximise playing time, so the approach has been a robust one when it comes to kicking the ball away that delays the restart of play, therefore enhancing the actual time the ball is in play. That's a combination of tighter management, as well as, when required, administering cautions when it is a clear, deliberate and impactful act by a player.

The education piece has been across the game – for Clubs, players and match officials; there is a need to understand what the impact of the action by a player is so we can get consistency from game to game.

There are two parts to effective playing time – ensuring players don't delay the restart of play, and then there's a calibration to ensure that effective added playing time is captured, as per guidance from IFAB. Last year and previous seasons, there were notional amounts of time added for goal celebrations and substitutions – this year, we've gone to exact times for all items, which has been an increase in almost five minutes in effective playing time in some divisions



During the opening two match rounds of the season, the additional time, particularly in the second half, quite often was in double figures. There has been a continued educational piece with the match officials and from a few weeks in, we saw the players' understanding increase regarding the more accurate recording of actual time by match officials, with the reduction from double figures added on time to six, seven or eight minutes, which is appropriate.



34

Total number of reports of surrounding a match official in the EFL are down from 58 at the same stage last season

Denying an obvious goalscoring opportunity

In line with an update in law by the IFAB, the wording around denying an obvious goalscoring opportunity in the penalty area changed from this season, with a yellow card being produced if the offence was a genuine attempt to challenge for the ball, while a non-footballing action will result in a red card.

Mike Jones says:

Last year, as part of a player challenging an opponent inside the penalty area, if it was not a genuine attempt to play the ball, such as an upper-body foul, it would have resulted in a red card offence.

This year, all footballing actions are now deemed to be yellow card offences, if inside the penalty area. Actions that are not a clear football action, such as a pulling of a shirt or a pushing motion, would still be punished by a red card for denying an obvious goalscoring opportunity.

Overall, the feedback we've received indicates that this has been appreciated by Clubs, with match officials playing their part in making sure that is applied correctly.

High threshold

Continuing this season, a 'high threshold' approach is in place regarding penalising challenges, with the view that not every contact is a foul.

Mike Jones says:

High threshold is a working title for the identification of key match decisions. For each decision, there are four principles – what are the actions of the defender in that challenge, what are the motivations of the attacker, what is the degree of contact and is there a consequence? If there is no consequence to any minimal context, the preference is to allow play to continue.

This is why we've seen a lot more penalty appeals not necessarily being penalised with a penalty kick. Across the board, there have been fewer penalty kicks – there are obviously outliers where we have awarded a penalty kick incorrectly or have not awarded. Some of these have been highlighted by the 'Behind the Whistle' series, while continued educational and reflective analysis and practices take place with match officials after each game.



	sky bet CHAMPIONSHIP EFL	sky bet LEAGUE ONE EFL	sky bet LEAGUE TWO EFL
Avg effective playing time 23/24	57m 3s	55m 29s	55m 32s
Avg effective playing time 22/23	52m 16s	50m 12s	48m 8s

Participant behaviour

This season has seen a more robust approach to improving participant behaviour on-field and in the technical area, alongside a charter with three core principles – respect, protect and fairness.

Mike Jones says:

We saw a robust approach taken by officials from the beginning of the season and those messages have been re-affirmed on a number of occasions so far this season, as this is about creating a culture change. We're in a better place than we were at the start of the season, but this is a journey and this is a long-term sustainable position we need to maintain and a collaborative effort from the game.

What we've seen is, when a penalty kick has been correctly awarded, for example, the dissipation and dispersing of players has increased – there is less challenge for those clear and obvious decisions. The whole premise of participant behaviour is the image of the game, which we are all passionate about. If we're looking to attract the next generation of supporters, the game as a whole needs to show the way – nobody wants to see abuse of match officials who are going out to do things to the best of their ability, just like managers, backroom teams and players.



We need to understand this is a sport and sport is made up of opportunities, mistakes and misjudgements. No referee goes out there with the intention of making a misjudgement and nobody should be abused if that occurs.



Living the **American Dream**

The ultimate goal for most youngsters coming through the Academy system at EFL Clubs is to forge a career at the professional level.

While around 45% of EFL scholars earn a professional contract at the age of 18, over 95% complete their apprenticeship with a range of qualifications, as well as experiencing several personal development and life skills workshops, all of which contribute to preparing them for life after football.

The EFL's education partner, League Football Education (LFE), is responsible for the provision of this academic and holistic care up and down the country, and supports the transition of those who don't receive a professional contract offer.

In recent seasons, American scholarships have become an increasingly popular pathway, offering the opportunity to experience a vibrant university lifestyle in a new culture and the chance to play football at a good level while studying for a degree.

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

★ ★ ★ ★

Support in this area is facilitated by LFE Transition & Careers Officer, Anthony Cato, who was himself released by Blackpool in 2016, before furthering his education with a degree in Sport and Exercise Science at Liverpool John Moores University.

"A USA Scholarship is an extremely popular pathway for LFE apprentices coming out of a professional football environment and it's growing each year," he says.

"Hundreds of apprentices have continued their education and footballing journey in the US, with over 20 going out this summer – a large percentage of those with the assistance of LFE's partner agency, FirstPoint USA.

"With the World Cup on the horizon, it's an exciting time to be in that environment, so I'd encourage any Academy player to really consider a Scholarship in the states if things don't work out for them here at their Club.

"This is an area of work we are really proud of and it's exciting to think about future opportunities that are available to LFE apprentices."

Although it is possible to secure a scholarship without any external assistance, it is not always easy or realistic. However, LFE has joined forces with FirstPoint USA – an agency that has placed more than 30,000 scholar-athletes since being established in 2001, working with around 2,500 colleges and universities in the USA – to offer a free US Scholarship service for its EFL scholars.

Cato adds: "LFE and FirstPoint USA have had an exclusive partnership for over three years now. FirstPoint USA have a wealth of experience in the US market and have secured many life-changing scholarships for LFE apprentices, all at absolutely no cost for their comprehensive service package.


ANTHONY CATO

"To be able to offer this service to our apprentices completely free of any service charge is incredible. Exploring scholarships in the US can often result in families having to contribute financially towards a scholarship for their son or daughter, so to alleviate the cost of working with a consultancy service as experienced and as reputable as FirstPoint USA is a huge benefit for us as an organisation.

"I personally am extremely grateful to FirstPoint that we've been able to support so many of our apprentices and learners with this service. It has certainly allowed those who previously wouldn't be able to afford the costs of working with a consultancy to do so, and opened up so many amazing opportunities for them in the process." ★

With over 70 staff members located across their global office network, many of FirstPoint USA's team are former Stateside student-athletes, including Head of Academy Partnerships, Harvey Moyes.

The 27-year-old was a youth player at Carlisle United before securing a scholarship with NCAA Division 1 school Northern Kentucky University, enjoying a successful collegiate career from 2017 to 2019.

Moyes, who captained the team in his final two seasons, then transferred to Southern Illinois University for his final year of eligibility, where he studied for a Master's degree in Sports Psychology.

★ ★ ★ ★



HARVEY MOYES

"I was by no means a top candidate academically coming out of school and I never thought that was on the cards for me," he says. "But thankfully, the US route offered me a fantastic opportunity to keep playing at a top level and get a degree, followed by a Master's alongside that, which I don't think would've happened if I had stayed in the UK.

"Those four years being an international student on an American campus are incredible. Playing in one of the main sports teams and everything that comes with that is a really privileged position to be in. The level of attention and buzz around college sport is fantastic.

"I've been able to come home with a degree, get a really good full-time job and still be playing in the fifth tier of Scottish football. Add to that the life experience I gained along the way and the connections I made with people from all over the world, who I'll stay in contact with for the rest my life, it was a truly unforgettable experience."

Having lived the American dream himself, Moyes now helps the next generation to pursue the life-changing opportunity.

Essentially managing the LFE partnership, he visits Clubs up and down the country to deliver an informative presentation and field any interest or questions that the Academy players might have.

He explains: "My role is in the recruitment phase, so I'll try to educate these young talented players about the opportunity available to them as best as I can. If they decide it's the right path for them, we'll bring them onboard with FirstPojnt and assign them a dedicated talent management consultant.

"They'll work on the player's behalf to build a solid profile – with an academic evaluation and an understanding of their footballing style and ability, whether that's from watching them live or through highlights and game footage.

"There are so many universities offering soccer scholarships, so it's up to us to find the best fit for each individual. The talent management consultant will then reach out to coaches – and we have an extensive network of coaches that we have strong relationships with. It's not a case of getting as many players out as possible, we want to send players to somewhere right for them to succeed."

Alongside their football commitments, EFL scholars study an educational programme that has been specifically designed for elite athletes and is geared towards nationally recognised qualifications, while personal development and life skills workshops develop them as well-rounded individuals.

Moyes believes this upbringing in the Academy system provides ideal preparation for pursuing a future across the pond.

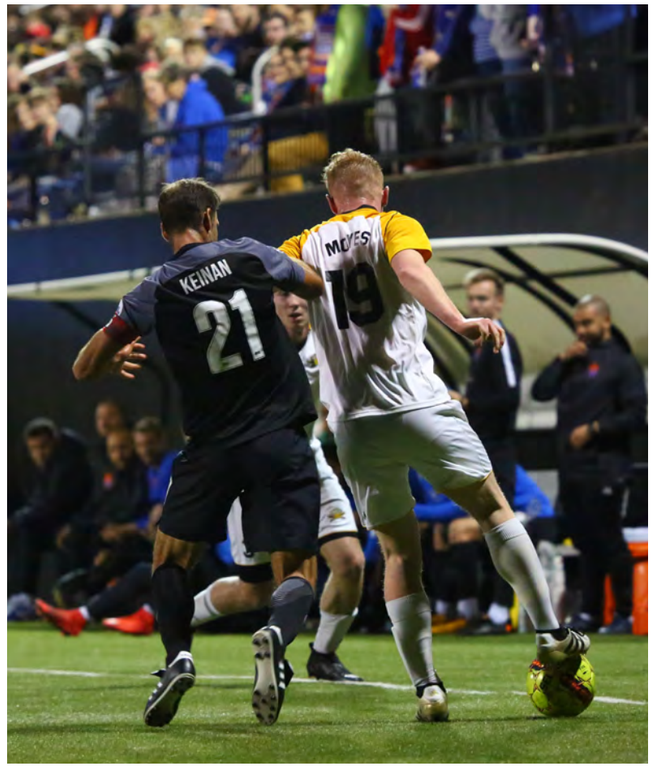
"Completing the BTEC Level 3 course sets them up well for admission into US universities and the routine of having education alongside football is reflective of life as a student-athlete," he adds.

"American universities are very professional sporting environments, with full-time training and excellent facilities, but you're not just going out there to be a footballer. You have to stay on top of your classes, because if you're not achieving the required grades, you're not eligible to play for the team.

"This isn't an opportunity that'll suit everybody, but it's good to be open-minded. One of the biggest apprehensions that we come across is people questioning their academic level, and while there are minimum academic requirements that need to be attained, there are lots of great opportunities out there and we can advise on eligibility.

"It's a step into the unknown on the other side of the world, but you quickly form such a tight-knit group with the other international students, who are in the same position, and you can build some incredibly strong bonds and connections.

"Many choose to stay in America after completing their scholarship, so it really can be a life-changing experience."



THE LIFE EXPERIENCE I GAINED ALONG THE WAY AND THE CONNECTIONS I MADE WITH PEOPLE FROM ALL OVER THE WORLD, WHO I'LL STAY IN CONTACT WITH FOR THE REST MY LIFE, IT WAS TRULY UNFORGETTABLE

The latest cohort of former scholars to embark on a new life in the States via FirstPoint included players from all three levels of the EFL, ranging from Ipswich Town and Middlesbrough to Portsmouth and Exeter City to Newport County and Forest Green Rovers.

Danny Smith is one of many to benefit from the highly-regarded free of charge service provided to LFE apprentices. After being released by Wigan Athletic in 2022, the 20-year-old is currently in his sophomore year at La Salle University in Philadelphia, competing in the NCAA Division 1 and studying a major in economics.



DANNY SMITH

"I felt the US route suited the sort of person I am, and it's been a fantastic experience so far," he notes. "I think I've settled in really well and I already consider it as my second home. The people are amazing and I've made friends from all over the world.

"Coming out here, I thought I would benefit from the emphasis they put on physicality, especially the work done in pre-season, with a lot of running and gym work. I feel I've certainly developed in that department.

"I think it's definitely a fantastic experience that helps you as a player, but more importantly, as a person. I feel a lot more mature and independent having moved away from home. If you're the sort of person who wants to challenge yourself or pursue higher education while continuing your football journey, I don't think you'll regret coming over here.

"On and off the pitch, there have been so many memories and experiences that I'll keep with me for the rest of my life and I'm looking forward to making more over the next three years." ★



MANAGER INTERVIEW | **JOHN MOUSINHO**

MOUSINHO MAGIC

WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

When John Mousinho was announced as the new Portsmouth Head Coach in January 2023, it's fair to say eyebrows might have been raised.

Still a registered player with Oxford United and just 66 days after playing his last professional game for the U's, the former defender – who had never taken charge of a senior game of football before – called time on his playing career to head to the south coast.

"It's fair to say it was a left-field appointment from the Club," Mousinho himself admits. "I literally hung up my boots there and went to pursue this opportunity."

But this 'left-field' appointment might just turn out to be a stroke of genius from Pompey, who are firmly in the hunt for promotion from Sky Bet League One having put together a run of 16 games unbeaten to start the 2023/24 campaign.

Even more impressively, that period without tasting defeat – which was eventually ended by Blackpool towards the end of November – stretched back to the middle of March, as Portsmouth's progress under their youthful new manager continues to catch the eye.

One of the last two teams to have maintained an unbeaten record in England's top four divisions this season – Mansfield Town also lost for the first time on the same weekend – there's no doubt that Mousinho has convinced everyone that he is the right man for the job.

Almost 12 months on from his appointment, it is certainly looking like an inspired decision.

"I was really surprised that Portsmouth took the leap with me," he continues. "I had confidence in my own abilities, but I didn't necessarily think Portsmouth would go for such an inexperienced Head Coach appointment and I wouldn't have blamed them if they hadn't.

"I knew and understood the pressures a Club like this faces and I wanted that challenge. There's expectation here and always a huge pressure to win every game. Yes, that expectation is going to be tough at times, but I view that as a good thing.

"As a player, I achieved pretty much everything I wanted to and when the opportunity to lead a Club of this stature and magnitude came about, it was a no brainer for me."

At the time of his arrival, Pompey CEO Andrew Cullen commented that Mousinho "possesses real leadership and motivational skills" – key traits for any manager, and ones he very quickly looked to instil on his new Portsmouth side.

Coupled with his previous role as Chair of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) and his player-centric approach to management, Mousinho has all the right attributes to succeed.

"As a player, my motivation was always to maximise my own ability," he explains. "I knew I was responsible for my own destiny. When you become a manager, everything is different. It's no longer about you, it's about the team and what is best for everyone else. You have a sole responsibility to the Football Club.



"And it's about the fans as well. That's sometimes a cliché, but it's true. They pay a lot of money to come and see us play and I feel responsible for them. Winning for them motivates me as much as anything else and I take that responsibility into every game.

"I'm someone who feels the pressure every minute of every day but in a strange way, I quite enjoy that. Pressure is a huge part of football, even more so in management, so if you don't enjoy that, there's probably no point in doing it.

"It doesn't matter what Club you're at, people expect you to perform and fans expect you to win games. I enjoy that aspect."

Mousinho started his coaching badges early to allow for a smoother transition into management.

During his time at Oxford, Karl Robinson would include him in coaching sessions, recruitment meetings, team selections and various staff dealings, including interaction with the Board, to allow for as full a picture as possible of the trials and tribulations of football management.

"I was really lucky in that respect," he admits. "And to be honest, I generally think age and experience is irrelevant in management. Yes, you need to come into the job and have those foundations, which I think I had, but it's more about whether or not you're actually ready for the job and want to take it on."



And of course, having last played just a year or so ago, Mousinho understands a player's mindset as well as anyone.

"I quite literally came straight from the dressing room into this Head Coach role," he says. "At the time, I felt that was my biggest strength, but also, potentially my biggest weakness too.

"I'd had no prior experience to go off, so I just said to the players, 'look, I know how things are, I understand what it's like to be a professional footballer'. I have that experience, I know how difficult it is to win games at this level, I know how hard the players work, I know what it's like to be away from your family and I know the strains.

"Because of that, I felt like I had an affinity with the players straight away and that was my message to them; that I understand what it's like and because of that I'm going to do whatever I can to make their jobs easier.

"You could say that's a huge strength, but I guess you could also look at it as a weakness too. Because I'd come straight from the dressing room, I'd never had those sorts of interactions with players before and never addressed a room as a Head Coach.

"It's different, but when it boils down to it, you just need to remember that players are all humans and they all want the same thing. When you break it down like that, it makes it a lot easier to come into a dressing room, address a group of players and get them on the same page as you."

It's an approach that is, so far, working wonders.

From the outside looking in, Mousinho's transition from player to manager has been almost seamless. And while it is something the 37-year-old worked hard at towards the latter stages of his playing career, he still found out for himself that nothing prepares you more than jumping straight in at the deep end.

"The best way to describe it is to say that there's nothing that can properly prepare you for management," he remarks. "You can have thousands of conversations with as many people as you want and do all the training you like, but until you take the role and everything is on you, you don't fully understand it."

But how do you know when the time is right?

"It's really difficult to know, for sure," he acknowledges. "But you also never know when an opportunity is going to arise. For me, I felt ready and the fact I was given an opportunity meant I just had to take it. I guess that's when you find out if you're ready or not.

"When I left Oxford for this job, I was still on a playing contract. It was a bit surreal at the time because in my first week as Portsmouth manager, we travelled up to Fleetwood with me as Head Coach, but 10 days prior, I'd travelled to Fleetwood on the back of the bus as a player with my Oxford team-mates.

"It all happened that quickly. And that was something I had to adjust to immediately and learn there and then to be a Head Coach. It's a very different role. I had to very quickly stop myself from being how I might have been as a player and remember that it's not about anything other than making sure you do what's right for the Football Club, but also the 20 plus players you're now looking after.

"When you're on the other side, in my opinion, players don't want a friend. They want a manager who is friendly, yes, but who is approachable, someone who will give them time and understanding, but ultimately, they want someone who can lead them and help them get to where they want to be professionally."

After almost a year at the helm, his results as a Head Coach certainly don't reflect those of someone who, prior to 2023, had no previous experience in the dugout. However, there is one change he is still getting to grips with.



"One thing I find the most difficult as a manager is the sudden loss of control on a matchday," Mousinho confesses. "It's something I'm really not very good with.

"As a player, I always felt like I could influence a game in some way. Even though you've got to rely on 10 other players to help you get to where you want to be, as a player you always feel you have control over the end result.

"As manager, in a strange way I've got ultimate control over what happens on the pitch in terms of how we do things, but when the game kicks off, I'm relying on the players to execute a plan we've worked on all week, and to be honest, I feel completely helpless, particularly when things don't go well.

"When things aren't going your way, it's not necessarily the losing that's the worst part. It's sitting there thinking, 'I can't do anything to change this right now'. Yes, there's always something that can be done but nothing is the same as putting your boots on and going out there to try and change the game yourself."

A steep learning curve, but one that Mousinho is taking in his stride as he continues to thrive in the dugout.

"I'm loving it, I'm really enjoying every single day," he beams. "You never know what it's going to be like until you step over onto the other side and I know I've got a massive challenge on my hands at this Club, which is actually one of the biggest things I enjoy about the role.

"I'm learning to expect the unexpected, there's never a dull moment and there's never a decision I have to make that doesn't have big consequences, which I find really exciting.

"In this city, this is everybody's Football Club, success affects everyone. I'm a football fan, I understand that. And as a manager, I still feel that now and that's what motivates me and is one of the most rewarding feelings when we do well."



CARABAO MARK 10 SEASONS



October saw confirmation of a record-breaking partnership in League Cup history, with the EFL and Carabao Energy Drink agreeing to a three-year extension.

Carabao will remain the title sponsor of the Carabao Cup until the end of the 2026/27 campaign, ensuring that the association will extend to 10 seasons, making the energy drink provider the longest title sponsor since the competition was established in 1960.



Carabao became the title sponsor of the 2017/18 League Cup competition, with Manchester City claiming the title with a 3-0 win over Arsenal. Since the commencement of the sponsorship deal, Manchester City have won the Carabao Cup a further three times, including consecutively between 2018 to 2021.

Nine-time League Cup winners Liverpool (in 2022) and current holders Manchester United are the only other Clubs to have lifted the trophy since.

The Carabao Cup Final itself is now recognised as one of the most high-profile football Finals in the sporting calendar, as showcased by a bumper Wembley Stadium crowd of 87,306 fans and a record audience of 4.26 millio in February as Erik Ten Hag' United overcame the c of Eddie Howe's Newca United to win 2-0 and Carabao Cup for a sixth time

Since the partnership bega Carabao and the EFL have activated internationally a Thailand and Asia, showca the partnership and the competition to global audie



Joint campaigns have included the Carabao seven-a-side cup, most recently hosted in Thailand in November 2022 by former League Cup winners David James and Louis Saha. The 'Coach the Coaches' initiative, launched in 2021, has seen coaches from EFL Clubs travel to Southeast Asia to improve and develop the standard of football and coaching in Thailand.

Ben Wright, EFL Chief Commercial Officer, says: "The Carabao Cup is an incredibly valuable asset to the EFL and its Clubs, and the relationship with Carabao over the last seven years has played an important role in the life of English football.

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Carabao Group CEO, Sathien Sathientham, adds: "We are delighted to renew with the EFL and extend our title sponsorship of the Carabao Cup through to 10 seasons in 2027.

"The competition has seen the brand go from strength to strength, both in the UK and globally, as we see the positive impacts of increased awareness of Carabao products and customer base among football fans.

"We are honoured to play our part in a competition and event such as the Carabao Cup Final at Wembley Stadium, and look forward to continuing our relationship with the EFL, the 92 participating Clubs and all of their fans for a further three seasons."

Supporting the Away Fan Experience

One of the most important elements of a matchday is the passion and rivalry shared by all supporters, whether home or away. But there is something exciting and different about travelling away from home.

Unfamiliar sights, sounds and the thrill of a new shared experience compel thousands of fans to travel to League grounds up and down the country each matchday in support of their Club.



While the importance of the 'home' supporter experience is clearly an immediate priority for Clubs, and the various touchpoints that allow Clubs to positively influence the home supporter experience are understood, how are the expectations of away fans considered and what can help influence their matchday experience?

One increasingly popular tactic is to utilise the skills of Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs). SLOs – a regulatory requirement at all EFL Clubs – act as a point of contact and sounding board for fans, to ensure that two-way dialogue is facilitated and the feedback, thoughts and experiences of supporters are fed back to a Club's senior staff.

Quite often, SLOs are fans of their Club and work hard to build a profile and reputation as an ally of the fanbase. Who better, then, to travel with supporters away from home, to be the source of information and a reliable friendly face?

To find out more about the benefits, challenges and opportunities this presents, we caught up with experienced Cardiff City SLO, Paul Corkrey, to discuss his appointment and how he uses his role for the betterment of Cardiff City fans' experience.

Having had a long alliance with the Football Supporters' Association (FSA) and Football Supporters Europe (FSE), which exposed him to supporter matters on a national and international level, 'Corky' (as he is commonly referred to by fans) was approached to take on the role of Cardiff City SLO in 2021.

"I've lived in the Merthyr Valley and have followed Cardiff City all my life, so I gladly accepted the opportunity and am proud to represent the Club I cherish," says Corkrey.

"Initially, my involvement with the Club was much about improving its often unfair reputation with other fans and police forces, both home and away. We started to liaise with opposition Clubs and organised, where possible, for our own stewards to attend with the aim of improving the supporters' journey and match experience.

"The benefits were that it supported the staff at the Clubs we visited, it offered a reliable form of information and assistance for travelling supporters, and ultimately became a way to offer our fans trustworthy 'familiar faces' to enhance their experience.

"As SLO, I take on several tasks, but predominantly my role is about the fans and most importantly, their journey and their experience."

It's not always easy, but finding a routine and becoming a reliable constant source of assistance has proved invaluable, both for Cardiff City fans and staff at the Clubs they visit.

He continues: "Prior to each away game, our Head of Operations reaches out to our opponents, outlining expected away fan numbers, mode of travel and highlighting any issues that he considers relevant. I am always party to the information and will subsequently contact the SLO at the home Club to introduce myself.

"I tend to travel independently to every away fixture and upon arrival, will meet the home SLO to share information and build a rapport. I also typically visit the ticket office and discuss returns/collections and reprints, and make myself aware of their processes. These are crucial to support the main objective of creating a safe, secure and welcoming event for all fans.

"On occasion, I am invited to attend the home Club's pre-match briefings. It is important to know we are guests of the Clubs we visit and be cognisant of their important safety management plans. Pre-match, I position myself outside the away fan entry points to meet and greet, answer questions and generally make myself accessible."



WORDS // **ANDREW POMFRET & DANNY TEBBUTT**



Once inside, Corkrey continues to play a key role, and much of it is about information gathering and sharing, a process that continues after the final whistle.

He explains: "I sometimes pass on up to date 'real time' information from the home Club that might be important for our fans, or instructions from the home Safety Officer, such as clearing the aisles or unfortunate reports of any anti-social incidents or offensive chanting.

"I write a post-match summary report with details of the day, which all gets added in the Club's matchday reports log."

As 'Corky' testifies, supporting the Club comes with responsibilities, and it's important that fans understand this to ensure all those connected to the Club have a great matchday.

"As part of improving the experience for away supporters, it's important to identify and where appropriate, sanction individuals whose behaviour falls below the expected standard," he adds.

"I liaise with the relevant dedicated football officers, who also travel to our away fixtures, and where necessary, the Club can issue appropriate sanctions in line with its Customer Charter."

His work doesn't end once matchday is over, with fan meetings and consultations regular occurrences at the Cardiff City Stadium.

> As SLO, I take on several tasks, but predominantly my role is about the fans and most importantly, their journey and their experience
>
> ""

"I arrange and chair regular meetings with our three main supporter groups and those who run regular organised travel," says Corkrey. "These happen at the Cardiff City Stadium approximately every six weeks, with minutes made available on the Club website and via a WhatsApp group. These meetings focus on operational matters, including ticketing, travel and fan behaviour at both home and away fixtures.

"Importantly, it allows the Club and fans to work together to try to find the best solutions to any issues that arise and everyone who comes along can express their opinions, concerns or feelings."

As a way of positively influencing the experience Cardiff City fans have on their travels, it's clear that Corkrey plays a key role, while allowing him to continually seek to improve elements of the matchday journey both at home and away.

"I've been told that seeing a familiar face is a great comfort to travelling Cardiff City fans and I am confident other Clubs would achieve similar benefits if they sent an SLO along to all away fixtures," he suggests.

"Ultimately, it's great to just be able to help our loyal supporters, who have the Club's best interests at heart and spend their disposable income on following us. I'm just a fan who has the fortunate position of being Cardiff City SLO and aim to keep on helping others enjoy their experience."

Saints support fostering service

Southampton Football Club recently announced a ground-breaking partnership with Southampton City Council's fostering service, Fostering Southampton, aimed at creating a brighter future for local children and young people in the Southampton community.

The initiative, which launched during Southampton City Council's 'Love Our Children' week, focuses on recruiting foster carers from diverse backgrounds and cultures who will receive comprehensive training and expert support to provide a nurturing environment for children in need.

In collaboration with Fostering Southampton, Southampton FC is dedicated to supporting children and young people in the city to ensure they have invaluable opportunities to remain connected to their families, friends and existing schools.

Currently, there are 510 children in care, with just over half having to be placed outside of Southampton due to a lack of fostering placements within the city. By supporting the recruitment of local foster carers and hoping to reach a potential new audience of foster carers, the partnership aims to ensure stability and continuity in the lives of these children, allowing them to flourish within the familiarity of their surroundings.

The Club will work with Fostering Southampton over the course of the 2023/24 season to support both existing and new foster carers and their families, offering free tickets to games, merchandise and exclusive opportunities to create special memories.

Foster carers play a pivotal role in shaping the lives of young individuals, and the Football Club aims to use its reach to encourage individuals passionate about making a positive impact to find out more about opportunities within fostering. The initiative welcomes foster carers from various walks of life, regardless of their working arrangements – whether full-time or part-time – or family background or heritage.



The campaign has been supported by a digital Out-Of-Home advertising campaign, with drawings of Southampton's men's and women's first-team players dotted around the city. The drawings have been completed by young people in care and their foster families. There will also be matchday takeovers and regular information on how to become a foster carer throughout the course of the season.





As part of wider support for 'Love Our Children Week', Southampton FC also arranged a special stadium tour for young people and their foster carers, as well as a football match at a local school between those young people in care and staff at Fostering Southampton.

Announcing the partnership, Greg Baker, Director of Community for Southampton Football Club, said: "Our Club believes in the power of community and supporting those most in need in our city, and this initiative aligns perfectly with our values.

"By encouraging our fans to consider becoming foster carers, we hope to offer stability to these children and reinforce the bonds that keep them connected to their roots. Together, we can create an environment where every child has the opportunity to thrive."

The campaign is also backed by ex-Saints footballer Pedro 'Pele' Monteiro, who, alongside his wife, Jo, has been fostering children for almost 10 years. During that decade, the pair have cared for more than 70 foster children.

"We feel incredibly lucky to have cared for so many foster children," said Monteiro.

"Fostering can be challenging, but the rewards are immeasurable. Our two biological children have formed close bonds with many of our foster children, and fostering has taught them valuable life skills and empathy.

"We highly recommend fostering to anyone who has extra love to give and space in their heart and home. The training and support provided by the Southampton foster care network is exceptional, and being part of this community of foster carers has been an incredible experience."

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, foster carers in Southampton have decreased and there are more children in care than ever before. There is hope that the partnership with Southampton FC will reach new audiences, raise awareness and encourage more people to embark on a fostering journey.



Councillor Alex Winning, Cabinet Member for Children and Learning at Southampton City Council, added: "Southampton children deserve the best from their city, and our foster carers offer so much time, love and respect to our young people. Southampton City Council, and many local authorities in the UK, urgently need to recruit more foster carers for children and young people from the city who are unable to live with their own families.

"These children and young people need nurture, stability and support from foster carers in a safe and loving home environment. This could be for a few nights, weeks, months or even years. With this support, children can grow and thrive.

"That's where the partnership with Southampton Football Club can be really beneficial. The Club has always been a great ally to Fostering Southampton, regularly donating tickets and merchandise to us. We are delighted to partner with them officially this season to highlight and celebrate fostering."

Family Ties

He might have only just turned 20, but Miles Leaburn is already making a name for himself.

The towering striker is the latest player to emerge from Charlton Athletic's conveyor belt of Academy talent, which includes the likes of Ezri Konsa, Joe Gomez and Ademola Lookman.

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

Leaburn, who racked up 20 senior goals as a teenager, recently surpassed a half century of first-team appearances for the Addicks, establishing himself as one of the most highly touted youngsters in the EFL.

"Since the first day I arrived at this Club, I've come a long way," he says. "I've still got a long way to go, but reaching 50 appearances is a really proud achievement for me and to do it at this age is an honour.

"All the coaches in the younger age groups are so enthusiastic and the first-team managers have always been willing to give young players a chance here. There's a clear pathway into the first team at this Club and that makes it a great place to be for us coming through the Academy."

Given his family connections, the 6ft 6in starlet was perhaps destined to become a success at The Valley.

His father, Carl, amassed almost 350 outings during an 11-year spell with the South Londoners, while his mother, Tracey, has spent eight-and-a-half years at the Club, currently working as Head of First-Team Player Care.

"Having such a strong support system has been really helpful for me," Charlton's No.11 confesses. "I'm forever grateful to both of them for what they've helped me achieve in my life.

"Obviously, she's my mum, but it's like she's mum of the whole group. She helps all the players with any problems they might have. Anything they need, she always gets it sorted and to have that level of support off the pitch is massively important because it enables us to concentrate on matters on the pitch.

"All through my career, especially when I was young, my dad has been there to give me advice and give me a different perspective on the way I perform on the pitch. It does mean a lot to me and my family to have followed in his footsteps and I just hope I can continue to grow at this level."

If there was any pressure to live up to the family name that's synonymous with Charlton Athletic, it certainly doesn't show.

Mature beyond his years, the exciting prospect burst onto the scene last August with a debut to remember, scoring in stoppage time after being introduced off the bench during a 2-2 draw with Accrington Stanley.

"I didn't expect to come on as early as I did – I think there was around 20 minutes still to go," Leaburn recalls. "Everyone dreams of scoring on your debut, and I was just thinking in my mind to make sure I was getting in the box and giving myself a chance.

"When the ball came in and I went for the header, in the



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moment I didn't know what to feel. I was screaming in front of Sess (Steven Sessegnon) and Jayden (Stockley) and running towards the fans and then I was tackled to the ground. It was a great feeling.

"I was at Chelsea for around 10 years and then got released at 16. In the two years I spent in the Under-18s at Charlton, I gained my confidence back and was able to continue my development. That moment of scoring on my debut felt like everything happened for a reason and it was just part of my journey to go through that adversity.

"I'd scored a few goals in pre-season, and then to score on my debut was sort of setting the standard for myself and confirmed that I do belong in professional football. My mentality has just been to continue to show that ever since."

Leaburn's instant impact was a sign of things to come as he went on to feature 40 times in his maiden campaign in senior football, hitting the back of the net on 13 occasions, leading to him scooping the Club's Young Player of the Year award.

"I didn't expect to be involved as much as I was last year," he admits. "I thought there was a chance I could be on the bench at the start of the season, but I was expecting pretty much all of my appearances to come as a substitute.

"From around halfway through the season, I was starting games and getting a lot of goals, which was a very proud achievement for me. To reach double figures wasn't something I was expecting at the start of the season.

"A lot of the coaches and my team-mates really helped me in my development transitioning from the Under-18s to professional men's football. The season as a whole was very good for me."

The talented 20-year-old has also been a positive influence off the field, committing to engaging in community activity despite his tender age.

"A major thing with this Club is our relationship with the fans and the local community," he says. "When they're rocking at The Valley and supporting us, it feels like a 12th man for us, so it's important that we give back.

"We like to engage and interact with them because they're just as important for this Club as us out on the pitch."

Leaburn is one of several Academy graduates currently in the Addicks senior squad, with the likes of Ashley Maynard-Brewer, Tyreece Campbell, Nathan Asiimwe and Karoy Anderson all coming through the ranks.

In recent years, the Club has introduced a pioneering Player Care programme for its Academy scholars, designed to develop the players off the pitch as well as on it.

The youngsters delve into numerous topics, including accountability, communication, confidence, identity, reputation and resilience, with workshops being presented in many ways, something Leaburn benefited from during his time in the youth setup.

"I attended a lot of those sessions while I was in the Academy and they help a lot," he reveals. "For me, it particularly developed my social interaction skills and certain other traits you can use off the pitch in your everyday life.

"It's nice that there's a few of us from the Academy that have come up to the first team, because it makes it easier for others to make that transition. We can make them feel as comfortable as possible, so they can have full confidence and perform to their best ability. We saw that with Micah (Mbick) coming in and scoring on his debut recently."

Michael Appleton's squad also includes a healthy amount of experience, with Leaburn receiving plenty of advice and guidance from the seasoned professionals.

That includes prolific talisman Alfie May, who is competing with Manchester City's Erling Haaland for most league goals scored in England's top four divisions in 2023.

Leaburn adds: "Last season, it was really helpful for me to have people like Ryan Inniss and Eoghan O'Connell telling me what defenders wouldn't like and the best ways to make it difficult for them in games.

"Chuks (Aneke) has always been there to offer advice and support with my development too, in particular showing me how to use my body more efficiently.

"The biggest thing that stands out when playing with Alfie is his willingness and determination to score goals. I was watching a clip of him recently where he played a ball in behind from the halfway line and then he's sprinted forward to get into the box. That desire to get on the end of things has really imprinted on me and I'm trying to implement that into my own game.



"I'm always looking to learn and improve. I'm focused on scoring more goals and trying to help this Club push up the league and hopefully get into one of the promotion places."

THE YOUTH OF TODAY

In August, former Derby County Academy Director, Darren Wassall, was appointed as the EFL's Head of Youth Development.

After over a decade working with the Rams, the 55-year-old – who played for several EFL Clubs across his 21-year playing career – has taken up his new role at the EFL, succeeding David Wetherall, who held the position for the previous 12 years.

"All the experiences I've had at Derby will stand me in good stead for this role," he explains. "It's about trying to help the rest of the 72 EFL Academy Managers and Clubs to continue their brilliant work and to keep improving standards for the next generation of players. It is an exciting role and I'm enjoying it immensely."

Wassall started his career at Nottingham Forest, under the tutelage of Brian Clough, where he rose through the ranks to make his senior debut for the Tricky Trees.

After eight years at the Club, which included loan spells with Hereford United and Bury, he played his last game for Forest in the 1992 League Cup Final against Manchester United before the former defender made the switch to Derby that summer.

He went on to play for Manchester City and Birmingham City but after suffering a ruptured Achilles injury while playing for Birmingham, Wassall was forced to retire from the professional game at the age of 32 and joined non-league outfit Burton Albion.

"I've had a wide variety of playing experiences," he says. "I've played with and been managed by some unbelievable players and managers over the years and gained great experience in terms of knowing what is required at the top level to become a professional footballer.

"All those experiences, both good and bad, have been invaluable in my role as a youth developer in helping the next generation of players maximise their potential. I loved my playing career and as soon as I finished, I went into coaching, and I've done that ever since.

"Football has been my life. Since I was 16 and joined Nottingham Forest as a scholar, that's all I've known and wanted to do."

After hanging up his boots in 2005, he made the transition to oversee the Brewers' newly formed youth setup, working closely with current Mansfield Town boss Nigel Clough.

WORDS // HOLLY HUNT



Wassall in action for Nottingham Forest

In April 2009, his next role saw him remain in the East Midlands to take up the position of Academy Manager at one of his former teams, Derby – the Club where Wassall made over 100 appearances, winning promotion to the top flight.

Wassall – who has previously taken charge of first-team affairs on an interim basis at Derby – spent 14 years with the Rams, stepping up to Academy Director in 2015.

"I've been in youth football for nearly 25 years," he continues. "My whole professional coaching and management career has been dedicated to youth development. I am passionate about working with young players and young people, creating opportunities for them in football and in life. I have always maintained that, as a young person, all you can ask for is an opportunity. It is our job to make that happen.

"The players are the ones that do the hard work, and it is our job to give them a platform to succeed and thrive. Starting even at Burton Albion, John Brayford came through our youth team and went on to play for Derby and Cardiff and is now back at Burton as their captain.

"At Derby, we had the likes of Will Hughes, Jeff Hendrick, Max Bird, Louie Sibley and Jason Knight – you could keep going. There were some talented young footballers that we were fortunate enough to have in our care, and we played our part in developing them as both people and as players. I am proud of everything we achieved at Derby. I was fortunate enough to have great staff within the academy, who all massively contributed to its success."

Now, Wassall has taken on a new challenge at the EFL, where he is using his knowledge and experience to assist the 72 EFL Clubs across the three divisions.

There are a number of key areas to focus on, one of which is the importance of player care and wellbeing, which Wassall recognises as being essential to everything he does.



He emphasises: "Nowadays, education, player welfare, safeguarding and player care is at the forefront of Academy life. Everything is based around creating a safe environment for young people to thrive.

"It is important that we can demonstrate that our Academy system is creating a safe but fun and enjoyable environment, where young people experience a life-enriching programme. We also need to make sure that every young person in our care, is better for the experience of being in our Academies, both as a player and a person."

While it is obvious that Academies are here to develop the next generation of first team players, Wassall highlights that he is acutely aware that a large proportion of participants do not go on to become a professional footballer.

However, through the system, young people enjoy the benefits of travelling the country, Europe and beyond to compete in tournaments and festivals, along with educational opportunities and life skills programmes which have proven to enhance career prospects both on and off the pitch.



"Of course, we are here to develop young players and hopefully young footballers, but we want to develop young people as well," Wassall remarks. "We do an excellent job at that, and it needs to be spoken about more.

"We will always be looking for improvement though. We'll be working together with all the Academies to make sure that every Academy under our banner is successful and highly thought of.

"I am working with a lot of talented people in the game, from the EFL to the Premier League. We are in a healthy state, and we want to maintain that and keep improving our success stories on and off the pitch."

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A Record-Equalling Run

Over two decades on from Luton Town's historic run, Stockport County equalled the longest winning streak in the fourth tier of English football after registering 12 consecutive victories to propel the Hatters to the top of the Sky Bet League Two standings.

Take a look at the longest winning streaks in the division's history...

12
STOCKPORT COUNTY 2023/24

This season, Stockport have come flying out of the blocks on the back of last term's Play-Off Final defeat. After suffering back-to-back losses in their opening fixtures, Dave Challinor's side embarked on a 12-game winning streak between September and November.

Kicking off with victory over AFC Wimbledon earlier in the season and reaching the record-equalling milestone against Colchester United over two months later, there were some memorable victories along the way, including an emphatic 5-0 showing against much-fancied Wrexham AFC and a hard-fought 4-2 win over Swindon Town, in which County came from behind twice.

12
LUTON TOWN 2001/02

Luton set a new record for the most consecutive victories in the fourth tier when the Hatters made it 12 wins on the spin during their promotion-winning 2001/02 campaign, between February and April 2002.

During that time, Luton – managed by Joe Kinnear – sealed the deal with a 3-1 away win at Swansea City, finishing as runners-up to bounce back to Division Two at the first time of asking.

10
NEWPORT COUNTY 1979/80

Similarly, some four decades ago, Newport County's 10-game winning streak coincided with the Exiles' promotion from the Fourth Division.

It marked the Club's first promotion since 1939, with County's impressive form between February and April 1980 setting them on their way to a memorable double, having won the Welsh Cup later in the campaign.

10
NOTTS COUNTY 1997/98

Under then-boss Sam Allardyce, Notts County topped the fourth-tier table in 1997/98 to ascend as champions.

The Magpies won 10 games on the trot during the winter months between December 1997 and January 1998, and it was a run that stretched to 14 games undefeated in total, resulting in the Club clinching promotion with six games to spare.

10
SWINDON TOWN 2011/12

Swindon Town got their hands on a first piece of silverware in over 15 years when they topped League Two in 2011/12.

The Robins hit their stride between December 2015 and February 2016, putting Paolo Di Canio's men into contention for promotion after undergoing a bumpy start to the campaign with mixed results.

10
NORTHAMPTON TOWN 2015/16

It was a season to remember for Northampton Town when the Cobblers stormed to the League Two title in 2015/16, finishing 13 points clear at the summit come May.

Northampton's 10-game winning run between December 2015 and February 2016 represented a Club record as Chris Wilder's side remained unbeaten for the rest of the campaign, going an impressive 24 league games without defeat.



Regulating a Sustainable Pyramid

WITH THE ARRIVAL OF AN INDEPENDENT REGULATOR CONFIRMED IN NOVEMBER'S KING'S SPEECH, CREWE ALEXANDRA CHAIR AND LEAGUE TWO REPRESENTATIVE TO THE EFL BOARD, CHARLES GRANT, DISCUSSES WHAT THE FUTURE COULD HOLD FOR ENGLISH FOOTBALL.

WORDS // **CHRIS OSBORNE** | PHOTO // **CREWE ALEXANDRA**

The arrival of an independent football regulator moved a step closer when King Charles confirmed in November's King's speech that legislation will be brought forward.

It means the government will put a football governance bill before parliament in the coming year, following on from the publishing of the fan-led review two years ago.

EFL Chair Rick Parry, speaking shortly after the King's speech, said: "This is an opportunity to create a regulator that can help football to address the systemic issues that are facing the game, so that we can avoid Clubs getting into financial trouble and the threat of supporters losing their Club altogether."

Clubs throughout the EFL will be hoping sustainability will be a central responsibility for a regulator.

Charles Grant, Crewe Alexandra Chair and League Two representative on the EFL Board, knows first-hand the challenges facing Clubs further down the pyramid.

"Crewe Alexandra plays 40 miles from Manchester United, Manchester City, Everton, Liverpool and closer to Stoke City - so it is a Club for our local community and the Football Club is big part of the local community," he says.

"It is getting progressively more difficult to survive, and occasionally prosper, in the Football League today, because it's down to finances and it is down to regulation.

"We're a Football Club, like a lot of other Clubs, who are wholly owned within the local community.

"The directors around the board table have always been in and around the Crewe area and supported the Football Club for many years.

"What they wish to see is a healthy Club that can entertain and succeed. And by succeed, we mean getting promoted every now and again, occasionally having a run at a cup - but succeeding also includes still being viable in the Football League next year and the year after.

"It is a challenging existence when, even in League Two, Clubs lose a substantial amount of money each year, which is essentially covered by owner funding.

"But it's a challenge that all of the people at Crewe Alexandra and clubs like Crewe relish."

For Crewe, a key focus for sustainability is to invest in youth development, reflected in the impact of young players on the 2020 League Two promotion side, with an average of 7.3 academy produced players featuring across each starting XI that season.

Grant believes a regulator must level the playing field and ensure the rules and regulations are fairer "between the haves and have nots", particularly in terms of financial sustainability and the need for fairer distribution of funds throughout the football pyramid.

"If we can ensure this is the focus of a regulator, it should make sustaining our Clubs in the Football League more straightforward than it is today," he says.

"We think the regulator will improve the health of our Clubs in the wider pyramid and it represents a real opportunity to make life a little more predictable, which in turn will significantly improve sustainability.

"Every little bit helps when you're a loss-making Football Club. It will bring a greater clarity and fairness to a lot of the regulations we operate by.

"The football pyramid is close to breaking, the cliff edge between the Premier League and the Championship is definitely not sustainable. This has a major impact down the pyramid between the Championship and League One and likewise between League One and League Two as well as the National League.

"You can't escape the fact that football would be in a much healthier place today if there were to be no parachute payments.

"Equally importantly, financial redistribution shouldn't and absolutely must not be for wage inflation, it should be for investment into our Clubs' infrastructure - our stadia, pitches, 3G and youth development."

And Grant is looking to a regulator to apply consistency to financial regulation across the whole of the football pyramid.

"Putting regulations in place to ensure the sustainability of our Clubs is an absolute must, then we will significantly reduce the chances of a Bury, Macclesfield or dare we say Derby. It must improve the financial health of our Clubs.

"I'm looking for a much more level playing field. The independent regulator needs to have real teeth, it needs to learn and it needs to be agile and decisive in determining when to intervene. We want a regulator who can be involved right up front."

So, how could the football landscape change in England, if a regulator has the desired impact over the coming years?

"The ideal scenario is that the pyramid doesn't have so many gaps and we have reduced the cliff edges." says Grant.

"With the gaps between the leagues significantly reduced, the pyramid would then be more stable and more sustainable. Clubs would be able to move up and down the leagues without owners having to make foolhardy gambles, as they often do today.

"And I would like the National League to be included in this as much as possible.

"And the regulator must ensure we do not spend new monies from financial redistribution - or as today with money we don't have - on higher and higher wages, which can then benefit the game as a whole.

"English football will be much healthier and it will mean we won't be reading as much about failing or failed clubs. This is the only credible way to ensure the sustainability of our Clubs."



WITH THE GAPS BETWEEN THE LEAGUES SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED, THE PYRAMID WOULD THEN BE MORE STABLE AND MORE SUSTAINABLE

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TOGETHER AGAINST RACISM

EFL | KICK IT OUT

As part of its commitment to creating a more inclusive environment for all, the EFL has launched 'Together Against Racism' – a campaign which renews appeals to football supporters to report any incidents of racism and discrimination they see or hear in stadiums and online.

Over 50 million people in England and Wales live within 15 miles of an EFL Club. That extraordinary reach places Clubs at the very heart of communities across the country and the role they play is a vital one, highlighted recently by the EFL's Week of Action.

Making those Clubs reflective of the communities they represent is a principle to which the EFL's Director of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, David McArdle, and his team are working towards. Guided by the Together Strategy that was published in 2022, there has been significant progress over the last 18 months, with achievements including:



7,000
collective hours of EDI education delivered to over

1,000
individuals, smashing the five-year target for the strategy in the first year of delivery.

65
diverse fan groups established across EFL Clubs.

I-Recruit
the introduction of an anonymised recruitment tool to ensure more diverse candidates are interviewed for roles within EFL Clubs.

2,000
diverse books donated by the EFL and its Clubs to primary schools across the country.

Tackling discriminatory abuse is a key part of the football-wide Love Football Protect the Game initiative, which aims to combat all dangerous and illegal behaviour at football grounds across the country.

Making stadiums as safe and welcoming for all is crucial, so through October, the EFL and its Clubs joined forces behind the 'Together Against Racism' umbrella, reminding everyone that we all have a role to play in stamping out discriminatory abuse.

With support from Kick It Out, the campaign called on supporters to report any incidents of racism or discrimination they see or hear in stadiums or online, as the EFL and its Clubs work to make the matchday environment an inclusive and welcoming one for everyone.

"Football supporters are the lifeblood of our game and they create the atmosphere and experience which makes the game in this country so unique," explains McArdle.

"But they also have a vital role to play in stamping out racism and all forms of discrimination. Highlighting the options available to supporters to do so and reassuring them there are ways to report safely was a key part of the campaign and we hope it has made supporters more aware and more likely to report or challenge such unacceptable behaviour."

Alongside the call to supporters, 'Together Against Racism' highlighted the importance of the campaign from a player's perspective, with former Reading and Jamaica midfielder, Jobi McAnuff, sharing his experiences with fellow Sky Sports pundit, David Prutton.

In a wide-ranging conversation, they discussed the importance of people reporting incidents to help eradicate racism from the game.

"The bigger conversation and the bigger issues can sometimes feel really daunting when you're looking at how we can solve racism," says McAnuff. "A lot of people say it's impossible, but it's about dealing with these incidents as and when they occur, stamping it out as much as we can and hopefully having that day-to-day impact which leads to longer change that we all want to see."

TAKING CENTRE STAGE

From Academy hopeful to first-team talisman, Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall has experienced a storybook journey at the King Power Stadium.

And the script is only getting better for the Leicester City midfielder.

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

PLAYER INTERVIEW | **KIERNAN DEWSBURY-HALL**



With former protagonists James Maddison and Youri Tielemans moving onto pastures new in the summer, the self-confessed performing arts enthusiast has assumed the lead role of Leicester's production under the direction of new manager Enzo Maresca.

Pulling the strings from a more advanced role this term, the 25-year-old has been one of the EFL's greatest showmen so far, taking inspiration from the theatre professionals he admires in his spare time.

"I'm a massive fan of West End shows and I have a lot of respect for that industry and the people in it," says Dewsbury-Hall. "I've got a lot of friends in that business and there are more similarities than you'd probably think.

"Their job is to entertain on stage and I'm here to entertain on the pitch, so I feel like there's a mutual respect and I can pick up a few tips and tricks from them, even though it's a completely different way of life.

"I feel like in terms of my own story, I've been in the first team for a couple of years, so I've bedded myself in and now I would like to take on a lead role.

"I might not be the most talkative in the group, but I try to set an example on the pitch and I'm very keen to help anybody in any way possible. Hopefully this ends up being a successful chapter for me in my career."

Like any captivating plot, Dewsbury-Hall's pathway hasn't been without adversity.

A late bloomer in every sense of the term, City's No.22 didn't make his senior debut until the age of 21, being introduced off the bench in an FA Cup tie at Brentford in January 2020.

And it was during subsequent stints on loan at Blackpool in Sky Bet League One and Luton Town in the Sky Bet Championship where he really started to blossom.

"I wouldn't change anything about my journey and I look back on it with fond memories," Dewsbury-Hall explains. "I'm so happy I had those loan spells because they moulded me into the person I am today.

"My stint at Blackpool was alongside some really experienced players, such as Jay Spearing and Gary Madine, and there were a lot of people who had been in the EFL for a while. To be thrown in at the deep end like that was great for me and made me grow up a lot.

"To then go to Luton and play a full season in the Championship was so good for my development and I feel like that's when I went from a boy to a man.

"I do attribute a lot of my success to those loan spells because without them, it might've been a different pathway for me."

Since then, the Foxes Academy graduate has gone from strength to strength.

Having scooped the Players' Player of the Season award at Kenilworth Road, Dewsbury-Hall returned to Leicester for the 2021/22 campaign, primed to contend for a role in the first team, and it was an opportunity he didn't squander.

In his breakthrough season, the man from Shepshed featured at Wembley Stadium during an FA Community Shield victory over Manchester City, appeared in 28 Premier League matches and scored his maiden goal for the Club against Napoli in the UEFA Europa League.

He says: "My family are Leicester fans and I'm from the area, so it probably does mean a little bit more to me because I've lived it and breathed it for more than half my life.

"When bad times come, it probably hits me harder, but when the good things happen, I probably enjoy it a bit more.



"I remember when I was a kid seeing lads break through from the Academy and I think the fans have a little bit of a soft spot for that because they know we're just normal people from the area. I hope they do see the hard work I've had to put in throughout the years to get to where I am."

As a Fox through and through, Dewsbury-Hall knows as well as anyone the impact the Football Club can have on the local community.

"It's very important," he asserts. "Since this Club won the Premier League, Leicester is very much a family city now and we have a very good group that are keen to engage with the community.



"A lot of young people look up to us as role models, so we have to be professional and help the community as much as we can. I think back to when I was a kid and I know that meeting a player would really motivate me and make me the happiest kid in the world.

"I go and do things back in my hometown and it's nice to give back because you don't always realise how much it will mean to people. Little things can make the biggest impact, so as long as you continue to stay humble and grounded, you're not going to go far wrong."

Alongside his commitment to interacting with the local people, Dewsbury-Hall has also been putting smiles on the faces of the Leicester faithful primarily for his performances on the pitch this season.

Producing match-winning goals and decisive assists, the creative left-footer has emerged as one of the Championship's top talents ever since his dramatic opening day double overturned a deficit against Midlands rivals Coventry City.

"I'm happy with the way I've started the season," he insists. "There's still a lot more to come from me, but the fact I've been contributing to the team and helping us win games and play well is what I want to do as a player in my position.

"Moments like that when you score a winner at the King Power, that's what you live for and want to strive for.

"I wouldn't say it's something I'm necessarily thinking about, but of course, I want to be considered as one of the top players in the division because I believe in my own ability. All I can do is go out on the pitch week in week out and show that.

"It's nice to hear people say good things about you but you're only as good as your last game and you have to keep proving yourself on the pitch, so that's where my focus is."

His immense potential has been unlocked by Italian boss Maresca, who has quickly put his stamp on the team since departing from treble winners Manchester City in June after spending a year as one of Pep Guardiola's assistant managers.

"I've been mightily impressed with him since he's come into the Football Club," Dewsbury-Hall adds. "From day one, he sat us down and said how he wants us to play, his style and what he wants to implement – not just on the pitch, but also the culture of the Club off it as well.

"He's so intelligent. He makes you think about football in a different way and there were even times in pre-season where us lads almost felt a bit stupid because he'd say things that we didn't really see or understand at the time – it all seems so simple now.



"IT'S NICE TO HEAR PEOPLE SAY GOOD THINGS ABOUT YOU BUT YOU'RE ONLY AS GOOD AS YOUR LAST GAME AND YOU HAVE TO KEEP PROVING YOURSELF ON THE PITCH, SO THAT'S WHERE MY FOCUS IS."

"He's a very passionate guy and I'm also very passionate about football, so we get along really well. I've had chats with him one-on-one about my game and he's helping to improve me in a lot of different ways.

"He played at the top level and he's worked under top managers, so his pedigree is very high and whenever he says something, you make sure to listen. He's only been here a couple of months, but he's already made a great impact, so it's quite exciting to think what he can do in the future."

Having steadily emerged from the shadows to take centre stage at his boyhood Club, Dewsbury-Hall is relishing his starring role.

And if his early season form is anything to go by, he possesses all the attributes and characteristics to handle the demands of a career under the bright lights. ●



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'Building Foundations' Football Fund

Communities across the country will benefit from £6 million of vital funding after the EFL and its title partner, Sky Bet, unveiled the Building Foundations Fund in November, breathing new life into community projects throughout England and Wales.

Launching at Barnsley FC's Oakwell Stadium, the Building Foundations Fund represents the largest multi-year sponsor-backed fund dedicated solely to community activity and will give the 72 EFL Clubs a chance to bid for grants of up to £100,000 to invest in ongoing programmes or to develop new initiatives.

From the current 2023/24 season, Sky Bet will invest £1 million per year into the Fund. A panel of industry experts, including Sky Bet ambassador Jeff Stelling, will select the winning bids across a range of categories, such as improving local sporting facilities or promoting the physical and social benefits of the game.

To mark the start of the Building Foundations Fund, Club Community Organisations (CCOs) at each EFL Club will have the opportunity to spend an initial £10,000 grant.

Former Leicester City, Liverpool and England star Emile Heskey joined EFL Chair Rick Parry and Sky Bet Managing Director Dan Colton at Barnsley's 3G pitch to meet participants from its walking football programme, an existing community scheme for Over-35s that will benefit from the 2023/24 funding.



Parry, says: "Unrestricted funding for community activity on this scale is hard to find and presents an exciting opportunity for EFL Clubs to further enhance the impact in the areas they are located.

"We are extremely grateful to Sky Bet for its ongoing support to the professional game in this country and this new investment via the Building Foundations Fund will create a long-lasting legacy for the EFL and Sky Bet partnership."

Jeff Stelling, voted Sports Broadcaster of the Year for five years when presenting Sky Sports' Soccer Saturday, adds: "Everybody knows my love of the English Football League. I also know all too well how lower league Clubs and the communities around them struggle for financial support.

"I'm delighted to play a part in the Building Foundations Fund and I truly believe it presents a great opportunity to make a real difference."

The EFL and Sky Bet agreed a record extension earlier this year that saw the sports betting brand continue as the League's title partner until the end of the 2028/29 campaign. The commitment to a community fund was an integral part of the extension agreement.

First agreed in 2013, the partnership represents one of the longest and most significant in professional sport. The partnership is built around safer gambling and delivering joint objectives in a socially responsible way.

Colton, Sky Bet Managing Director, says: "We're incredibly proud of our long-standing partnership with the EFL – it's a relationship that has gone from strength to strength over the past decade and we wanted to raise the bar further still with the Building Foundations Fund.

"The Fund is a core pillar of our new agreement with the EFL and we're very excited to see the impact the £6 million will have on such important projects across England and Wales."



MANAGER INTERVIEW | **PETE WILD**

WILDEST DREAMS

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

"ONE THING I WANT TO TRY AND BE IS ME; I DON'T WANT TO BE ANYBODY ELSE," AFFIRMS BARROW AFC MANAGER PETE WILD.

The 39-year-old has been called "a bit whacky" at times and admits his character even draws chuckles from his own players, but it's befitting of his self-made 'Roy of the Rovers' story which has seen him go from pub landlord to football manager in the last two decades.

"I find it very difficult when people know who I am," he admits. "I was just one of the lads who used to go down to the footy and watch from the stands. A lot of the players we come up against and have in our team, I used to watch and have an opinion on as a football fan!"

Much of his upbringing took place in pubs, with Wild's parents owning a handful of establishments, where the Bluebirds boss grew up kicking a ball around in the car park with the local punters. He even gained his landlord licence while balancing a number of other jobs on the side before embarking on a career in coaching.

"When I left school, I went to be an apprentice mechanic with our next-door neighbour, who was manager of a garage," Wild recalls. "I remember going to work for a steel company one summer and I also worked for a fireplace company. I went cutting trees down for a living and laying footpaths, and I worked for the tree surgeon for quite some time.

"At that time, with the family business, my dad was trying to scale down what he was doing, so I decided to help him out running the pubs, so I was coaching during the day and running the pubs in the evening."

/theEFL /EFL /efl



WILDEST DREAMS

"When it's all over – because there will be a day when football is all over – I came from a different world, and I've got no worries or qualms about going back to that life. It keeps you quite grounded and attune to normal life."

After putting his ambition of being a professional footballer aside in his late teens, Wild pursued his coaching badges earlier than most, aged 18.

A range of different roles have afforded him a well-rounded experience, but his position as manager of the England Amputees national football team between 2012 and 2015 was a particularly significant learning curve.

It was Wild's current assistant manager at Barrow, Adam Temple, who was stepping down from the position when he put a call in to his friend to notify him of the opening.

Wild says: "I went to 10 countries in three years; I did two World Cups travelling the world coaching football. I was working with a group of people who were so determined and driven to succeed. There was that sense of a higher purpose even before we got to tournaments.

"There were lots of inspiring stories. We had Jamie Tregaskiss, who was a phenomenal player. He was in Manchester City's Academy before he had an accident in the playground and unfortunately, it turned cancerous and he had to have his leg removed at 15."

Wild's first taste of football management came with his hometown team, Oldham Athletic, adopting a caretaker role in Sky Bet League Two, 28 years to the day that he attended his first game as a fan with his dad on New Year's Day in 1991.

He went on to take up his first permanent position with FC Halifax Town in the National League, where he spent three years. And having been linked with a number of vacancies at EFL Clubs during his time in West Yorkshire, he finally departed to become Barrow boss in May 2022.

"I'm always very conscious that I'm still very young and I need to work," Wild continues. "I can't be out of work, so it was really important that I picked the right role.

"I was very lucky to be linked with a lot of jobs in that last year at Halifax, but I always wanted something that was an incremental rise; I didn't want to shoot right up and shoot right back down again. I was really cautious in the move I made.

"I've been good at working for Clubs who want a long-term project, who have maybe lost their way and need to find direction again. I loved the fact they had three local owners who were putting money into the town. Culturally and professionally, I felt it was a good fit and over these last 18 months, that's been proven."

Since his arrival in LA14, Wild's mission has not only been to give the team a boost on the field, but to rebuild the community ties between the Club and the town itself. Now, every Friday after training in Manchester, he sends members of his squad to visit local schools and engage with the next generation of Bluebirds supporters.

He remembers: "When I got the job, I went around the town and asked people what they thought the Club was missing. A massive part of it was there was no connection with the first team.

"We had Elliot Newby, who is from Barrow, go and speak in his school he went to a couple of weeks ago. The players are telling me when they go in the schools now that they can't believe how many kids know their names.

"We're in the entertainment industry and part of entertaining people is making sure they feel wanted, welcome and part of the process."

Back in 2019/20, the Bluebirds won promotion back to the EFL following a 48-year absence under former manager Ian Evatt. After narrowly avoiding the drop in their first two terms back in League Two, with six different managers coming in and out of the door, Wild's biggest priority was to stabilise.

In his first season in charge last year, Barrow posted an impressive ninth place league finish under Wild's tutelage. This season, they want to build upon that and despite perhaps being unlikely promotion candidates from the outset, Wild's men are very much competing.

He says: "When we came in, it was, 'please keep us in the EFL'. The strategy meeting now is, 'can we make Barrow at the very least a sustainable top 10 League Two Club?'

"It's a strong, solid Club behind the scenes which allows us to be a better version of ourselves on the pitch. Speaking to the fans now, everybody always wants to progress, and they have every right to dream." ■















[BEHIND THE SCENES]

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Club Photographer IN FOCUS

Joe Dent

PETERBOROUGH UNITED



Like many working in the sport, Peterborough United's Club photographer, Joe Dent, had aspirations to become a professional footballer as a child, but settled for the next best thing.

Always with a disposable camera to hand, it was his school form tutor – who, incidentally, happened to be married to the local sports reporter – that pointed him towards photography and the idea of reaching out to the Cambridgeshire Club for work experience.

He admits: "From my first match at Peterborough, I said, 'this is what I want to do for the rest of my life'. I started off as a volunteer when I was 17 at the time. I mixed it with working part-time in a local theatre. They offered me a part-time job in the ticket office, so during the week, it was a way of earning a bit of money.

"Eventually, as the Club got promoted to the Championship and had some success, the Club found real value in the photography and I got offered a full-time job purely as a Club photographer."

A teenage Dent photographed his first Posh game back in November 2004 when Peterborough's reserves took on Aldershot Town's reserve team. Four promotions and an EFL Trophy triumph later, next season marks his 20th year with the Club.

As with everything, the job has had its ups and downs.

He laughs: "The worst bits are weather and internet connection! With every job, you have to take the good days and know you're going to have some rainy, cold days.

"The perks are capturing moments in history. In 100 years' time, people will look back at the pictures I've taken and I'm really proud of that."

Aside from dabbling in landscapes and portraits during his time at college, it's always been football for Dent, until a certain world heavyweight champion dropped in at London Road in the summer of 2010 when Posh hosted West Ham United in a pre-season friendly.

"Mike Tyson was in the country doing a tour of arenas to speak about his career," Dent recalls. "He was doing one in Peterborough and the Club had a phone call during the day to say they'd like to bring him to the match. Nobody really believed it until he actually turned up with his entourage.

"He had his own photographer with him and he said, 'will you be taking pictures of Mike out on the pitch?' He said, 'I'm going to have to introduce you to him because in America the paparazzi follow him and jump out in front of him and he might lash out at you'. I thought, 'I don't want to get punched by Mike Tyson'!"

During his time with the Club, Dent witnessed Peterborough win back-to-back promotions from League Two to the Championship between 2007 and 2009, while his first trip to Wembley came almost a decade ago in the 2014 EFL Trophy Final against Chesterfield.

Clockwise:

Ivan Toney celebrates to the camera after scoring, September 2019.

The trophy lift at Wembley Stadium after winning the EFL Trophy in 2014.

The champagne moment for Peterborough United after winning the Play-Offs at Old Trafford, May 2011.

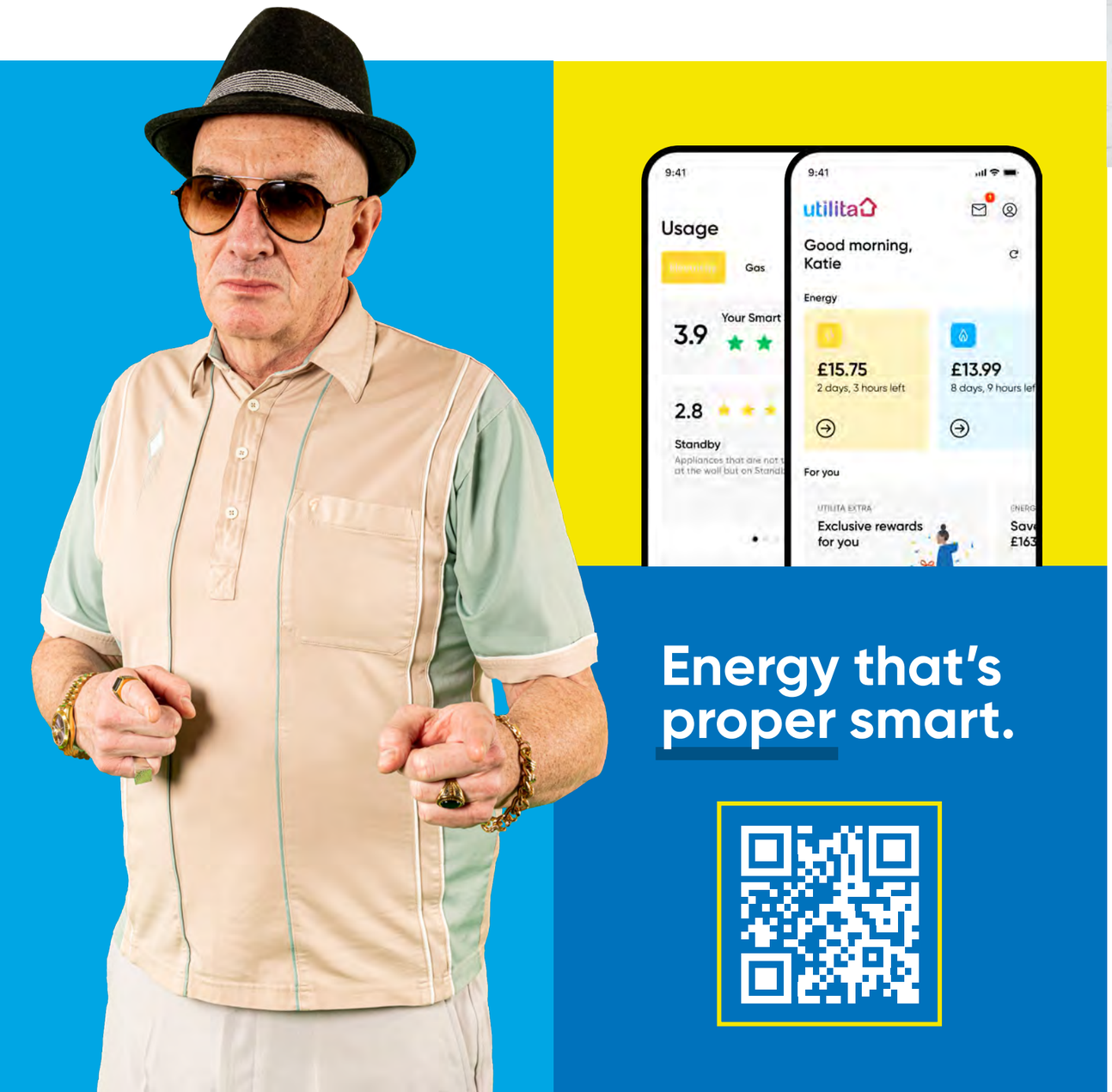
Changing room celebrations at Wembley after the EFL Trophy success in 2014.

Boxing legend Mike Tyson makes a surprise visit to Peterborough United, July 2010.

Tommy Rowe celebrates a last-minute winner against Leyton Orient, February 2014.

SAVE LIKE DAVE

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Snow covers the London Road pitch during a match against Walsall, February 2018.

The most memorable occasion was a visit to Old Trafford in 2011 when Posh beat Huddersfield Town in the League One Play-Off Final as Darren Ferguson's men tasted victory on his dad's home turf, while the Club most recently celebrated success in 2020/21 when they finished as League One runners-up during a COVID-disrupted campaign.

"The last promotion, I had the camera snatched off me and they said, 'come on, it's about time you had a picture with the trophy'," he smiles. "I always say that's the reason I became a photographer – so I didn't have to be in the pictures!"

Although he has seen managers and players come and go, building relationships is an important part of his job, having worked with Posh's current boss across three separate stints in the dugout.

Dent continues: "I've worked with Darren Ferguson for a long time now. Grant McCann was great as well because I worked with him as a player at the Club first, then he was a youth coach and went on to become manager.

"Steve Evans was a great manager to work with from our point of view. If the team were on a good run, he'd encourage lots of happy, smiley faces in pictures and he'd send a message to say, 'we're going to do something a bit different in training today that might make good pictures'.

"Likewise, if we were on a bad spell of results, he would make sure the images were of the players focusing and working hard. It's all about perception."

Away from the pitch, Dent and his trusty camera serve a number of the Club's different departments – from the media team to the commercial team.

Still on a learning journey himself, Dent previously spent time with Arsenal to compare notes with the Gunners' photography team, and in the new media age, his industry is one that is constantly changing.

"The way the Club uses photography has evolved," he notes. "The demand for pictures is so much quicker now. When I first started, there was no social media. It would be a case of one picture for the match report for the website and maybe three or four pictures in the following matchday programme.

"Now, it's all instant. The players are always straight on at me too, sometimes within minutes of full-time!"

One of his favourite photos was snapped in February 2018 when Peterborough hosted Walsall before the game almost fell to the weather when wintery conditions hit. At the risk of the fixture being abandoned, the home side picked up their shovels to clear the snow, with Posh running out 2-1 winners in the end.

"I'm always trying to look for pictures that are away from your typical action shot where you've got two players tackling for a ball," he states.

"Before kick-off, it was a normal matchday. It started snowing and it just got thicker. I got a great shot from when I went up into the stand and you can see the pitch is covered in the snow. We were winning at the time and the referee stopped the game, and Peterborough players were sweeping the lines. I love that picture."

Dent, who has become part of the fabric of Peterborough United, is hoping to be behind the lens for more success to come for the Club he has grown to love. ■





MEET THE TEAM

Jessica Telford

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

In the summer of 2021, the EFL determined that a resource should be introduced to develop a smarter, more consistent business-wide approach to the delivery of its email communication and information sharing with Clubs.

The approach aimed to enhance the level of quality and consistency of messaging sent from the EFL's various departments to Clubs, addressing frequency and scheduling issues, particularly at busy periods in the season.

Having been recruited as the League's first Internal Communications Manager just over two years ago, Jessica Telford has overseen a significant overhaul in this area.

Here, she discusses the developments made since taking on the role...

When I first took up the position of Internal Communications Manager in October 2021, the objective was clear – provide a first-class level of service for the EFL's Member Clubs by supporting and developing internal business communications processes and enhancing levels of proactive engagement.

Day to day, that means coordinating and managing all daily communications out of the business to the League's Member Clubs, with ultimate responsibility for the scheduling and consistency of the look and feel/tone of our message.

In the two years I've been in post, the impact has been largely successful, with structured communication, enhanced protocols and consistency in the EFL's messaging and style. As many of us know, the game changes quickly and subsequently, communications have to be adapted and they need to be agile. It's a continually developing role and in an age where many of us work online and from home, solid communication has become more important than ever.

Clubs receive emails from various departments across the EFL on a vast number of topics, which ultimately make up the operational and non-operational elements of the game. Week-to-week, a number of communications requests from across the business will come in for me to ultimately manage and issue to Clubs as per the Club communications schedule.

The EFL acknowledges the pressures faced by Clubs throughout the season, in an increasingly busy fixture schedule. To ease the incoming of information, the League operates its communications process via a schedule which looks to eliminate Friday emails where possible. Information is instead sent to Clubs from 9am to 5pm throughout the week, but no later than 12 noon on a midweek matchday. Communications will only be sent to Clubs at the weekend if they are business critical. The schedule is determined by the number of communications requested each week, who at Clubs will receive the information and how time sensitive the information is. We operate similar to that of a calendar, where communications are entered as individual 'events' - there can be movement to the schedule and alterations to the detail but this method allows us to look at the week's communications holistically.

Naturally, there are pressure periods throughout the calendar year, where information sharing is at its highest. As you'd imagine, June and July can be a particularly busy time for both the League and its Clubs, as we prepare for the start of another thrilling campaign. Paired with the summer transfer window, it's easy to see how communications peak around this time of year.

Of course, there are times when the schedule is disrupted through matters that are out of our control, such as a global pandemic, the passing of Her Majesty the Queen, or war and conflict. We live in a society that, at times, expects football to exert cultural influence and opinion on matters outside of the game and managing those very reactive communications with operational matchday matters can be difficult, but the League continues to be grateful for the cooperation of its 72 Member Clubs.

Each of our Clubs operate entirely individually, with varying structures and roles – it really is true that one size does not fit all. You find, particularly in Leagues One and Two, that there are some Club staff wearing a number of different hats,



> The ultimate objective is to offer the highest standard of service and administration to the Clubs within the EFL, and enhance and protect the reputation of the EFL and its competitions, both on and off the pitch.

with a multitude of responsibilities and ultimately sitting across a range of the League's communication distribution lists.

Trying to strike a balance between keeping Clubs informed and not bombarding them with updates can be challenging and there are a number of protocols we have introduced to try to ensure we're supporting Clubs without adding additional pressure.

Prior to the Internal Communication resource, departments at the EFL were responsible for issuing their own updates to Clubs and while the system wasn't necessarily broken, we were able to identify a number of tweaks that would enhance the way we communicated with our Clubs.

Previously, Clubs might have received three different emails from three different departments at the EFL, all within the same hour. Now, we opt to stagger our communications to allow sufficient time for Club staff to action as required.

During the pandemic, we introduced a Club Weekly Update to keep Clubs abreast of all the latest developments, and while the content is much different now to a few years ago, Clubs have indicated that this is still a really useful communications channel. Elsewhere, the Portal continues to be another invaluable platform for housing guidance and documents, particularly the circulars, which only a few years ago were still being sent out as letters.

The ultimate objective is to offer the highest standard of service and administration to the Clubs within the EFL, and enhance and protect the reputation of the EFL and its competitions, both on and off the pitch.

In the short-term, I'm working on an internal communications channel for EFL employees which will act as both a repository and information sharing tool to assist individuals in their roles, as well as providing a social and engaging space for employees to learn more about one another. Long-term, I'd like to hear that Clubs have seen an overwhelming improvement in the way that the EFL shares information and communicates with them.

I'm always looking at ways we can improve our service to Clubs and will always make myself available to those who might like to offer feedback on the EFL's communication process. If any Club would like to get in touch to raise their views, they can contact me via **jtelford@efl.com**.

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Smart Cost of Living Support

IN ENGLAND AND WALES, 90% OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH THE LOWEST AVERAGE NET ANNUAL INCOMES LIVE WITHIN 10 MILES OF AN EFL CLUB AND THEIR COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS.

That makes the EFL network best placed to support the most vulnerable in society, especially as the population navigates through a cost-of-living crisis. One such partnership and programme is reaching tens of thousands in a 'smart' way!



Since 2021, Smart Energy GB has teamed up with the EFL and EFL Trust, providing a national platform to promote the benefits of smart meters to football supporters going through the turnstiles and those in the community who engage with the Club Community Organisations (CCOs).

Smart meters* are not only valuable when they are installed in homes to help keep track of energy use, but are crucial to upgrading Britain's energy system, playing a key role in helping the transition to more environmentally friendly and sustainable energy sources, such as wind and solar.

Phillippa Brown, Deputy Director of Special Audiences at Smart Energy GB, says: "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."

From Holiday and Food Activity Programme activities that engage with low-income families to various social projects for older members of communities, CCOs have been hosting dedicated cost-of-living support sessions, where the benefits of smart meters have been showcased.



Demonstrations of the in-home displays that come with a smart meter from energy suppliers have been shown at community events and activities, including at matchday Fan Zones, walking football sessions and community stalls.

Cathy Abraham, Chief Executive Officer at the EFL Trust, adds: "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 is helping people make informed decisions about the use of their energy."

*Eligibility may vary.



Making Matchdays SAFE

WORDS // JACK WYLIE

An area where the EFL and its Clubs continue to make huge strides, the EFL is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children and adults at risk. The launch of a new safeguarding strategy in 2022 saw the EFL commit to evolving safeguarding standards and practices as the world continues to change, as well as be leaders in the field.

Delivered through the enhancement of skills and regular training of staff at all levels, education remains the most important aspect of delivery, highlighting the importance of Clubs having the appropriate level of information and knowledge to enable to them to identify threats and protect people, whatever the circumstances moving forward.

With a matchday event being a core, high-profile activity delivered on a weekly basis by every Club in the EFL, each Club has the responsibility to ensure that the event is a safe and enjoyable experience for all involved, whether that is in the capacity of a spectator, player, employee or independent service provider.

So how do Clubs ensure they are safe for all those that attend?

Irrespective of the different approaches that exist between Clubs, the core responsibilities and principal objective remains the same in that every child and adult at risk who attends the matchday event, in any capacity, should be safeguarded.

In order to embed a culture for all Clubs to follow, the EFL's Safeguarding team launched a guide to safeguarding on matchdays in May, providing practical information on how Clubs might prepare for, manage and respond to the safeguarding considerations of children and adults at risk when hosting a fixture.

Sunderland AFC Academy Safeguarding Officer, Darren McCall, joined the Club ahead of the new campaign and was tasked with strengthening safeguarding practice at the Stadium of Light, using the guide as a source of reference.

"We want every single supporter who comes to a matchday or an event to feel safe and be safe," he says. "We want the individuals to feel that in the event of something going wrong, we would be able to act on it and look after them.

"It's really important that we have these guidelines because it gives us as a Club a clear vision of what we should be doing, and reassures the public that come into the stadium that they're going to be protected."

Recommendations in the guidance include the need for strategic and tactical planning, the importance of recording all safeguarding matters, irrespective of the perceived level of seriousness, and encouraging investment in a member of staff to undertake the role of Dedicated Safeguarding Officer/Coordinator for stadium operations.

Additionally, there is detailed information regarding the recruitment and deployment of stewards, safeguarding the delivery of the mascot and ball retrieval operation, and establishing a bespoke facility to accommodate young spectators who have a sensory impairment, as well as the provision of childcare for a period before, during and after the match solely for the children of family and friends of the players.

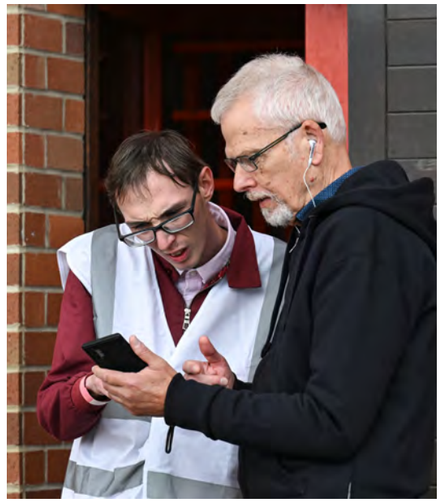
Meanwhile, the appointment of Matchday Safeguarding Champions has increased the level of practical support that can be provided by Clubs around their stadium.

"We've currently got five Matchday Safeguarding Champions, who work under the Safeguarding Lead on a matchday," McCall adds. "We've tried to pick individuals who have an understanding of safeguarding while having a stewarding background.

"For example, we've just recruited someone who'd spent 25 years working as a teacher in an all-boys school, so has a wealth of experience in dealing with under-18 individuals.

"The Champions will respond to any safeguarding issues that happen, whether that be from somebody elderly struggling to get to their seat or if we're having to eject youths for misbehaviour and need to ensure we're following the safeguarding procedures.







"They also support the police with their searching of the away fans on entry to the ground, especially with the under-18s that are coming in, as well as looking after any lost children and trying to relocate them with their parents, and supporting any vulnerable adults with anything they might need.

"The impact on the Club has been phenomenal. The Safety Officer and Deputy Safety Officer have been overwhelmed with the additional support and the change in behaviours that we've noticed. We're not ejecting as many youths now and having that safeguarding presence on a matchday has definitely contributed to that. It seems to be working really well and it can only get better moving forward."

Best practice is constantly evolving in safeguarding and Sunderland, like many Clubs across the EFL, have plans in place to further improve their measures.

"Our focus is just to make things better and engage with the fans, because it's their Club," McCall explains. "We intend to train our safeguarding stewards in different areas, with things like dementia training, and we're also looking to make the disability liaison group bigger, so we can increase engagement with our disabled supporters.

"We're engaging with our youth element as well to find out what we can do to make their matchday experience better and how we can look after them."

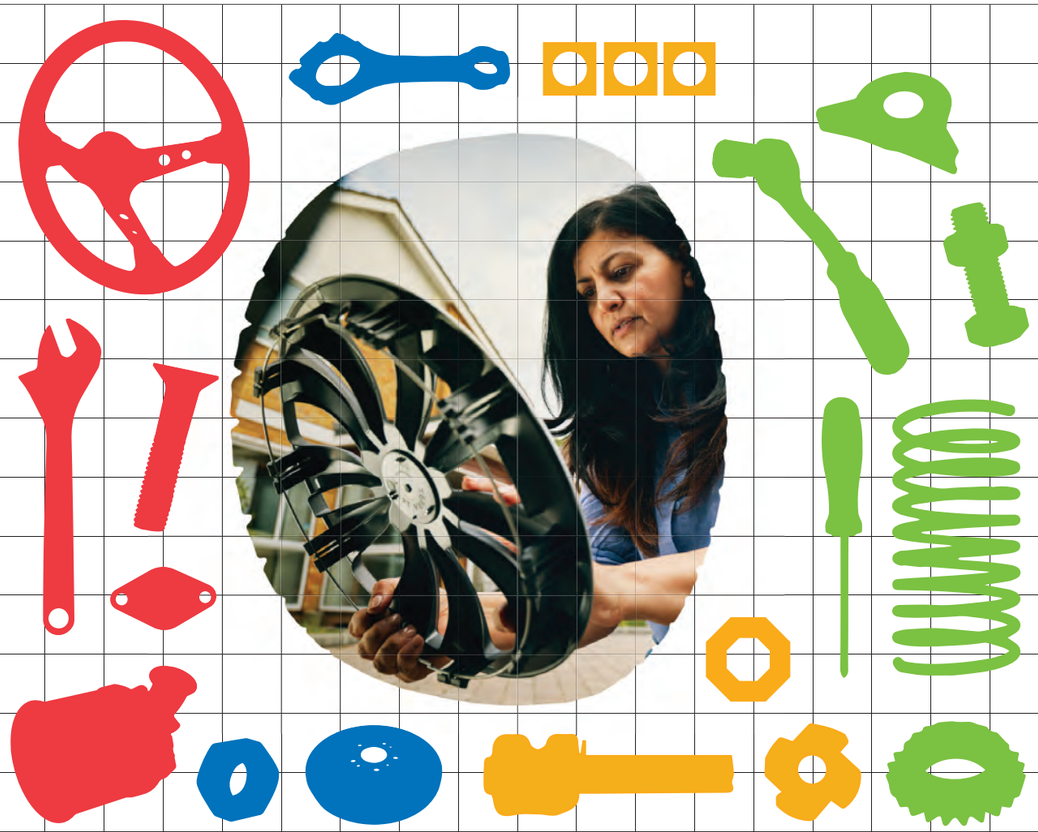
While the Clubs are rivals on the pitch, the EFL's safeguarding culture is a collaborative approach, with support provided across the network.

"I've only been in post for three and a half months, but one thing I have noticed within safeguarding is that every Club I've gone to, their support has been fantastic," says McCall.

"There's no hiding things away when it comes to safeguarding. Everyone's been fabulous with sharing policies, procedures, ideas, good and bad practices.

"The support we're getting from the EFL is really good as well – Alex Richards, Helen Smith and Sarah Boyer have been amazing. It's really nice to know they're on the other end of the phone if we need them."

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Going Green

WORDS // AARON GALES

It was watching an episode of Blue Planet 2 that set Bristol City's Head of Sustainability and Climate Change, Peter Smith, on the path that would lead to the Club becoming the second EFL team to achieve GreenCode accreditation.

It was that moment in 2018 which sparked an idea that would evolve into Project Whitebeam, a joint initiative between Bristol City, Bristol Bears, Bristol Flyers, Ashton Gate Stadium and Bristol Sport to recognise, measure and mitigate their impact on the environment.

Bristol City now join Forest Green Rovers, widely recognised as the greenest Football Club, not just in England, but across the world, as one of two EFL Green Clubs with GreenCode accreditation.

Green Clubs is the EFL's environmental sustainability initiative, which was established in 2021, with Clubs invited to take part on a voluntary basis. Reflecting the appetite to make a real difference among football, the Green Clubs scheme currently has 54 members – 51 Clubs and 3 Club Community Organisations – signed up to the scheme.

The programme offers an online resource hub for Clubs to access, with training opportunities and webinars and all participating Clubs receive bespoke one-to-one consultancy sessions from GreenCode to help them improve their environmental performance.

Achieving GreenCode accreditation is a challenging process, but Smith believes it is very attainable and cites Forest Green Rovers as a blueprint for other Clubs to follow.

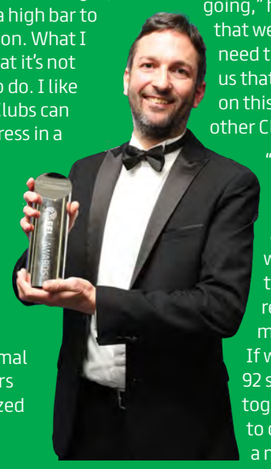
"It's a very thorough process and it's a very high bar but I think that's right," he says. "It should be a high bar to get the full accreditation. What I would say though is that it's not impossible for Clubs to do. I like to think we've shown Clubs can make quite rapid progress in a short period of time.

"What Forest Green are doing is very ambitious but much of what they do is completely achievable by most Clubs. They are a normal Club, with normal fans and normal players and they have trailblazed and paved the way for others to follow."

Alongside their GreenCode accreditation, Bristol City has received further recognition for their environmental efforts, winning EFL Green Club of the Year in 2023 and the Football Supporters' Association Climate Action Award and were ranked as the Championship's most sustainable Club by Sport Positive.

Smith is understandably proud of their achievements while acknowledging that there is far more for his Club, football and the wider sporting landscape to achieve:

"It lights the fire under our feet to keep going," he adds. "We are fully aware that we still have things that we need to improve but it's great for us that we are one of the leaders on this now and it's also great that other Clubs are following suit.



"We don't want to be one of a small number of Clubs, charging out ahead of others, we want everybody to be in the pack because that's realistically what's going to make the most difference. If we have 92 Clubs and 92 sets of fanbases pulling together and inspiring sport to change on this, it will make a much bigger impact."

EFL | Elms

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MILLWALL FOOTBALL CLUB
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BARNSLEY FC
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1883
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CARLISLE UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB
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