



# BEN BRERETTON

CHAMPIONSHIP APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR

# the 11



**The latest eleven talented teenagers to make the grade in LFE's March line-up, as voted by our team of Regional Officers, were:**

- Jake Turner** Bolton Wanderers
- Leon Davies** Cambridge United
- Mark Harris** Cardiff City
- Joe Bateman** Derby County
- Kenton Richardson** Hartlepool United
- Callum Nicell** Leeds United
- Luke Jordan** Morecambe
- Canice Carroll** Oxford United
- Callum Roberts** Preston North End
- Nathan Bishop** Southend United
- Leo Smith** Wrexham

*Nominations are made four times each season by LFE's regional officers and the winners all receive a certificate, cheque for £50 and coverage on the LFE website.*

## LFE Club Meetings

**LFE's annual Club Meetings are set to take place at Oxford, Leicester and Huddersfield.**

The events are designed to help clubs share best practice and deliver updates on the apprenticeship in sporting excellence programme. Clubs can send up to four delegates on the day, for registration and more information please visit LFE's website.

	<b>TUESDAY 25 APRIL 2017</b> Oxford United FC
	<b>WEDNESDAY 26 APRIL 2017</b> Leicester City FC
	<b>THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2017</b> Huddersfield Town FC

## Pass4Soccer

**Pass4Soccer, LFE's official partner when it comes to helping players earn soccer scholarships with Colleges and Universities in The USA is hosting a trial game for players in May.**

The event which will take place on Friday 5 May at Sutton Coldfield Town FC. It is open to those who have come through LFE's apprenticeship programme and will be attended by scores of University soccer coaches keen to recruit for their squads for next season.

**For more information about the opportunity and to register please call Pass4Soccer on 0191 229 5263 or visit [www.pass4soccer.com](http://www.pass4soccer.com).**

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LFE is supported by:



## Sky Sports zoom in on MFT



BY **STEVEN SUTCLIFFE**

**LFE's My Future Today programme drew to a conclusion for 2016-17 in front of the Sky Sports cameras at the Macron Stadium in March with players from Bolton Wanderers and Wigan Athletic playing the supporting cast.**

Over 30 clubs and in excess of 500 Under-18 players have taken part in the workshops which tackle the concept of athlete identity and provides players with insight to their personality profiles as well as encouraging them to develop and recognise all their skills and interests.

Bolton's Iranian striker Alex Samizadeh, said: "Obviously I don't know what is going to happen [in the future] but this helps you to build confidence for the future and understand what you need to do to be successful in life.

Wigan Goalkeeper Theo Roberts echoed those sentiments. "The way it was presented to us was really refreshing with the actors and things like that and I think that is important.

"It helped the message get across and helps us all understand why it is important to develop ourselves as people and not just think solely of football."

The sessions which also help players understand their employability skills and increase awareness of dual careers and opportunities away from football, were supported by The Dame Kelly Holmes Trust and theatre group AFTA Thought.

League Football Education, project manager Dan Jolley, said: "These events focussed on personal development and providing an opportunity for apprentices to think about their own personality, skills and interests. It is a holistic approach to support them in becoming rounded individuals. In turn that delivers on and off the pitch benefits. We want them to understand their own identity and to realise that this can help them as players but that they are also more than just young footballers.

Chris McCready, a former professional footballer who now works for the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust, added: "This project addresses the personal development of young players through interactive workshops, activities and drama. We've challenged players to think about themselves as more than just a footballer and want them to think about themselves in broader terms.

"We believe that interests, developmental activities and better relationships will deliver better separation from football and allow them to perform, maintain their emotional well-being and smooth their transition inside or outside the game."

## Assessment Trials 2017

LFE's annual Assessment Trials offers players the chance to show case their talents in front of an army of scouts from professional clubs, non-league and from Universities in the UK and abroad.

The events, which are open to those who are coming towards the end of their apprenticeship or the end of a first professional contact (under 19 year), aim to help players find a route back into the game at an appropriate level.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT**

[www.lfe.org.uk/trials2017](http://www.lfe.org.uk/trials2017)



**THURSDAY 27 APRIL 2017**  
Bradford City FC, Valley Parade



**TUESDAY 2 MAY 2017**  
Woking FC, The Laithwaite Community Stadium



**WEDNESDAY 3 MAY 2017**  
Port Vale FC, Vale Park



**THURSDAY 4 MAY 2017**  
Nuneaton Town FC, GV's Liberty Way Stadium



# ERASMUS+ Player Placements

Former Accrington Stanley apprentice Nathan Hudson has urged more current apprentices to consider Sweden as an option if things don't work out in England.

Sixteen former apprentices are currently out in Sweden on LFE's Player Placement programme and recent statistics have shown that at least 50% of players are offered professional deals at the end of their placement period.

Hudson, who admitted that he had started to "lose hope" of making a career in football believes that those figures represent a real opportunity of continuing the dream. Now in his third season in Scandinavia, he said:

"When I left Accrington I joined Padiham FC and started to lose hope of becoming a footballer but LFE's programme changed everything for me.

"It gave me hope and joining BK Sport was the best decision I ever made, it showed me how amazing living in Sweden was and how suited I am to playing out here. I was able to make a good impression and Division 3 side Kiruna FF came calling.

"I finished last season with them and because I've done well secured a contract with Soderhamns FF in Division 2 this year. It's a step-up and great to hear people saying good things about me as a player. One thing I learnt from my apprenticeship is that life isn't always going to go your way but sometimes if you keep believing and work hard the chances will come. Then you have to take them."



## THE PLAYERS ON PLACEMENT

**DORY YATES**  
(PORTSMOUTH) YTTERHOGDALS

**KELLAND ABSALOM**  
(WIGAN ATHLETIC) YTTERHOGDALS

**NICHOLAS KENNEDY**  
(YORK CITY) BODENS BK

**BRANDON GRANT**  
(EXETER CITY) BODENS BK

**EDJIDJA MBUNGA**  
(BIRMINGHAM CITY) IFK OSTERSUND

**JORDAN POTTER**  
(BIRMINGHAM CITY) IFK OSTERSUND

**KEVIN MBUTI**  
(DONCASTER ROVERS) IFK OSTERSUND

**ALEXANDER MCBURNIE**  
(BRADFORD CITY) YTTERHOGDALS

**RAKIM NEWTON**  
(WREXHAM) GOTTNE

**JORDAN HANCOX**  
(FLEETWOOD TOWN) GOTTNE

**REECE AIREY**  
(WREXHAM) HEDEN IF

**MICHAEL TETTEH**  
(FLEETWOOD TOWN) HEDEN IF

**CALLUM JENNINGS**  
(GRIMSBYTOWN) HEDEN IF

**KARNELL CHAMBERS**  
(CHELTENHAM TOWN) OREBRO SYRIANSKA IF

**RAEKWON SMITH**  
(WALSALL) OREBRO SYRIANSKA IF

**ELVIS MENAYESE**  
(CARDIFF CITY) ESKILTUNA CITY FK

## Education Support Fund

BY JACK WYLIE

Norwich City's Head of Education & Welfare, Mark Hallam, has hailed the impact of LFE's Education Support Fund (ESF) in enhancing and supporting the education of the club's apprentices.

The ESF has operated for a number of years and allowed clubs to improve their delivery of education and the apprenticeship programme and Hallam has taken advantage of that support this term by utilising the fund to pay for a new IT and learning suite.

Hallam said: "We've been able to put a great resource in place by accessing this money from LFE and reinvesting what we've drawn down into supporting education at the football club.

"We had discussions with our regional officer Darren Bloodworth and he supported me in coming up with the idea to create a new IT and learning suite that would help the apprentices in completing their education courses and provide a valuable club resource."

Clubs have historically used the fund to support enhancements to learning in a wide range of areas, purchasing equipment like Apple MacBooks, iPads, microphones, video cameras, video analysis software, nutrition and cooking classes and heart rate monitors.

"The new classroom now has an excellent wifi signal which was a problem previously, particularly when trying to upload work to the Education Management System," Hallam added.

"The computer suite has 10 new laptops with Microsoft software licenses. They are networked, meaning faster internet connection when completing education work or watching their replay analysis clips.

"Also, the boys each have access to a laptop in all the sessions rather than sharing, which had occasionally happened previously.

"I will definitely be looking to make use of the support fund in future seasons as it can only benefit my club and most importantly the players who are here."

Any queries should be directed to Alan Sykes on **01772 326 870** or email: [asykes@lfe.org.uk](mailto:asykes@lfe.org.uk)



# Academy Leagues Round-Up

BY JACK WYLIE

## North East Division

Usual suspects are in control of the North East section as defending champions Mansfield remain ahead of the pack following eight unbeaten matches in succession. Second-placed Oldham lifted themselves into contention with an impressive streak of 10 wins in a row, but that came to an end with a 2-1 defeat to bottom club Lincoln in March.

The gap has since stretched to five points after the Stags prevailed 2-1 in the battle of the top two despite falling behind early on, with striker Jason Law grabbing a brace.

## North West Division

The race for the North West title is heating up, with four teams still in the hunt. Blackpool are in the driving seat, largely thanks to the prolific goalscoring of Republic of Ireland Under-17 international Rowan Roache, who has netted 27 times in all competitions this campaign.

Ciaran Donnelly's side are three points ahead of Burnley, having played a game more. The Clarets were beaten 2-1 by Pool in February, but have responded with six wins in seven since that result. Rochdale and Walsall remain in the mix, sitting seven points adrift with two games in hand on the leaders.

## South Division - Merit League 1

Newport County have sprung a major surprise by leading the pack and remaining the only unbeaten team in the Merit League One. County scraped into the top tier on goal difference having lost four of their last five regular season games, but have accumulated 13 points from a possible 15 thus far.

Rhys Kavanagh and Joe Hunt were on the scoresheet in a 2-1 win against runaway South East Division winners Leyton Orient, who have already lost twice, the same amount they suffered in 22 regular season games as they romped to a 19-point lead.

South West champions Exeter are also struggling, ending March with consecutive defeats to Luton and Southend.

## South Division - Merit League 2

Peterborough masterminded a sensational turnaround in their rise to top spot in the second tier, having finished at the foot of the South East regular season table. Jack Collison's side had failed to win in nine games dating back to mid-November, but have already claimed four wins from six, including a 3-2 success over second-placed Bournemouth, with forward Morgan Penfold on target twice.

AFC Wimbledon are the form team and look well positioned in third - a point behind the leaders - although they have played a game more. At the time of writing, the young Dons had not lost this year in a run dating back 16 games.

## U18 Professional Development League North

Sheffield United are unbeaten this calendar year and wrapped up the title against rivals and closest challengers Sheffield Wednesday with a 2-1 victory. Fittingly, Jordan Hallam was one of the scorers for the Blades and the striker now has 17 to his name this term.

2015-16 winners Nottingham Forest are three points adrift of second-placed Wednesday with one game to spare but have ended the campaign in style with 5-0 and 6-1 wins over Millwall and QPR, respectively.

## U18 Professional Development League South

The Southern section is all to play for heading into the final round of fixtures as Charlton hold a two-point lead, although contenders Coventry have a game in hand. Sky Blues striker Jordan Ponticelli tops the individual scoring charts with 24 goals, including five in a 7-0 win against Cardiff, but Billy-Jay Stedman's 90th minute winner against The Addicks back in January could prove to be the deciding factor in the title race.

## U18 Premier League Tier One

Reading have made an impressive start in Tier One, earning four points from three games to secure second in the table. David Dodds' youngsters twice took the lead in a 2-2 stalemate with Arsenal, before claiming three points against Blackburn after Ben House netted his 15th goal of the season to seal the win.

## U18 Premier League Tier Two

Fulham's Isaac Pearce has notched four goals in as many games to lead the Cottagers to the top of Tier Two, including getting himself on the scoresheet during their 3-0 victory over Everton.

However, Norwich have made a 100 per cent start from their two games. Having dismantled Derby 5-3, David Wright's team then pulled off a sensational comeback from 2-0 down against Middlesbrough, with Kieran Higgs and Alan Fleming scoring in the 89th and 91st minutes before a Devonte Aransibia spot kick three minutes into stoppage time completed the fightback.

## U18 Premier League Tier Three

Wolves are in command in Tier Two after three wins and three clean sheets from as many games. Meanwhile, Brighton & Hove Albion produced a stunning performance to crush West Brom 7-1 after initially falling behind after half an hour. Max Sanders and Issac Hutchinson were both at the double for Ian Buckman's side.



## CHAMPIONSHIP

### LFE Apprentice of the Year The EFL Awards

# Ben Brereton



Nottingham Forest



BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE

Nottingham Forest forward Ben Brereton has admitted that this season has surpassed all expectations, after being crowned the LFE Championship Apprentice of the Year, at the EFL Awards. It has been quite a campaign for the imposing 6ft striker from Stoke-on-Trent who is one of a number of academy graduates making a meaningful contribution on first team affairs at the City Ground.

The teenager, only made his Reds first team bow in January but it did not take him long to hit the headlines, scoring a 90th minute winner against Aston Villa less than a fortnight later.

By early April he had registered 3 goals from thirteen first team outings and started five consecutive games for Forest ahead of his 18th birthday.

The development of his all-round game and moments like his assist for Eric Lichaj, to open the scoring in Forest's victory against promotion hopefuls Huddersfield, has earned the admiration of new Reds manager Mark Warburton, as well as attracted interest from the Premier League, with Arsenal and Liverpool already reported to be monitoring his progress.

"What a performance that was," Warburton enthused.

"He had maturity, quality, desire, awareness and commitment.

"In my opinion, he can go to the very highest level. With his quality, his awareness - the cross he hit for Jamie Ward just before half time was a world class delivery. It was hit with pace and accuracy. It was outstanding. He will only get better."

That rapid progression, which has comprised international recognition with England Under-19s, playing in two European Championship qualifiers last month, saw him just edge out Sheffield Wednesday's George Hirst and Bristol City's Lloyd Kelly, to mark another successful chapter of his story to date.

"It's a great achievement for me and it just tops off a great year," Brereton said.

"Last season I was in the Under-18s and then I came into the

Under-23s. I just keep working hard and doing everything right, that's what you've got to do and then hopefully you get picked for the first-team. When you get there you've got to take your opportunity.

"Now I'm in the first-team I can't dwell on that, I have to keep pushing forward. Personally, I didn't think I was going to do as well as I have done, but it's been good. It just shows that if you work hard, then you can get there."

His journey is unlikely to end with this accolade though, stressed the club's academy manager Gary Brazil, who promoted Brereton to the senior side when he was placed in temporary charge of first team matters.

"We've been really impressed by the boy, as a human being, to start with," Brazil said.

"We're quietly surprised and pleased by what we've got out of him in 20 months. He's adapted very, very quickly; he's become very liked by his colleagues and his peers. Really, because he's completely committed to the team."

"He's now gone into first team football and he's took to it very, very comfortably. Ben is very much a big team player and he commits to every area of his programme and he has excelled in every area of his programme.

"The boy has a massive future going forward. Will he go on and do big things? Absolutely."

Brereton however has remained modest about his rapid advancement and preferred to lavish praise on those that have supported him including; Brazil, Under-23s head coach Jack Lester, Under-18s boss Gareth Holmes and Under-18s assistant Jake Wigley.

"I owe the club a lot," said Brereton. "They are a great club and the academy staff, like Jack, Gary, Gareth, Jake Wigley, they all supported me when I was in there. And they're still supporting me now."

"I speak to them regularly about the games and they're trying to help me. Then I've got the gaffer (Mark Warburton) as well, he's trying to help me, so it's all good," he added.

## CHAMPIONSHIP - THE SHORTLIST

**George Hirst** Sheffield Wednesday

Son of Owls legend David, the young striker has been in prolific form in Wednesday's Under-18 and Under-21 teams. The 18-year-old has netted 25 times for his club this season and has bagged five goals in six appearances for England's Under-18 side.

Hirst also featured twice for the first-team, including his Championship bow against Reading in December.

**Lloyd Kelly** Bristol City

Young defender, Kelly, has been in and around first team training from the off and it seems only a matter of time until he makes his mark in the first team.

Academy boss Gary Probert said: "Lloyd encapsulates everything we believe a Bristol City player should look like. As a young person, an academic and footballer, Lloyd has made terrific progress across the duration of his scholarship."



"It's a great achievement for me and it just tops off a great year."

## LEAGUE ONE

### LFE Apprentice of the Year The EFL Awards

# Lewis Butroid



Scunthorpe United



A decade on from joining Scunthorpe United, Lewis Butroid was named the LFE League One Apprentice of the Year at the EFL Awards in April.

It has been quite a journey for the left-back from Gainsborough, who signed an 18-month professional contract in January, with the club he supported as a boy.

There has also been the small matter of a senior debut for the Iron against Middlesbrough under-23's in the Checktrade Trophy to celebrate, in what is fast becoming a dream season.

Unsurprisingly for a player with the capacity to run a sub 20-minute 5K as a schoolboy, Scunthorpe's Under-18s skipper is noted for his lung busting endurance, tenacity, hard work and level-headed attitude.

They are qualities which have served him well so far, allowing him to produce a mature performance that belied his inexperience against Boro and push for further involvement in Graham Alexander's high flying League One side.

"I had a season ticket before I was actually signed (for the academy).

"I was told the day before (about my debut). From the minute I was told, I was quite nervous and couldn't really stop thinking about how it was going to go.

"You have all manner of situations running through your head about what might happen on the pitch but it couldn't have gone any better for me."

Butroid, who was an unused substitute in the games against Morecambe and Oxford in the following rounds of the competition, has drawn the praise of academy manager Tony Daws, who has hailed him as an example for others coming through the club's youth system.

"Lewis signed for us as an under-nine, ten years ago now. He made good progress through as a left-back and came all the way through our system," Daws told the EFL.

"He's captain of the youth team, displays a terrific attitude, is punctual, a good leader, and motivates his team-mates as well as himself. Lewis made his debut in the first team against Middlesbrough and did really well. He was named man of the match.

"He's kept a level head and has worked really hard at his game. He's also working really hard at college as well, which is important. He has a great work ethic and is a player we're really proud of," he added.

## LEAGUE ONE - THE SHORTLIST

**Matthew Gillam** Rochdale

Teenage striker Gillam has been earmarked as one for the future by Rochdale boss, Keith Hill, who watched his young protégé score on his debut, in a 2-1 win at Hartlepool in the EFL Trophy.

"He's had a marvellous season for the youth team and he hasn't looked out of place in the first team squad," Hill said.

**Callum Cockerill-Mollett** Walsall

The 18-year-old fullback penned his professional contract in August and made his first-team debut a few weeks later in a 5-2 EFL Trophy victory over Grimsby.

Captain of the Under-18s team, Cockerill-Mollett has featured regularly for the reserves and earned a second senior appearance in a 1-0 win against Leicester Under-23s in November.

## LEAGUE TWO

### LFE Apprentice of the Year The EFL Awards

# Myles Judd



Leyton Orient



There has not been a great deal to shout about this season for the beleaguered supporters of Leyton Orient. Well documented financial problems and a catastrophic sequence of results - accumulating just 7 points from a possible 54 - has seen the O's spiral towards the National League.

Step forward, Myles Judd. The club's 18-year-old right-back and the newly crowned League Two Apprentice of the Year.

The second year apprentice, who has been with Orient since he was 10-years-old, signed professional terms with the club earlier this season and his emergence alongside several of his peers from the club's academy has represented a beacon of hope for the future.

Judd, who made his senior bow against Luton almost 18 months ago, has impressed since stepping up to first team duties on a more regular basis this year.

"It was just a dream come true to play for Leyton Orient," he said.

"I've been with them since I was 10, so I was very happy to sign my professional contract with the club.

"You learn a lot because you're obviously playing against older experienced professionals. It's different to the youth team, physically and mentally and I think I'm learning a lot. I'm quite modest but I believe in my ability and I'm going to try and push myself to go as far as I can."

That exposure to first team football has so far encompassed over 20 appearances in testing times, however Judd has coped admirably with those pressures, according to the club's Academy manager Miguel de Souza.

"He's done fantastically well in a difficult season and is a pleasure to work with," de Souza said.

"He's very professional. He turns up on a day-to-day basis and fulfils all his other responsibilities before he goes out

and trains. He always gives his best in everything he does and has become a role model for the other young players to look up to.

"His transition from the youth team to the first team has been seamless which is testament to his professionalism. He's also been able to use that professionalism in the classroom where he has made extraordinary progress.

"When he joined the club he had not done a great deal at school but he is on course to attain all his academic qualifications because of his determination and a brilliant attitude to grasp every opportunity he has been given. He fully merits this award."

## LEAGUE TWO - THE SHORTLIST

**Alex Fletcher** Plymouth Argyle

Fletcher has been a regular scorer in the Youth Alliance South West division and his exploits in front of goal have not gone unnoticed by Pilgrims boss Derek Adams

A four goal haul in the FA Youth Cup triumph over Cheltenham earlier in the season prompted Adams to hand him his debut as a late substitute against Newport in the FA Cup.

**Leon Davies** Cambridge United

It was an extra special 17th birthday for Davies in November as the right-back signed a three-year professional deal at the Abbey Stadium.

Included in 'The 11' by LFE in February, Davies was introduced to the first-team fold with four appearances in the EFL Trophy and has since added five League Two outings to that tally.

 **Ben Brereton**  
Nottingham Forest

1 Striker Ben, who was crowned as the LFE Championship Apprentice of the Year at the EFL Awards, has made quite an impression at the City Ground since making his debut in Forest's 2-0 defeat at Leeds in January. He followed that up with a first start against Rotherham a week later and then capped off a remarkable 11 days by scoring a 90th minute winner against Aston Villa at the start of February.

He has gone from strength-to-strength since then and had registered 3 goals from a dozen appearances by early April.

 **Olly Marx**  
Wrexham AFC

2 Second year apprentice OLLY was thrown in at the deep end by Wrexham manager Dean Keates in March. The young central defender who hails from Frodsham, Cheshire was a last minute inclusion in the Red Dragons starting XI for their National League trip to Barrow.

Recalled early from a loan spell at Sutton Coldfield to be involved, Olly began the game at right-back before switching to the centre of defence and drew praise from Keates, who called him "absolutely outstanding".

 **Alex Fletcher**  
Plymouth Argyle

3 Newton Abbot-born striker Alex, made his Argyle debut as a 17-year-old in December, coming on as a substitute against Newport County in the FA Cup second round.

He was joined on the Pilgrims' substitutes' bench by fellow apprentices Jordan Bentley and Billy Palfrey and while his senior bow lasted a little over 10 minutes

big things are expected of the youngster, who was an unused substitute when Liverpool arrived at Home Park, in the third round.

"He can score goals, he can link-up the play well, he's very good in the air," said the Argyle boss Derek Adams. "He's just a youngster at this moment in time and there's still a good way to go for him."

BY **STEVEN SUTCLIFFE**

# The Debutants



 **Steven Alzate and Tristan Abrahams**  
Leyton Orient

4 5 Playmaker Steven and striker Tristan became the latest Orient youngsters to make their first team bows in a desperate time for the O's. The two second year apprentices, who have both been with Orient since the Under-13s, joined fellow apprentices Myles Judd, Josh Koroma and Sam Dalby in the team.

Steven came on for his debut in the defeat at Stevenage in late February and started the next game which proved memorable, as he scored his first senior

goal to set the O's on their way to a stunning 4-0 win at fellow relegation strugglers Newport.

Tristan from Catford made his debut in that win and has now featured on three occasions. Alzate, from Islington with Columbian parents, lost his starting place to experienced winger Gavin Massey but has been a regular substitute and had clocked up six appearances as Touchline went to press.

 **Joe Rowley**  
Chesterfield

6 Perhaps the only positive to emerge from Chesterfield's League One defeat against Rochdale in March was the emergence of 17-year-old midfielder Joe Rowley. The Spireites manager, Gary Caldwell is clearly a big fan and is predicting a 'massive' future for Joe, who had caught the eye at youth and reserve level with his technical skills and capacity to burst forward from midfield.

"He's been fantastic," Caldwell said. "He's someone I think has a massive future and we have to try and develop that and push him on. I feel like he's got the quality to affect the first team now, even at his young age."

 **Mallik Wilks**  
Leeds United

7 Mallik, netted a brace against Hull in the FA Youth Cup in December, earning himself a call-up to the first team squad a week later. While he was named on the bench, by Leeds boss Garry Monk for the club's Sky Bet Championship clash with Reading at Elland Road, he had to wait until to the back end of January to make his senior bow - getting almost half an hour during the club's FA Cup exit at Sutton United.

The powerful striker has been a virtual ever present for the Whites Under-18s and Under-23s this season and has already signed a professional deal to keep him at Leeds until the summer of 2018.

# RYAN NYAMBE

BY STEVEN SUTCLIFFE



"I'm really grateful for every opportunity I have been given and I have taken them. I just thank God that here I am now. Every day I go in to training with a big smile on my face and in to a good atmosphere."

**Just 12 months ago, Nyambe was completing his apprenticeship at Ewood Park. He has spent much of this term establishing himself as a cornerstone of the Blackburn team fighting for survival in the Championship.**

After making his first team bow last term, the 19-year-old has featured 23 times for Rovers in the present campaign and has been an almost permanent fixture since making his league debut against Brentford in November.

Yet his attitude and initial love of the game was fostered by his early life experiences playing football on the streets of Katima Mulilo in Namibia before he moved to Manchester at the age of 10.

Nyambe had lived with his auntie and uncle before he made the move to England to join his Mum, who had already travelled to the UK in search of a better education.

"I was born in Namibia and moved to Manchester when I was 10 years-old," he said.

"It was a really big change. The first time I came here it was snowing. It was the first time I had ever seen snow before. I'd played football in Namibia but only at school."

Nyambe's progression was swift. He joined a junior team close to his new surroundings in Wythenshawe, South Manchester and within three years was attracting the attention of several professional clubs.

"I joined a local team when I first moved here. I was playing with my school as well and two of my friends got scouted for Blackburn. It was just a case of working hard and then eventually that happened for me as well.

"I was 13 when I first signed and I worked my way through the youth age groups. We used to train on a Monday and a Thursday afternoon so they put transport on for us to come in to training."

Back in Namibia, Nyambe's rapid rise to prominence has gained plenty of attention. He has already met the President, Hage Geingob and is fast becoming one of his home country's most recognisable stars, surprising even himself in the process.

"I'm really surprised," he said. "At the start of the season I always thought I might play three or four games for the first team, but I have surprised myself by starting so many.

"I was looking to play maybe three or four games towards the back-end of this season so I have played a lot more than I thought I would. I'm really grateful for every opportunity I have been given and I have taken them. I just thank God that here I am now. Every day I go in to training with a big smile on my face and in to a good atmosphere.

"My apprenticeship was a great two years. This club really helped me to develop my game and to make my debut while I was still in the academy was brilliant. I made sure that I completed the education programme to the best of my ability as well, because that will give me more options for the future."

While the future seems bright for Nyambe, of more immediate concern is the situation that Rovers have found themselves in languishing near the bottom of the Championship. The stress of a relegation battle would be challenging to even the most seasoned professional yet Nyambe has blocked out his nerves in a bid to help his team to safety.

"It has been a really hard situation because you don't want to make a mistake. You don't want to let the team down because if you do then it only adds to our problems being down at the bottom.

"You have to put that to the back of your mind and do everything you can. I have had to adapt really quickly and I did it in such a short space of time, but now I'm getting used to it. I feel a part of the team and feel really comfortable."



# Cecil Thomas

Last month, former Crawley Town striker Cecil Jee Thomas performed in front of the biggest crowd he's ever faced. His composure, skill and agility helped his team to get the result they were looking for.

The fans roared their approval, but it was the high-pitched scream of a crowd packed with young girls and mothers.

Cecil was representing the Italia Conti Academy of Theatre Arts in front of over a thousand spectators at London's ExCel arena. His task was to perform a series of leaps, spins and tumbles in a dazzling display of gymnastic dance at the MOVE IT show.

"When I was 16 I was offered a place at the Brit School and auditioned for a place at Italia Conti. I was offered a 75% scholarship which is a massive opportunity at that age," explains Cecil, now 21.

"Instead I chose to sign for Crawley. At the end of the two years, I'd been released and was still finding myself. I didn't know what to do. I came to MOVE IT and went to the Italia Conti stand. They said 'come down to the boys open day'. I wasn't sure but I went and ended up being offered a full scholarship, which is very unusual."

A place on the on the three-year Diploma in Performing Arts costs most students around £50,000 - highlighting Cecil's potential as a dancer. Like in football, you have to work extraordinarily hard to make it in the cut-throat world of dance.

Cecil, a central striker or wide forward, is now getting used to an even tougher regime.

"I was very fit," recalls Cecil, "I was highest in the bleep test at Crawley but when I came to dance I wasn't fit at all.

"Football fitness is very aerobic, sharp, interval training and agility. Dance is very different. I couldn't believe how strenuous training was. It's ridiculous. When I started my body was in shock. You use muscles that you didn't even know were there. Like learning how to mobilise and strengthen individual muscles in your feet to be able to point them correctly, tightening your quads and using your hamstrings. It's a whole new concept of being fit.

"Some days we are in for 7.40am, so I am up by 6 o'clock to travel in to Guildford from home.

"We finish around 6 or 7 most days so are doing 10-12 hour days. Every night you go home exhausted to have an ice bath and just crash. The first month I almost quit. But you get more resistance to how difficult life is, your muscles get stronger, and you become better at coping with it."

Cecil explains that he now feels he belongs on the dancefloor or stage as much as the pitch. "Because I did football first and wasn't a natural born dancer, my body changed a lot quicker than others who'd been training for years. I could see the improvements straightaway, like I could jump higher. I didn't realise I had the physique for it."

None of Cecil's Crawley team-mates are professional footballers now, but he has had what he describes as "a life-changing" year. Acting in a play at the world-

renowned Brighton Fringe, modelling for Nike's Strike Night campaign - seen by four million viewers online, being recruited as a body-double for Dele Alli and Marcus Rashford and appearing alongside Wayne Rooney in an advert for one of Manchester United's sponsors!

"We had to do a trick, flicking the ball up with the outside of the foot. It took a lot of takes! I was under real pressure. When the players arrived at the shoot, we had to show them what to do - Rashford did it in three takes, which is amazing! He was very humble, very normal."

After leaving Crawley, Cecil spent two months at the Nike Academy, trialled at Nottingham Forest, then returned home to Sussex to play at various local non-league clubs. Football is now taking a backseat though. With one year left to go at Italia Conti on his Diploma, it is time for Cecil to start planning his next steps. He has already started on a teaching qualification in acting and dance through the University of Greenwich. "We also do circus skills so when I graduate I should have enough to be an accomplished performer, not just a dancer. Nowadays in dance, everyone does everything,"

"The thing I miss most about football is my team-mates, the banter, being with them and playing football every day. That was my dream and it didn't work out but now I'm living another dream which is just as fulfilling."



## RORY CARSON FROM FOOTBALL TO NEWSROOM

Rory Carson's journey has taken him from Belfast to Bradford City and back again, from cleaning boots to washing dishes and from patrolling midfield to monitoring and setting the news agenda.

Now a producer at BBC Radio 5 live, he talks to Touchline about his apprenticeship and beyond.

I think that football prepares you for anything that you're going to face in life. I say to people time and time again that my two-year apprenticeship was the best learning curve I've ever had.

I left home at 16 to live in digs. You had to make new friends, find new things that interested you, you start building a new life for yourself and you have to deal with the pressure, the stresses and strains of trying to become a professional. That is hard for a young person to deal with.

If you ask most teenagers what they want to do when they are older most will say 'I don't know'. People who pursue a career in football are thinking about it from 10, 11 or 12 years of age. So if you're able to take that dedication and passion and transfer it to something else, the skills you have developed on that journey are in place.

I wasn't the smartest kid at school. I just had a bit of determination but every apprentice has that determination otherwise they wouldn't have got as far as they have. So if you can take that and apply it to every facet of your life the rest takes care of itself.

I can remember being 15 years-old and being so close to becoming a professional that I found it hard to focus on my education but also my parents and Bradford stressing that I'd need good GCSE's to ensure I wasn't at a disadvantage moving forward.

Then when I was released at 18 the choice was simple. Either into non-league, trying to follow the Jamie Vardy route or back into education. I'd had a bad time

with injuries and I thought even if I can get back to a professional club, what am I going to do when I get into my thirties?

So I did A-Levels, went on to University and got some funding from The Professional Footballers' Association which helped me massively. At the same time as I was doing my English degree I was working part-time in a cafe. I'd gone from everyone knowing that I was a footballer, to cleaning dishes to pay my way through three-years of academic study.

I started writing in the student newspaper and literally fell into some work at the BBC. I met a guy in the street, who worked there and knew that I had played football in England and back in Northern Ireland and he just asked if I'd like to come in. I was lucky. I went in and made some teas. The rest is history.

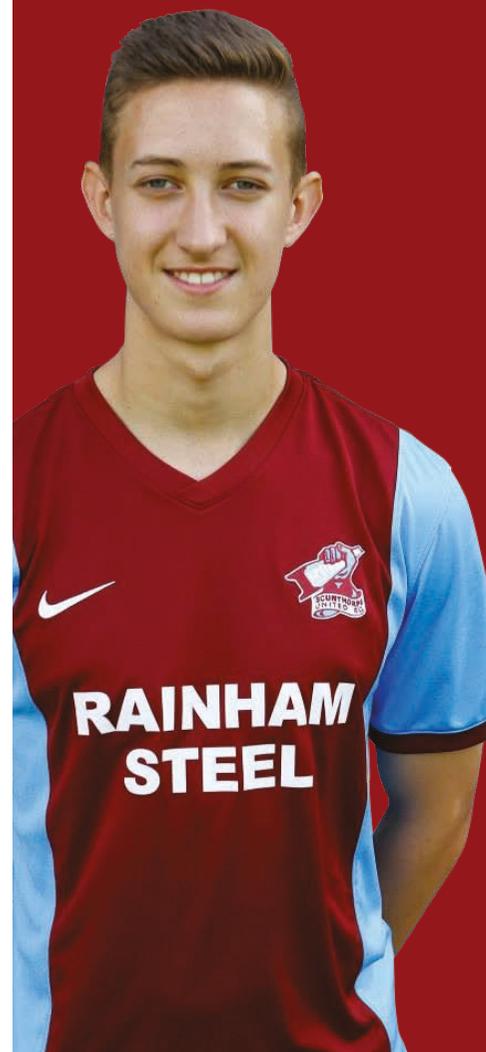
I'm now a producer on the Radio 5 live breakfast programme which is just an amazing job. I stopped playing football altogether when I was 21 and thought, 'where am I going to find anything as enjoyable as football?'

I kind of fell into what I'm doing now, which can be long 10 or 12 hour shifts. But you're preparing and setting-up a programme, finding things which you think people are interested in or things which you think are important, like for example the US Air Strike in Syria. To be honest it's just such an absolute rush, trying to bring those stories to life.

I am amazed I've found something that I love as much as football. I look back now and I think, I'm so glad I did football but I'm so lucky to be doing what I'm doing now.

## JACOB HOOD

Having made the step up to featuring in first-team pre-season friendlies in 2014, former Scunthorpe apprentice Jacob Hood suffered a degenerative knee problem that ended the second year of his apprenticeship before it had begun.



Here the 20-year-old tells Touchline how he turned that disappointment into the motivation to pursue a new career in business and civil engineering.

Completing my apprenticeship at Scunthorpe United was a fantastic experience, enabling me to fulfil a childhood ambition in becoming a full-time footballer. I played regularly for the Under-18s, reserves and first-team in pre-season and thoroughly enjoyed my football as well as being very active in my academic development, electing to complete A-Level English Language alongside the BTEC Extended Diploma in Sport.

Obviously, due to the serious knee injury (Patella Tendinopathy) shortly after pre-season, the thought process of 'my next step' was accelerated somewhat. I'd always thought that it was vitally important to develop myself in other areas aside from football due to the sheer competitiveness and unpredictability of the game.

The apprenticeship gave me a fantastic grounding, evolving skills in numerous areas: communication, determination, professionalism, self-discipline, organisation and leadership. This made the transition from football to business quite seamless. Yes there are obvious differences but the intensity, concentration and professionalism required in professional sport prepared me for my career and launching my first business.

Initially, I took a gap year to attain necessary work-based experience within Business Development for a small engineering consultancy firm in the West Midlands. After a year with the firm, an opportunity arose with a couple of partners to launch and become a Company Director of a Civil Engineering Consultancy named Residential Engineering Design Ltd (RED Civils). This responsibility of running my

own business came slightly earlier than I maybe envisaged, but I felt it was too good of an opportunity to dismiss.

RED Civils has now been trading for over six months and has solidified its position within the industry with FTSE 100 clients, such as Taylor Wimpey & Persimmon Homes. My role is to ensure the consistent stream of projects through structured business development activities, client forecasts and ultimately establishing and building of those clients/accounts, with a view to increasing profitability. I am also heavily involved with the production of technical engineering drawings, while working to develop my skills to become a qualified Civil Design Engineer.

With a highly competitive graduate market, especially within business, it appeared to me that an integrated hybrid approach towards higher education academic study and work-based experience appeared to be the most direct route to progress in the industry. The PFA offers an excellent bursary package to support all members through academic study, so I actively elected to study alongside my work commitments.

I am currently studying a part-time degree in two parts, initially an HNC/HND at Heart of Worcestershire College and then onto my final year to achieve a BA Honours Degree with University of Birmingham. In three years time, I am hoping to have completed my Bachelor's Degree, coupled with four years experience within the industry.

The plan for the future is for the business to continue to grow healthily and sustainably, as well as completing my degree to as high a standard as possible. I want to continue working towards getting back to full fitness and so that I can remain active alongside my business commitments.

# Coaches European Adventure

In February, LFE whisked four coaches from English Football League clubs across to Madrid for a week.

The trip took in visits to Atletico Madrid, Real Madrid, Getafe CF, Rayo Vallecano, AD Alcorcon as well as meetings with The Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) and The Spanish PFA. It was an opportunity for continued professional development and to share learning, experiences and best practice with some of the best in the business.

Here two of our quartet, helping to shape the next generation of young English talent recount their tales from the Spanish capital.



**Chris Hogg**  
Club: Ipswich Town  
Position: Professional Development Phase Coach (U18s)

I was apprehensive before this trip, unsure how I'd feel as part of a wider group of people - all with different backgrounds and intentions and seeking different outcomes. It was a step outside my comfort zone, though even the pre-trip conference calls were that!

The trip was whirlwind experience though and any apprehension quickly evaporated. Meeting Maria-Jesus and Rodrigo was a pleasure and instantly you felt you were in good hands. Our first night was memorable. We were escorted to Atletico Madrid v Celta Vigo and shared hospitality with Juan Carlos Pedraza, a club legend.

It was a unique and valuable week examining how one of the most revered countries, in terms of football style and performance, operate in youth development.

I was surprised by elements of the Spanish model. For example, players pay their own registration fee to the RFEF to play good football from Under-7s to Under-19s, enabling them to register at academies.

There is also no apprenticeship scheme in Spain, something we take for granted at home. The chance to be paid while learning on the job and undertaking education doesn't exist.

Clubs in Spain have players that work, go to college or University and then train in the afternoon or evening. They do so without a salary, imagine that happening in England!

There were lots of key things I took from the trip. Cultural differences which impact the style in which the game is played, the kind and humble people we met, the love and passion of people for football, the joy and satisfaction coaches have for their country and their players, the mind-set of constant improvement, of what's next and 'how are we going to stay ahead'?

The main imprint was how environments dictate a players psychological characteristics.

League formats from U7s to the first team breeds a competitive, winning mentality with lots of speed bumps and challenges along the way. It is designed to build key character traits like resilience, character, hard-work, desire, humbleness and independence.

There is a big emphasis on the all-round person with education being vital to a player's growth. Club's also seem to place a huge emphasis on coach care and using a common sense approach to develop a coach to reach their full potential so they in turn can unlock the best from their players.

I'm now even more curious and willing to learn about different methods to get the best out of the players I work with and to see what 'excellence' really is, to support the development of players at my club.



**Mikey Harris**  
Club: Portsmouth  
Position: U18 Manager

The trip to Madrid was an incredible experience. We were given access to some field leaders in Spanish and World football and we were all blown away by how accommodating everyone was.

Every organisation or club we went to was willing to share their values, beliefs and philosophies and they did so with passion and a high level of knowledge.

It made me feel enthusiastic about learning more about some of the structures and training methods of the different clubs in Madrid. It was an intense week, immersed in situations that enabled us all to learn incredibly quickly.

I was surprised by the end of the trip how much Spanish I could understand compared to the beginning of the week! This was another aspect that was very beneficial.

The relationships we built especially with Maria-Jesus (RFEF) and Rodrigo (Real Madrid) were great. They made us feel very welcome, working hard to ensure we understood all the information presented to us. We also took part in a workshop with Chris McCready and a number of Spanish coaches which was impressive and provoked discussion about the need for players to have a life which is not 24/7 football.

The importance of player's wellbeing and the impact of this on performance resonated with us as coaches. Personally this has led to me looking at the way we structure our apprenticeship programme with a view to developing the player's identity and interests off the pitch.

There were several other things I took away from the trip, namely; integration of the physical aspects within the technical programme - the majority of physical trainers are pro license holders. The accessibility of the Spanish Pro license course and the number of coaches of this level. The structure of the regional FA's and how they recruit players for the national teams and the strong relationships between the clubs and the national FA.

We were also fortunate to attend two fantastic matches at both Atletico and Real Madrid experiencing wonderful atmospheres and witnessing some special goals, from special players. I will never forget the moment the Champions League music came on at the Bernabéu

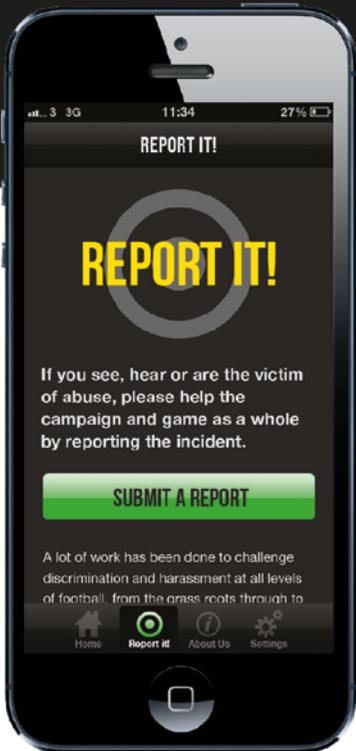
I was grateful to spend the week with some brilliant people and look forward to strengthening the relationships built in the future.



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**Ian Smithson** @smithers2204  
 Good session on mental health and wellbeing @IFUCARESHARE @ReadingFC apprentices @LFEonline #theresalwaysaway



**EFL Trust** @EFLTrust  
 FUTSAL & EDUCATION: "It's a great way to gain the step you need in life to get into university and employment."



**LFE** @LFEonline  
 Thinking of heading to university this year? Sign up for the @NTUfootball open day on May 11th - details here: <http://bit.ly/2otQJRB>



**Si Williams** @DrSimonWilliams  
 I never lose. Either I win or I learn from it. Wise words in the new classroom at @BFC1887youth & nice to see @LFEonline guides are to hand!



**LFE** @LFEonline  
 Warm-ups underway here at Woodhouse Grove, it's @officialbantams U18s vs @burtonalbionfc U18s in the Youth Alliance NE. Kick-off 11.00AM.

**LFE** @LFEonline  
 Want to play football in Australia? Two opportunities currently available for LFE apprentices, more info here: <http://bit.ly/2nbOFwn>



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