



League  
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Education

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# American Scholarships

A guide for players, parents and guardians  
For entry in 2022



Established by



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# Foreword



**Welcome to the guide to American Scholarships. The purpose of this booklet is to offer practical and independent advice to current and former apprentice footballers who are considering taking up a soccer scholarship to study in The United States of America.**

In recent seasons, a growing number of apprentices have taken advantage of the opportunity to start scholarships in America.

This booklet is designed to help you understand the background and process involved in obtaining a scholarship. It should also help you evaluate whether this is the right option for you.

LFE is aware that the eligibility criteria regularly changes which can sometimes cause difficulty for players to access this opportunity. However, we are seeing a consistently high number of apprentices making the transition and you can consider this option as a realistic possibility.

We hope this booklet provides you with much of the information that will assist you in pursuing your ambition to start university life in the United States. If you require any further guidance, please feel free to contact our Transition Officer on 01772 326875.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'S. Stephen'.

**Sarah Stephen**  
**Chief Executive**

# Soccer Scholarship Journey



## 1 Eligibility Check

It is important to understand whether you are eligible to study and compete at USA university level before you take any of the below steps. Read the 'Eligibility' section on page 8 in this guide and/or call LFE's Transition team on 01772 326875.

## 2 Research

Investigate which universities and colleges offer Men's Soccer at Varsity level at [www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org), [www.naia.org](http://www.naia.org) and [www.njcaa.org](http://www.njcaa.org)

Then check out who offers scholarships in Men's Soccer by visiting individual university and college athletic department web pages.

## 3 USA University Entrance Exam

Register for and sit the SAT or ACT Test. Remember to take advantage of the tips and test preparation information available via [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org), [www.act.org](http://www.act.org) and [www.fulbright.org.uk](http://www.fulbright.org.uk)

## 4 Making your Selection

Obtain contact details for coaches at universities and colleges which offer soccer scholarships and match this list against institutions that you feel can help you fulfil your academic and personal aspirations. Then draw up your shortlist, i.e. make sure that the institutions to which you are going to apply offer a course you will want to major in.

## 5 Highlighting your talent

Contact coaches on your shortlist and send out your CV and covering letter that explains both your academic and soccer playing abilities in terms that they understand.

## 6 Using the Web for your advantage

Individualise and strengthen your CV by offering coaches access to footage of you in action.

## 7 Initial Eligibility Clearing House (IECH)

Register with the appropriate IECH i.e. NCAA, NAIA to show prospective colleges/universities that you are eligible to study at their institution.

## 8 Visa

Once you have been offered a place your college/university will issue you with an I-20 form (The document you need to apply for is an F-1 student visa) and guidance on applying for a Visa.

## 9 Your new Journey begins

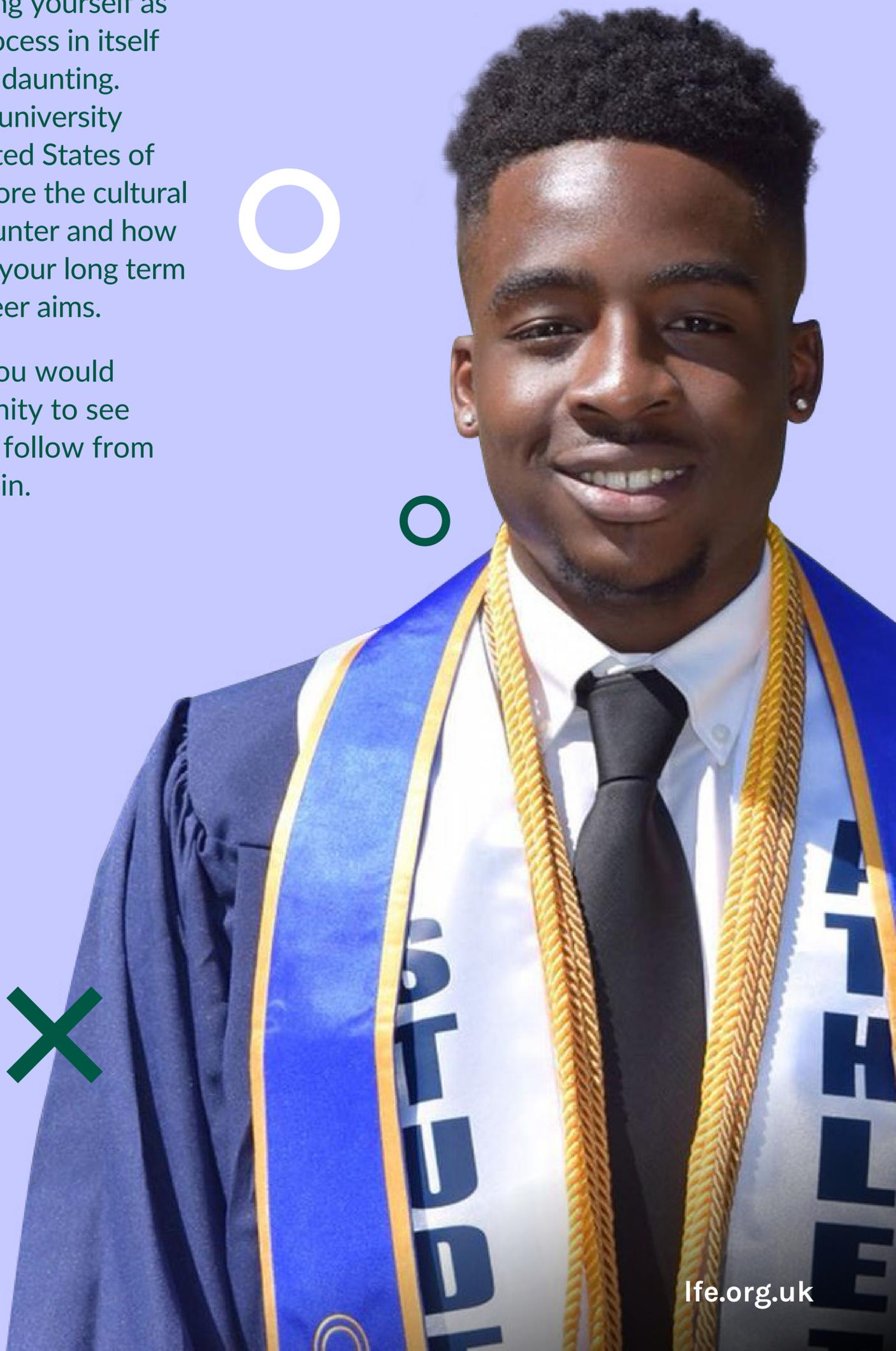
Once your Visa application has been approved book your flights and head across the pond to start your new life as a scholar in the United States.

# Studying in the USA

## Thinking about studying for a degree in the USA?

You may now be starting to think for the first time about playing elite-level football in a different country and developing yourself as more than a footballer. This process in itself can be quite exciting as well as daunting. If you are considering going to university and playing football in The United States of America, it is important to explore the cultural differences that you may encounter and how studying in the USA fits within your long term personal development and career aims.

When deciding what degree you would prefer to do, take the opportunity to see what career possibilities could follow from the subject you are interested in.



# Studying in the USA

## Why study in the USA?

Interested in heading to the USA to study? You're in good company. Last year, over 10,000 UK students chose the USA for undergraduate study because it will allow you to:

### 1 Choose from the wide range of universities on offer

There are over 4,500 US universities offering undergraduate degrees.

### 2 Take advantage of funding opportunities

Many students are able to fund their studies through scholarships from US universities and external funding bodies. Every year over 600 US universities offer international students scholarships of \$20,000 or more. Scholarships can be offered on merit, financial need and extracurricular achievement but you will most likely be seeking a scholarship which will be offered in recognition of your ability to play soccer.

### 3 Experience American college life

US universities are known for their vibrant campus life, marked by a plethora of opportunities for students to get involved on campus and in the community. There are literally hundreds of student organisations, athletic and campus events that allow students to pursue their interests in the arts, sport, leadership, voluntary service and more, all whilst getting their college degree.

### 4 Have the flexibility to explore your academic interests

Generally speaking, the undergraduate curriculum in the US is quite flexible. It is perfectly acceptable to be undecided about your major or field of study when applying to university. US universities teach under what is called the 'liberal arts philosophy'. This means students take classes from a variety of subjects during the first 1-2 years of university study before specialising in their major field. Students also have the option to complete a 'double major', degrees in two academic fields, which are often completed within the normal four years of study. Students may also earn a minor qualification, which is awarded upon completing 3-5 classes in one field.

### 5 Internationalise and strengthen your CV

When the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) surveyed 230 major UK recruiters, 65% of employers favoured applicants with overseas work experience. International students in the US have the opportunity to gain work experience during their studies and to work in the US for up to one year after graduation on the Optional Practical Training scheme.

### 6 Travel in the US and learn about another culture

The US spans six time zones and has a great diversity in geography and culture. Long university summer holidays and programmes organised by the international students office, such as holiday trips and host family schemes, offer students a great opportunity to see the US.

# Studying in the USA



## What course should I choose?

At university in the USA, your 'major' is the main academic subject that you will study on your degree. It is your field of specialisation during your undergraduate studies. You will also be required to study a core curriculum. Therefore, unlike the UK system in your first year (Freshman) you will be required to study a compulsory core curriculum, which may include Mathematics, Science, English, History, Logic and Philosophy, but which also allows you to choose electives in subjects that interest you. This is also your chance to take introductory courses in what you hope will become your main subject of study (known as your major).

In your second year as a Sophomore, you will complete the core curriculum and advance in some subjects to the next level. At this point if you have decided on a major subject you may begin taking classes specific to that subject. However, you are not required to formally declare a major until your third (Junior) year.

Your third year or Junior year should see you commence the advanced coursework for your major, which will see you build up to your fourth (Senior) year where you will complete your undergraduate study and take your final exams.

# Eligibility

## Are you eligible to study in the USA?

Athletic associations govern college sports and set rules regarding scholarships and athletic recruitment. There are a number of associations that colleges or universities can join, most notably:



### **National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)**

There are over 1200 member universities and colleges classified within three NCAA divisions (Divisions I and II being the most competitive). Athletic standards are high and the level of competition is intense. Only students with the very highest standard of ability tend to be recruited.

([www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org))

Junior colleges act as a good entry point to the US collegiate system. They can help players without sufficient grades to study in the USA prior to gaining entry to a NCAA/NAIA school.

Students hoping to be considered for a sports scholarship must meet normal university/college entrance requirements (published on the university admissions page) and continue to obtain satisfactory grades at university in order to receive and retain their scholarships. As a guideline, various sporting authorities have set their own minimum academic requirements for competing students.



### **National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)**

There are around 350, mostly smaller colleges in the NAIA, organised by districts. Many NAIA colleges have excellent sports programmes and may offer some sports scholarships. The level of athletic ability is still high, although the standard is not set as high as for NCAA Division I teams.

([www.naia.org](http://www.naia.org))



### **National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)**

Member colleges are accredited two-year institutions. The NJCAA is comprised of two divisions. Division I colleges may offer full scholarships, whereas Division III do not offer scholarships.

([www.njcaa.org](http://www.njcaa.org))

# Eligibility

## Admissions Criteria

As a general rule, US universities will expect to see a similar type of qualification and results as British universities of a similar level of prestige and competitiveness.

As a minimum requirement for four-year Bachelor's degrees, you should have completed at least five GCSEs at grade C/4 or above (or five Scottish Standard Grades), including English and Maths, plus be completing or have completed a post age 16 qualification. A small number of high ranking academic universities will require A-Levels for entry. Students aspiring to very high academic universities are recommended to research their individual requirements.

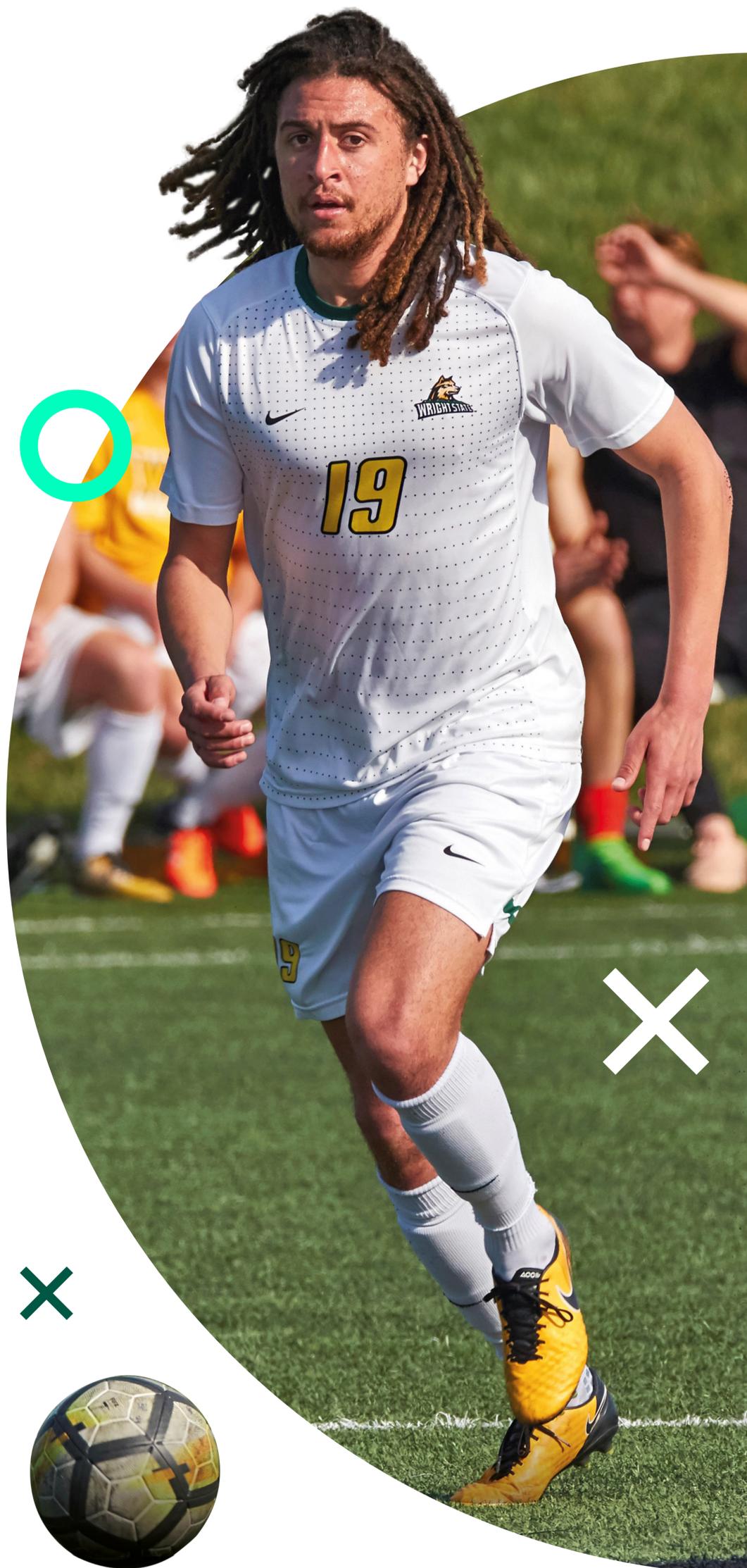
If you have completed your BTEC during your NVQ during your apprenticeship, you are eligible to apply to almost all NCAA universities. However, certain universities in the states will prefer those that have completed their extended diploma.

**Call LFE's Transition team on 01772 326874 for more details on this.**

## Football Representation

Signing an agreement with an agency or agent to represent you and support your football career can result in loss of eligibility for entering a scholarship in the USA.

**You should consider this before entering into any agreement and if you seek advice or guidance relating to representation then you should contact The PFA on 0161 236 0575.**



# Eligibility

## Academic Performance

Your academic abilities will be evaluated in the first instance by your GCSE results and or your predicted A-Level/BTEC results.

However, your academic aptitude will also be assessed through your performance on admissions tests. Admissions tests are used as a common denominator to compare applications from different US states (there is no national curriculum) and different countries.

The stronger your academic record inside the classroom and on standardised tests, the stronger your chances of admission. If you have done particularly well in your previous study, you may be awarded advanced standing by the US university you attend. However, academic achievements alone will not guarantee entrance to competitive US university programmes.

Unfortunately, there is not an official grade conversion between US and UK marks. Instead, US university admissions officers either evaluate international credentials internally or require that students use an external credential evaluator. On the right-hand side is a chart displaying approximate grade conversions that may be useful in determining competitiveness for admission and funding.

American universities may use this Grade Point Average to help them form an opinion of an applicant's academic strength. Please note, if you are applying to go to the US, Fulbright does not recommend converting your UK grades in to US scores on your application. Your UK results should be submitted in their original format.



## GCSEs and A-Level Results Converter

UK Numerical Grade	US Letter Grade	US Grade Point Average
7, 8, 9	A	4.0
5 or 6	B	3.0
4	C	2.0
1, 2 or 3	D	0

# Eligibility



## National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA)

- Five or more core academic subject passes at GCSE grades 9-4 or Scottish Standard grades 1-6, including maths, English, science and social studies (history, geography etc.) with an overall average of grade 5.
- The NCAA applies a sliding scale for the minimum SAT scores that are required for acceptance to NCAA Division I colleges. This will depend on your average academic grade. The higher your average academic grade is, the lower the minimum SAT score required.

The higher your average academic grade is, the lower the minimum SAT score required.



## National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA)

A '4' grade average overall in GCSE subjects, Scottish Standards, or an alternative qualification, such as Level 2 Diploma, if the school authorities can confirm your marks were in the 'Top Half' of the class.

You should aim for a minimum score of 18 on the ACT or 970 on the SAT to compete at a NAIA institution.

If you take the SAT more than once, scores cannot be combined. Colleges will only look at your highest test score.



## National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA)

Talented individuals who do not qualify for either of the above may be able to gain admission to a junior college. Each college will set its own entrance requirements.

NJCAA colleges in general do not have a minimum passing score for the SAT although individual colleges may set one.

Once enrolled at an NJCAA institution, athletes must maintain a 2.0 GPA to stay eligible.

# Eligibility

## Professional/Apprentice Eligibility

If looking to attend an NCAA governed university and you have been a professional footballer then you could still be eligible.

However, spending more than a year out of formal education or earning wages/bonuses above the set threshold will make you ineligible.

Completing your BTEC ensures you are eligible to go to university in America without 'topping up' your education.

As long as you do not receive more than the financial threshold playing for a football club in that gap year then you should retain your eligibility.

Please note, if you continue formal education after your Apprenticeship then this may extend the deadline for you to start US university.

It is important to seek advice about the above because eligibility is complicated and should not be assumed.

All entries to universities/colleges will go through to the governing body's clearing house who will determine your eligibility.

Each application is dealt with on an individual basis and not always uniformly. As such there have been cases where some players have received bans restricting their ability to play for their university soccer team.

In addition in certain cases bans have been imposed on some former apprentices but not others that are in attendance at the same university.

All former apprentices should note that NCAA universities/colleges apply stricter criteria to entry in to their programmes.

# Entry Requirements

## Overview – The SAT Test

The SAT Test, also known as SAT Reasoning Test, is a standardised test for college admissions in the USA. The SAT is owned, published, and developed by the College Board, a non-profit organisation in the USA. The College Board claims the test can assess a student's readiness for college.

The current SAT test consists of two main sections (Math and Evidence-Based Reading and Writing), whilst there is also an optional essay which a small number of universities may also require.

The cost to register for the SAT Reasoning Test is \$117 including essay.

**To register an account and book your seat for a test please visit [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)**

*Please note: Testing of English as a second language may also be required for apprentices who do not consider English to be their first language. In addition, the test often require candidates to use American spellings, language and grammar.*

## Overview – The ACT Test

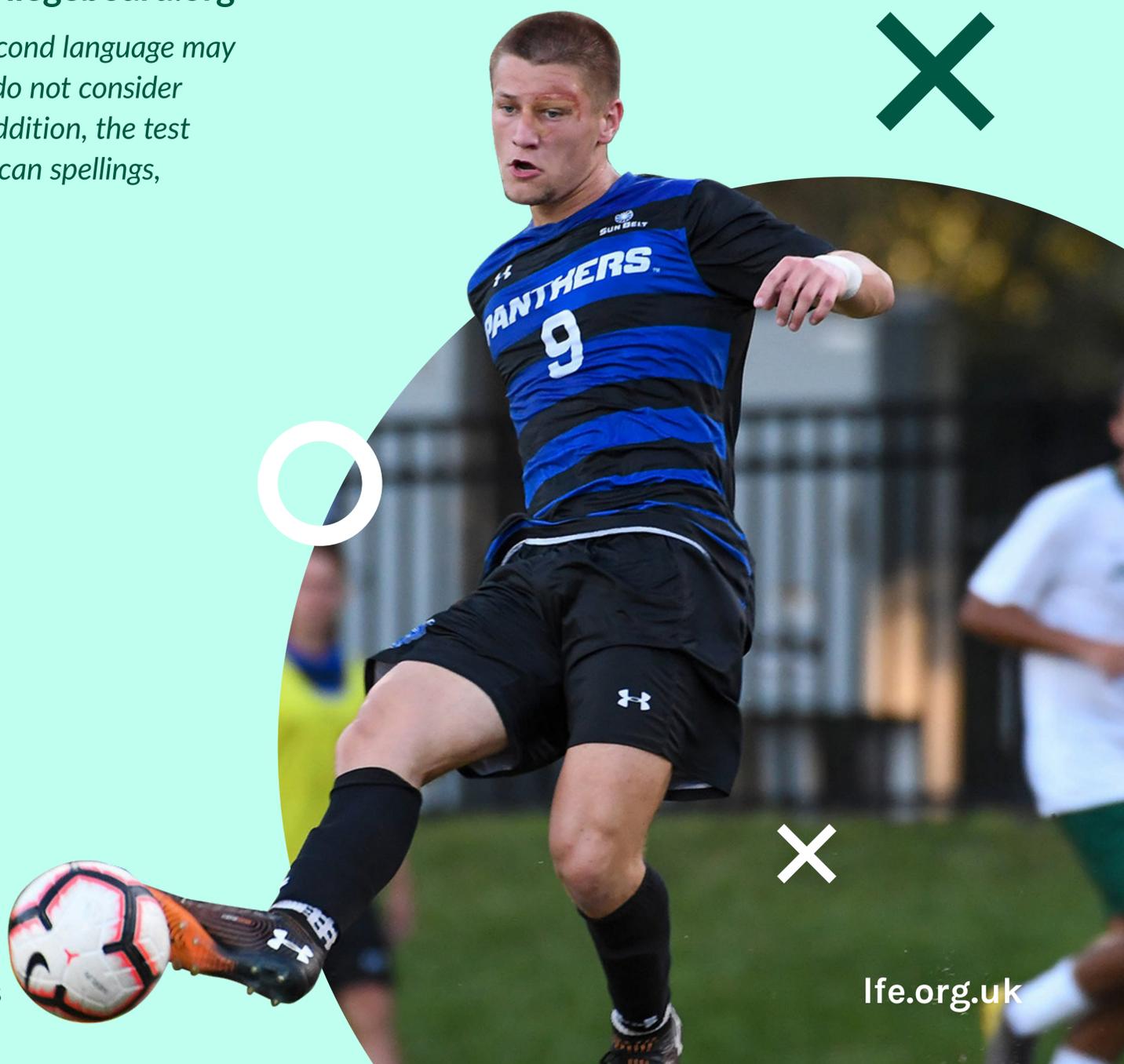
The ACT test is another standardised test for college admissions in the USA. You can undertake this test instead of the SAT if you preferred, as both are equally reputable.

The cost to register for the ACT Test is \$150.

**To book onto an ACT Test, or to learn more about the ACT, please visit [www.act.org](http://www.act.org)**

## Study Material

**[www.KhanAcademy.org/SAT](http://www.KhanAcademy.org/SAT)** is the college board recommended study material.



# Entry Requirements

## SAT and ACT Dates

SAT and ACT Reasoning Tests are run at a variety of centres across the country. There is generally a requirement to pre-register for these tests at least six weeks prior to the test date:

### SAT Test Dates:

4th December 2021  
*(register by 4th November 2021)*

12th March 2022  
*(register by 12th February 2022)*

7th May 2022  
*(register by 8th April 2022)*

### ACT Test Dates:

Friday 10th and  
Saturday 11th December 2021  
*(register by 19th November 2021)*

Friday 11th and  
Saturday 12th February 2022  
*(register by 21st January 2022)*

Friday 1st and  
Saturday 2nd April 2022  
*(register by March 11th 2022)*

Friday 10th and  
Saturday 11th June 2022  
*(register by 10th May 2022)*

Friday 15th and  
Saturday 16th July 2022  
*(register by 24th June 2022)*

To find your nearest venue, contact LFE's support partner **FirstPoint USA**. Visit their website to start your free application - [www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education](http://www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education) Learn more about **FirstPoint** on pages 19 and 20.

## SAT Scores

SAT consists of two major sections, with each section receiving a score on the scale of 200-800. This means that your overall SAT score could range between 400-1600 points.

## ACT Scores

ACT consists of two major sections. A student's composite ACT score is the average of the student's scaled scores in four multiple-choice test sections, with 36 being the highest possible score, while the writing test score ranges from 1 to 36.

*It is possible to register for the SAT or ACT Tests after the registration deadlines have passed. Specific terms can be found on the SAT/ACT website.*

# Sports Scholarships

## Overview

The process by which you could be considered for a sport scholarship can be a lengthy and complicated one. Unlike academic scholarships where you would simply submit an application indicating an interest in receiving funding to study at a university, students must engage in a highly-regulated recruitment process (please see below for further details).

Sport scholarships are granted by the university or athletics association in which a university participates with athletic directors or coaches playing a central role in decision making.

Scholarships can be awarded for a number of different sports, including: American Football, Athletics, Baseball, Basketball, Rowing, Golf, Gymnastics, Ice Hockey, Lacrosse, Swimming, Tennis and Football or as it is more commonly named in the US, Soccer.

Scholarships are provided on a yearly basis, generally renewable for four years which is the normal time required to complete a US undergraduate degree.

If you enter university with transfer credit or advanced standing, you will still be considered a first-year student for sports scholarship purposes.

Award amounts vary and can be anywhere from a few thousand dollars to \$50,000 for one academic year. It is very important to keep in mind that sport scholarships do not necessarily cover the full cost of tuition and maintenance.

# Sports Scholarships

## Overview (continued)

Scholarships are often offered on a percentage basis (i.e. a 75% scholarship will cover 75% of the total cost of tuition fees for one year), and universities have strict limits on the total amount they can award each year. Therefore, a university may split a small number of large awards into a larger number of lesser-value awards. For example, a university that has three 100% scholarships to offer per year may split them up to award six 50% scholarships to twice the number of student-athletes.

Importantly, whilst playing for a college team a scholarship can pay for the cost of earning an undergraduate degree, you do not attend university solely to play your sport. Students with sports scholarships must be working toward an undergraduate degree (in any field offered by the university).

There are a wide range of courses available, including those with a sport focus, such as exercise science, physical therapy, administration, marketing, etc. For more information about choosing, applying for and other funding opportunities related to US universities, please visit [www.fulbright.org.uk](http://www.fulbright.org.uk) or [www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)

High school student-athletes in the US are somewhat at an advantage to international students hoping to obtain a sport scholarship as they will have had some level of exposure to college and university coaches at local, regional and national competitions.



For more information on funding options, please visit Undergraduate Study in the US - Finances section on [www.fulbright.org.uk](http://www.fulbright.org.uk) or [www.khanacademy.org](http://www.khanacademy.org)

Coupled with the fact that their coaches may have contacts within university programmes and university scouts may be tracking their progress in the news or at competitions, engaging in the recruitment process to pursue their sport at the collegiate level can be somewhat more straightforward, and will certainly start earlier, than for an international athlete.

However, every year talented international students are successful in receiving scholarships in a variety of sports at a wide range of US universities every year. The important thing to remember is, whichever avenue you choose to take in the recruitment process, is that the earlier you start and the more time you put in, the more likely you are to achieve your goal.

# Sports Scholarships

## How to get a Scholarship

### The DIY Scholarship

Although it may be preferable to receive expert support when seeking a US Scholarship, the 'do-it-yourself' approach is a viable option. To get started, you may wish to follow the steps outlined below:

- 1 Visit the NCAA website ([www.ncaa.org](http://www.ncaa.org)), or one of the other athletic associations mentioned earlier, to view both the list of universities offering your sport at the varsity level and the eligibility rules for being considered for a sport scholarship at their member universities. Determine whether you meet the eligibility criteria and make a list of universities to consider.
- 2 After identifying which universities offer your sport, you should then do some research into whether or not that institution provides scholarships for athletes and what the criteria for selection are, both of which should be readily available on the athletic department's webpage for each university. At this point, it is also very important to do some research into the qualifications and reputation of each coach as you want to ensure that you will be well-supported and receive good training within your sport during your four years at university.  
  
You may also wish to consider other factors that are important in choosing a university to help narrow down your list.
- 3 Compile a list of contact information for the coaches at each university in which you are interested.
- 4 Draft a CV that includes, academic, personal and football accomplishments. Be sure to include teams played for, number of years, tournament/league results and or records held. **You can request a template of this type of CV from LFE's Anthony Cato via email: [acato@lfe.org.uk](mailto:acato@lfe.org.uk)**
- 5 Write a letter/personal statement to the relevant coach at each institution that explains both your academic and athletic abilities in terms that can be identified by him or her (this is where the CV comes in as an easy reference tool for athletic accomplishments).
- 6 You may want to include a link to online video footage and a reference from a current or former coach in your correspondence with university coaches. (Make sure to provide the name and status of the coach providing the reference in your cover letter).
- 7 Register with the appropriate Eligibility Center. This is an agency that provides initial eligibility certification for prospective athletes, but is not a placement agency. It provides initial eligibility certification results to colleges/universities that request the information.

# Sports Scholarships

## The DIY Scholarship (continued)

- 8 With luck, you should receive responses from universities within a few weeks. Some may invite you to submit a video of you participating in your sport, others may send a recruiter to see you in action for your club or invite you to visit their university.
- 9 Receiving notice of a coach's interest in you is a great start, but you still need to apply for admissions to the university through the same channels as other students. So you will need to register for and sit the SAT exam, as well as submit all required application materials by the deadlines set by each institution.
- 10 Throughout the process, keep in mind that students who are interested in pursuing sport at the varsity level in university should focus on the recruiting process towards becoming a university athlete rather than a quest for funding through a sports scholarship. Sports scholarships are often offered only late in the recruiting process.

This includes the Ivy League and all NCAA Division III universities. Additionally, because receiving a sport scholarship is extremely competitive, you will also want to look into other sources of funding and have fall back options for your undergraduate education, should you not receive a scholarship from the universities you've selected, or choose to attend a university that cannot offer a sport scholarship.

## Sports Scholarship Agencies

The second option is to work with a sport scholarship agency or placement service to connect with US universities actively seeking international student athletes and offering scholarships. These organisations will charge a fee for their assistance, but generally offer a comprehensive service that can make navigating the often complicated recruitment process clearer.

Students that choose to use an agency typically view paying their fee as an investment in their expertise and university contacts. However, this does not always guarantee a scholarship offer.

Please note, LFE has an exclusive agreement with FirstPoint USA, who provide a free support service for all LFE apprentices.

**More information about this can be found on page 19.**

Other additional costs and things to consider are:

- international medical insurance
- travel and accommodation costs
- tuition fees and the level of scholarship offered
- your eligibility
- which institution you are offered a place at
- US Visa



**LFE has joined forces with FirstPoint USA to offer a free US Scholarship pathway for apprentices.**

The exclusive partnership creates the opportunity for young footballers to access the student-athlete option in the States at no cost, using the expertise of FirstPoint's experienced consultants.

Founded in 2001, with support from the Prince's Trust and now part of the UCFB Group, FirstPoint assist 80,000 prospective students and student-athletes each year, whilst working directly with more than 2,500 of the best US colleges and universities.

Over the past 20 years, they have sent thousands of young UK footballers to the States, providing a life-changing opportunity and both the academic and sporting platform to fulfil their potential.

The agency has introduced a new digital platform – accessible via their website – to allow all prospective scholar-athletes the opportunity to assess their options and engage with institutions and coaches at the touch of a button and no cost.

A further endorsement of FirstPoint's credentials is the fact that they are certified by the NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA and the AIRC (American International Recruitment Council), to create academic and sporting opportunities for international student-athletes.

All of their 75-strong team – working from offices in London, Manchester, Glasgow, Shanghai, Dubai and Melbourne – are graduates of US institutions, academic experts and former collegiate athletes, meaning they can offer advice with the benefit of their own experiences.

## The process

LFE apprentices who are interested in a USA soccer scholarship should take the following steps:

- 1 Visit [www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education](http://www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education)
- 2 Click 'Athletes Start Here' and create your profile.
- 3 Once created, you will receive a message on the platform from one of FirstPoint's sports consultants.
- 4 Book in a call with your sports consultant to learn more about the opportunity.
- 5 Once you have had a discussion and decided to officially join the FirstPoint USA programme, you will be allocated a dedicated talent management consultant.
- 6 The talent management consultant will set up an introduction call and begin to plan your journey to the US.

## Key people

### Andrew Kean

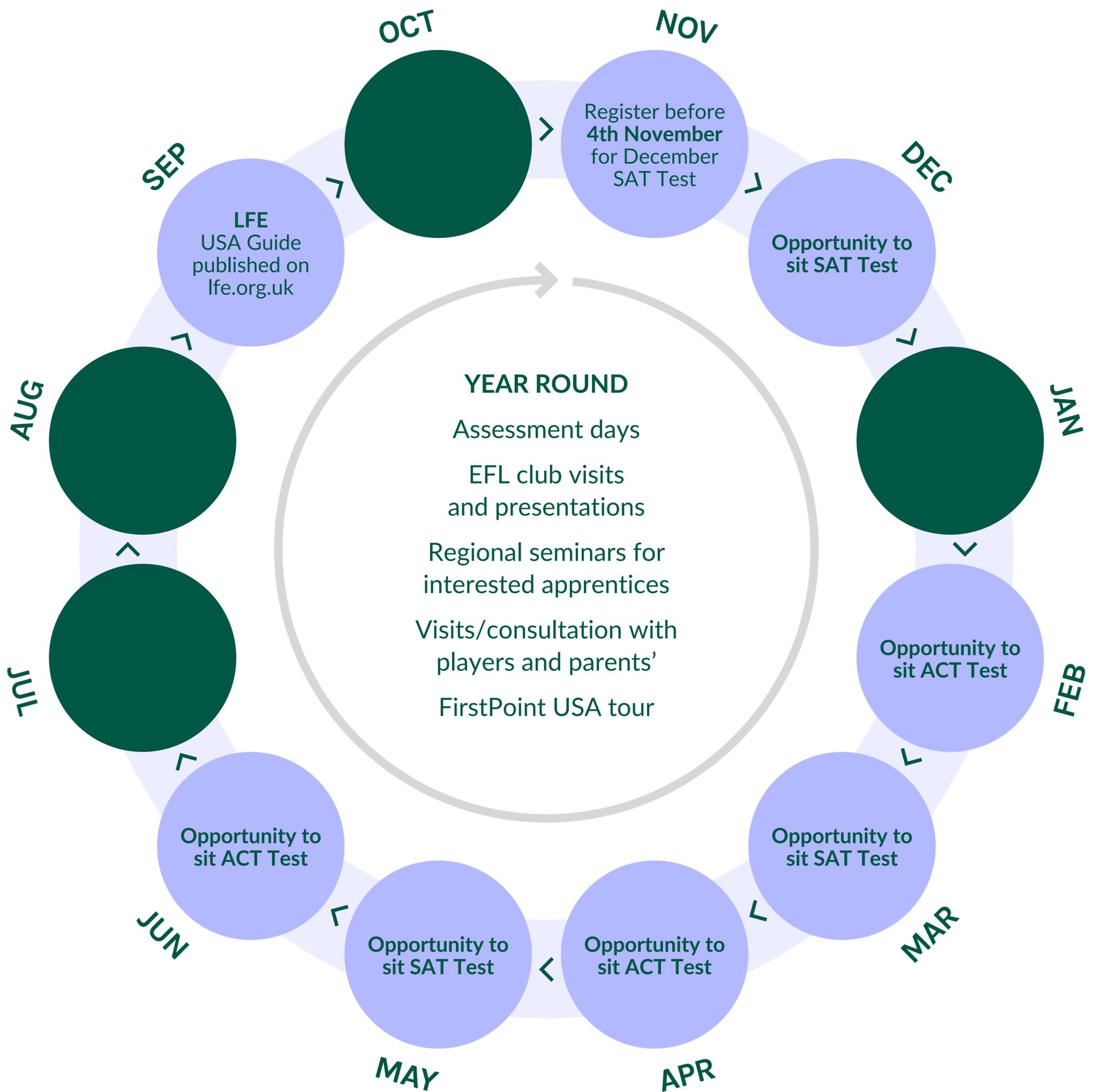
Chief Executive and Founder of FirstPoint USA, Andrew Kean earned a soccer scholarship to the University of Cincinnati and became the programme's first All-American award winner in their history. During his four years at the University of Cincinnati, Andrew was named Conference USA 'Defensive Player of the Year', Conference USA 'All-Conference 1st Team', a two-time NSCAA All-American, the Ohio 'Player of the Year', NSCAA All-Region, and the Cincinnati Bearcats 'Player of the Year'. He pursued an undergraduate degree in Nutrition and Physiology whilst at the University of Cincinnati. Upon his return to the UK, he set up FirstPoint USA in 2001.

### Ross Duncan

Ross is Chief Commercial Officer at FirstPoint USA and is the primary contact for all LFE scholarship enquiries.

You can contact Ross by email via [ross.duncan@firstpointusa.com](mailto:ross.duncan@firstpointusa.com)

# LFE Event Cycle



# PFA Charity Grants



The PFA provide grant aid for a variety of courses to help all members and ex-members of The PFA prepare for a second career. Members studying at university outside the UK can receive a £1,250 bursary per year of study.

You will need to apply for this bursary at the start of the academic year by contacting Pat Lally (Director of Education) or Oshor Williams (Assistant Director of Education) at PFA Education.

**Tel:** 0161 236 0637

**Email:** [education@thepfa.co.uk](mailto:education@thepfa.co.uk)

PFA Education  
11 Oxford Court  
Bishopsgate  
Manchester  
M2 3WQ

# Stories from the States

## Jamil Roberts

**Former club: Plymouth Argyle**

**U.S. College: Marshall University**

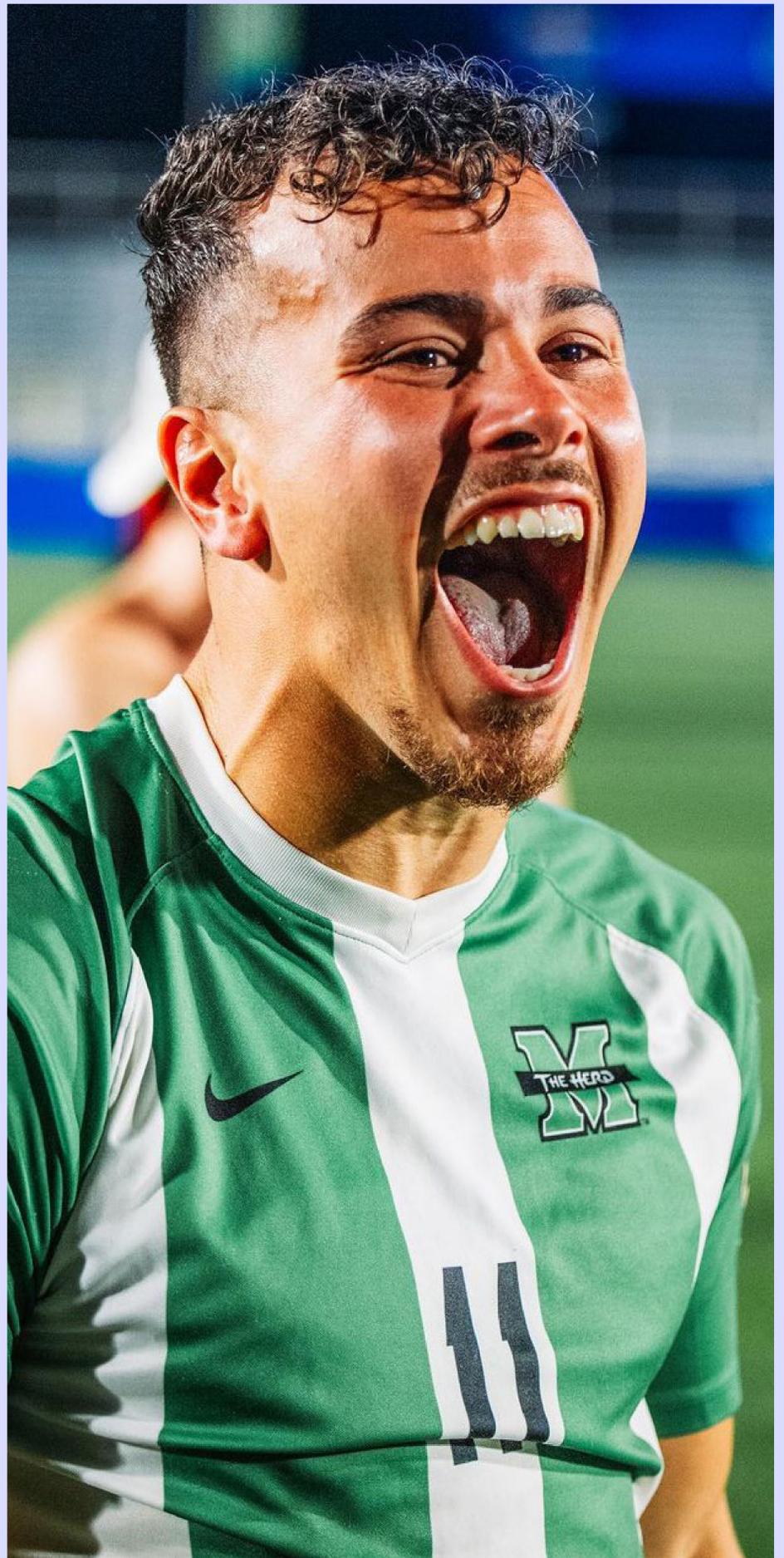
In the summer of 2016, Jamil Roberts' career in football was hanging by a thread after being released by Plymouth Argyle at the conclusion of his apprenticeship.

Almost five years later, the 23-year-old was accepting the NCAA Division 1 Offensive Most Outstanding Player award, having scored the winning goal to help Marshall University become NCAA National Champions for the first time in school history, since being established in 1895.

The versatile forward struck three straight match-winners in the quarter-final, semi-final and final, netting an extra time golden goal with the last kick of his college career before turning professional with Sporting Kansas City, who selected him with the 77th pick of the 2021 MLS SuperDraft.

"I've watched the game back many times and I still pinch myself," he told LFE. "To be the one who scored the historic goal and complete my four years at Marshall in that way, I couldn't have scripted it any better.

"Without blowing my trumpet too much, it did get to the point where I felt like a small town celebrity, which was very surreal. I don't think I paid for a drink in the month following the tournament. Everywhere I went, it was either on the house or someone was buying it for me.



# Stories from the States

“Some of the great Marshall athletes have had streets named after them around the city and there’s a rumour that I’ll have one of my own. There has also been talk that I could be an early inductee into the Hall of Fame.

“To even be mentioned in the same category as people like Randy Moss and Chad Pennington, who are NFL legends, that to me is just incredible.”

Unseeded Marshall enjoyed a fairytale run to the National crown, seeing off number one ranked Clemson, reigning champions Georgetown, hosts North Carolina and then Indiana, who boast one of the most successful soccer programmes in the nation.

“The NCAA Division 1 Tournament is the best against the best from across the whole country,” said Roberts, who was named as one of four finalists for Best Play at the 2021 ESPY Awards. “There are over 200 D1 teams and then 32 make it to the post-season competition.

“We had to beat some powerhouses of college soccer and we were dubbed as an underdog story by the media, but we never saw it that way.

“We were prepared to the finest detail for every opponent, which gave us so much belief in each round.

“Every single player played their part in helping us win the title, but inevitably my goal gets highlighted the most. I was a left-back in the Under-18s at Plymouth, but after one training session here, I was moved forward.

“That’s completely changed the trajectory of my career and to finish my time at Marshall with a tap-in, a proper striker’s goal, was very fitting.”

The American journey all started for Roberts in 2017, having spent a season struggling to make an impact at Dorchester Town in non-league, although a potential contract offer from Grimsby Town almost prevented him from making the switch across the pond.

“There’s a period of self-pity that comes after being released,” he added. “Some lads are ready to go straight into a new challenge after the apprenticeship, but I wasn’t. I needed some time to reflect and refocus.

“A year on from leaving Plymouth, I was refreshed and incredibly motivated to take on the challenge of America. Instead of holding onto a lot of bitterness, I was able to disconnect from that negativity and just focus on myself and my objectives.

“I was in pre-season training with Grimsby Town in League Two at the time and they’d made it clear that they intended to sign me.

# Stories from the States

**"At this point now, I've had four years of development, where I've matured physically as an athlete and mentally as a person, so now I feel a lot better prepared to start my professional career."**

"But the U.S. route offered a long-term guarantee of full-time football alongside getting a degree.

"At this point now, I've had four years of development, where I've matured physically as an athlete and mentally as a person, so now I feel a lot better prepared to start my professional career."

The experience in the States is not just limited to on the pitch and in the classroom, providing opportunities to travel and learn about different cultures.

"It's massively broadened my horizons," Roberts said. "Our team was made up of lads from America, England, Germany, Argentina, Yemen, New Zealand, and that's just what I remember off the top of my head.

"Aside from going to university in West Virginia and now playing in Kansas City, I've visited places like Florida, Miami, New York, California, LA, San Diego, Seattle, Chicago and North Carolina, so I'm well-travelled.

"I made a commitment to immerse myself in the community and make an effort to understand the local culture, and I feel like I've done that.

"I've become a much more rounded person with a better perspective on the world.

"Overall, it's been a learning curve on and off the pitch. It's allowed me to pursue education at a level I never thought I'd reach and it's enabled me to achieve my dream of becoming a professional footballer, which I didn't think would be possible after being released at 17.

"In all aspects, it's been the best experience of my life and I hope that it continues now that I'm away from the college environment."

# Stories from the States

## Javen Palmer

Former club: Crystal Palace

U.S. College: Georgia State University



Having been released by Crystal Palace in 2014, Javen Palmer spent six months on trial at various clubs before deciding to take on the challenge of a Soccer Scholarship in the USA at Farleigh Dickinson University in New Jersey, he then transferred to the renowned Georgia State University for his final two years.

“I had been at Palace from the age of 8, so I had never really faced any rejection before,” he told LFE. “It was definitely a difficult time. I wasn’t sure what was next but I felt that as one door closes another opens.

“A former coach of mine had mentioned America as a possibility. I didn’t decide until around September, having recovered from a torn meniscus and been on a few trials at some lower league teams.

The idea of going to the USA and playing full-time football, in addition to getting a degree, just made perfect sense to me.”

The student-athlete lifestyle means there is a strong emphasis on education. Palmer embraced his classroom responsibilities, earning a place on the Dean’s List and twice on the President’s List at Georgia State, which celebrate high academic performance.

“I’d say to any apprentice to make sure they are doing their best, even if it isn’t what they necessarily want to focus on,” he said. “You need to put yourself in the best position and it is important to have good grades when you decide you are going to go to America.

“There is a lot of work to do, but once you get to grips with the time management aspect of it, it becomes easier to handle. Once you learn about how to format essays and how to answer test questions, it becomes second nature.

“My major is in Sports Administration, which encompasses the whole sports industry really.

“You learn about the business side and the coaching side. It covers contract laws, sports marketing, sports finance, event planning, event management and many other subjects.

“Some people may find it harder than others, but education is always in your control. You can control how much you study, how prepared you are for a test, or how much you research for an essay.”

# Stories from the States

Palmer has also been receptive to learning away from the classroom, using the frequent travel opportunities to explore new cultures and increase his knowledge of American history.

He added: “For the games, we do a lot of travelling and I have been to a lot of places on the East Coast. I’ve been to New York City, Philadelphia, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Alabama, Mississippi, New Orleans and more, so I have managed to see places that I would never have envisioned.

“New Orleans was definitely the best trip that I went on. I got to try the local food and got involved in the Mardi Gras celebration. Atlanta has a lot of history and Georgia as a state has great history with regards to the Civil Rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr’s home is in Atlanta and they have a museum dedicated to him, which is really interesting.

“I am currently working at a non-profit organisation called Soccer in the Streets. We do great work for disadvantaged youth in Atlanta. I help to schedule tournaments, handle budgets, recruit corporate sponsors and handle community engagement efforts.

“Football in America is not accessible to everyone because the fees to play are expensive, so doing this work helps to give children the opportunity to play the game. It’s also good for me as I get to interact with different people, learn some administrative skills and gain experience in a working environment.”

The former Eagles apprentice admitted he has discovered the importance of developing on and off the field during his time in the States and advised current apprentices to be

aware that they can have an identity outside of football.

“Four years have flown by,” he said. “The opportunity to train everyday has definitely made me a better player. We basically live like professionals here. As a person, I’d say I have just become a lot more socially conscious and informed. I’ve definitely grown as an individual.

“Living in London can keep you inside a small bubble, so this was definitely an experience that I will look back on with fond memories. The experience has allowed me to make friends for life and enhance my skills and traits, while also working on my weaknesses.

“At the start of the process, all of my focus was on football and trying to become a professional. Now that I am on the other end of this four-year process, I now see that there is so much more to life after football, and maximising that part of life is going to be important.

“I think that some young pros do not realise that they have a lot of time on their hands. Training is actually a small window of your day. Focus on your football, do extra training on your own. But when that is all done, you can use your hours to better yourself in other ways.

“Learn about another industry, don’t close yourself off to opportunities. Some lads don’t realise they are more than just footballers. I didn’t understand that until about two years ago. It took me to get to 21, and being out of full-time football for three years, to really understand that I am more than just a player. Lads should explore options that will better them as individuals.”

# Stories from the States

## Mo Adams

Former club: Derby County

U.S. College: Syracuse University



From being rejected by Derby County, to mixing with elite players in Major League Soccer, Mo Adams has overcome many obstacles to earn a career in football.

While other Rams Academy products have become established first-teamers at Pride Park, Adams was forced on a different path after being released by the club in 2015.

When a prospective move to Blackburn Rovers fell through due to injury, the tenacious midfielder turned his attention to the USA, pursuing a scholarship at the prestigious Syracuse University, which sparked his journey to the MLS.

“As an apprentice, you learn how to be disciplined and you mature as a person,” the 23-year-old told LFE. “You’re working within a competitive environment which requires resilience and mental toughness, so I was prepared to deal with any setbacks that came my way in America.

“I’m a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Nothing worth having comes easy and I have the mindset to use adversity as motivation.

“I remember making a LinkedIn account and messaging over 200 coaches in England, from managers to assistants to scouts, and I didn’t get a single response. I then played in a showcase game and received around 10 full scholarship offers to go to the States, so it was nice to feel wanted again.”

The Brit abroad thrived in his new life in New York, claiming numerous awards in the highly-regarded Atlantic Coast Conference, as well as being named Syracuse’s Rookie of the Year before donning the captain’s armband in his Sophomore season.

# Stories from the States

“When you come from England and you’ve been in an Academy, you get a bit of respect,” Adams said. “However, with that comes accountability and increased expectations. They invest a lot to give you a scholarship and the way to repay that faith was to be the best person, student and player I could be.

“I came in as a Freshman with a chip on my shoulder and I think that mentality spread to other guys in the group. I wanted to set an example at all times, whether it be in training, in matches, in the classroom or just generally around campus.

“You become part of a family and I was proud to represent the Orange. People are dedicated fans and pay money to watch college sport. Even at our soccer games, we’d consistently play in front of around 4,000 supporters.

“A lot of our matches were nationally televised and nothing goes unnoticed because there is such extensive coverage. Every game counts. It’s very challenging and it motivates you to be competitive every day because there are rewards that will come with performing to a high standard.”

Adams’ success was not just restricted to his performance on the pitch, with his commitment to education resulting in an inclusion on the university’s Athletic Director Honor Roll, which recognises outstanding academic accomplishments.

“Over there, you’re a student first and an athlete second,” he continued. “Coming to the States gave me the chance to pursue my dream of becoming a professional player while also staying in education and having the university experience.

“As a student athlete, there is an understanding that it can be tough to balance your sport and studies, so you’re given the luxury of having as many tutors as you want, who can help you with your assignments.



“The coaches care just as much about your education as they do about your performance on the field because they care about you as a person, first and foremost.”

# Stories from the States

Despite only being halfway through his four-year course, the dream of a professional playing career became a reality in 2018 when Adams secured a Generation Adidas contract, which allows early entry for the MLS SuperDraft.

Having been a free agent with his leg in a cast just two years earlier, Adams was on his way to link up with World Cup winner Bastian Schweinsteiger, after Chicago Fire traded up to select him with the 10th pick.

He said: "Playing alongside one of the most decorated players in the world was a surreal experience. I remember the first time I saw him; I was pinching myself thinking it can't be real. I was always paired up with him in passing drills or patterns of play, which was an amazing experience.

"I still speak to him now – he texts me every now and again to check how I'm doing. He's an unbelievable player, but he's an even better person and the advice and guidance that he has given me has been integral in my development since turning professional."

Having spent 18 months with the Fire, 2018 MLS Cup champions Atlanta United – managed by Dutch legend Frank de Boer – came calling for his services in July 2019.

Adams made an instant impact, scoring his first professional goal two minutes into his debut, while he has since made contributions in the MLS Cup play-offs and CONCACAF Champions League, as well as winning silverware in the Campeones Cup.

And he has not forgotten his academic ambitions, recently restarting his studies with help from the MLS' partnership with Southern New Hampshire University, which offers players a flexible online education.

"I made a commitment to complete the whole college experience and you have so much free time as a professional athlete. It's important to use that time to get better as an individual and to also work on your future," he said.

"I'm learning about Sports Management at the moment, but my long-term intention is to get into broadcasting. I'm planning to do a Masters degree in Digital Broadcasting and Journalism and I'm trying to get more involved in media work to build my connections and experience in the industry.

"Coming to America has definitely been the best decision I've ever made. It's given me the opportunity to become a professional athlete, pursue a degree and gain some amazing experiences along the way.

"I'd advise players to explore options abroad because if you put yourself in a bubble, you'll never be able to grow. Be open to new opportunities and be willing to take risks. You could be one decision away from a totally different life."

# Useful Contacts

## College Board

[www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)

Provides information tips on dates and fees, online registration, SAT test preparation etc.

## The ACT

[www.actstudent.org](http://www.actstudent.org)

An alternative to the SAT test.

## NCAA Eligibility Center

[www.eligibilitycenter.org](http://www.eligibilitycenter.org)

This agency provides initial eligibility certification for prospective NCAA athletes. It provides initial eligibility certification results to colleges/universities that request the information.

## NAIA Eligibility Center

[www.playnaia.org](http://www.playnaia.org)

## FirstPointUSA

[www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education](http://www.firstpointusa.com/partner/league-football-education)



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