



Touchline

LEWIS

SIMMONS

The ex-Preston North End footballer details his transition from the pitch to the parachute regiment

PLUS Emmanuel Afolabi • Army Workshops • Apprentice of the Season

Careers

LFE learners can take advantage of employment opportunities thanks to LFE's partnerships with a variety of different organisations. Browse the range of exciting pathways at lfe.org.uk/careers

LFE Transition Officer

Academy players can seek information, advice and guidance regarding alternative options at any time from LFE's Transition Officer, Anthony Cato.

Contact him at acato@lfe.org.uk

Higher Education

All LFE apprentices can pursue a route to university in the UK or abroad if they achieve the required academic qualifications.

Download our informative guides to Higher Education or USA Scholarships at lfe.org.uk/touchline-downloads



Professional Footballers' Association

The PFA's Education Team provide guidance and funding for educational and vocational courses that support personal development and transition towards a second career. PFA members can also receive support in attaining FA and UEFA qualifications, which are often mandatory requirements when applying for jobs in coaching and management within professional football.

For more information, visit thepfa.com/players/education

THE ALUMNI PLAYER VOICE

In June 2021, LFE launched the Alumni Player Voice initiative to facilitate a safe and confidential space for past apprentices to talk about experiences, best practices, and areas for development regarding the transition support provided by clubs and wider organisations.

If you are an ex-apprentice and would like to contribute to our next session, contact PCT Support Officer, Ryan White (RWhite@lfe.org.uk) or LFE Communications (communications@lfe.org.uk).

Ofsted Outstanding

League Football Education (LFE) is delighted to announce it has been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, following an inspection in February.

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

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



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GOAL OF THE MONTH



STAN SKIPPER
DECEMBER WINNER

The winner of December's competition was Gillingham midfielder Stan Skipper, whose powerful strike from range versus Northampton Town claimed 50% of the votes.



AJAY MATTHEWS
FEBRUARY WINNER

Middlesbrough middleman Ajay Matthews won February's award after his fizzing effort from distance at Manchester City racked up 48% of the votes.

LFE'S GOAL OF THE MONTH COMPETITION RECOGNISES THE BEST STRIKES FROM ACROSS THE ACADEMY LEAGUES. FROM INDIVIDUAL MOMENTS OF BRILLIANCE TO EXCELLENT TEAM GOALS, THE SEASON SO FAR HAS BEEN FILLED WITH MEMORABLE STRIKES. HERE ARE THE WINNERS FROM DECEMBER ONWARDS...



JOSEPH WRAGG
JANUARY WINNER

January's award went to Exeter City's Joseph Wragg. The midfielder's long-range dink over the keeper versus Bristol City picked up 53% of the votes.



EDWIN ESSEL
MARCH WINNER

Edwin collected the March accolade after applying the finishing touch to a brilliantly worked team goal by the young Mariners versus Huddersfield Town, a goal that claimed 40% of the votes.



ZAK KEMPSTER-DOWN
APRIL WINNER

The Crewe Alexandra defender showed his composure at the other end of the pitch by curling home a terrific strike into the top corner, finishing off a great team move. Zak's goal amassed 98% of the votes.

ACADEMY LEAGUES ROUND-UP



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH EAST DIVISION

After the first half of the season was contested by local rivals **Lincoln City** and **Grimsby Town** battling it out for top spot, **Harrogate Town** enjoyed the strongest end to the season becoming eventual league winners, with the two aforementioned Lincolnshire sides finishing 5th (Grimsby) and 6th (Lincoln) respectively.

Runners-up were **Bradford City**, who finished an agonising two points off their Yorkshire counterparts at the summit. At the rear end of the table, **Rotherham United** never really recovered from their faltering start to the campaign and finished bottom after the final ball was kicked.



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH WEST DIVISION

In the north west division, **Blackpool** were crowned champions after an impressive second half of the campaign. The Seaside's rounded off a memorable season with a 4-1 home victory on the final day versus bitter rivals and defending champions **Preston North End**. The Lilywhites, who began their title defence strongly in the early knockings, finished the season in 10th place. At the foot of the table, **Walsall** finished bottom after enduring a difficult season from start to finish.



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH EAST DIVISION

It came with very little surprise that runaway leaders **Luton Town** ended up eventual winners in the south east division. The all-conquering young Hatters enjoyed a remarkable season, winning 18 out of their 20 matches and finishing 12 points clear of second placed **AFC Wimbledon**. The Hertfordshire outfit also boasted the most potent attack in the division, scoring a whopping 84 goals. Their defence wasn't too bad either, conceding just 12 all season. **Leyton Orient** finished bottom of the table and despite not having endured the worst of seasons defensively, it was their potency in attack that proved to be their downfall, netting just 20.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH WEST DIVISION

Following a closely contested title race between three south west coast sides, **AFC Bournemouth** ran out eventual league winners finishing just two points clear of **Plymouth Argyle** in second. Greg Miller's **Portsmouth** side who were top of the pile in December finished the season in 3rd. **Forest Green Rovers** ended a tough season in 10th position.



MERIT LEAGUE ONE

Just like in their Youth Alliance division, **Luton Town** ruled victorious in the Merit League One league, however the Hatters didn't runaway with this division in the same fashion. Alan McCormack's side narrowly pipped **Swindon Town** to the title by just a single point. It was a tightly contested division all together, with less than 10 points separating **Gillingham** in 3rd and **Sutton United** at the bottom.

MERIT LEAGUE TWO

In the second of two Merit Leagues, **Northampton Town** turned out eventual champions after the nine matchdays finishing four points clear of second placed **Bristol Rovers**. **Leyton Orient** enjoyed a much-improved Merit campaign compared to their Youth Alliance one by finishing 3rd. It was another really tight division, with the gap between Orient and bottom of the table **Southend United** being just eight points.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE NORTH

In the U18 PDL North, **Barnsley** were eventually crowned worthy champions. The young Tykes finished top of the table 11 points clear of second placed **Sheffield United**. Due to the system of the competition, they then went into the semi-finals where they faced off against PDL South runners-up **Millwall**, beating the Lions 1-0 to make it to the final. The Yorkshire side were then matched up against PDL South champions **Charlton Athletic** in the overall title decider, winning on penalties after a cagey 2-2 draw at Oakwell.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE SOUTH

Eventual PDL overall runners-up **Charlton Athletic** enjoyed a strong season in the PDL South finishing top of the pile after 28 matchdays. As a result, the Addicks progressed through to the semi finals where they swept aside **Sheffield United** 5-1 to make it to the final at Oakwell, losing agonisingly on penalties.

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE

After a long, competitive season in both the north and south divisions, **Manchester City** and **West Ham United** made it through to the national final after finishing top of their respective leagues. Hammers captain Gideon Kodua put his side ahead at the Etihad Stadium after just 16 minutes with a smart first-time finish before a second half equaliser from City's Justin Oboavwodu forced extra time, where the same forward would snatch the winner in the 102nd minute.

PAVING THE WAY

Having signed for Charlton Athletic at the age of just eight years old, Emmanuel Afolabi progressed through the Addicks ranks as part of a very talented age group.

"We had a good team. There was me, Joe Gomez now of Liverpool and England, Esri Konsa who's at Villa, Ademola Lookman, now out at Atalanta in Serie A," Afolabi told LFE. "I got to age the age of 12 and they (Charlton) offered me and Joe Gomez four-year deals. Only me and Joe signed them, which effectively kept us at the club until U16s. But when we were like 14/15, they offered us both two-year scholarships early, so I knew I'd be at the club until I was at least 18. It was a good experience."

However, when Emmanuel's scholarship with Charlton ended, he wasn't offered a professional contract, a decision that the then 18-year-old sensed was coming. "When I became a scholar, I didn't get as many minutes as I wanted, so I didn't get that time to develop as much as I wanted to at that moment in time, which is probably the most important time in your career. ▶



I missed out on a lot of development. I sort of sensed it was coming, like I said I didn't get as much playing time as I should have got. I mentally prepared myself for it to be honest. I knew the time would come; it was just a matter of when. So, when they brought me into the office and gave me the news, it was just like 'it is what it is', it was just unfortunate really."

Following his release, Emmanuel initially hoped to earn another contract elsewhere, but a combination of factors made finding a new club hard. "It was a difficult time. Essentially, you're just left alone to fend for yourself. I didn't have an agent or anything, so that's what kind of messed me up. I went to other clubs through a scout at Charlton, so they did try and help me out in that way, but it was hard.

I went to Colchester, Barnet and Crystal Palace after leaving Charlton, but unlucky for me, they already had players in my position who had three- or four-year professional deals, so it was always going to be hard for me to get in there and try and replace them, especially not having played as much football as I'd have wanted to near the end of my time at Charlton. It was difficult, I went to a few clubs and was let down, so the only option was to go lower and lower and that knocked my confidence a little, so I just decided to hang my boots up for a bit and do something else." In the initial weeks and months after his journey at the Valley ended, Emmanuel took time to focus on himself to try and come to terms with the position he found himself in and work out what he wanted to do next.



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"I just disengaged from people and tried to focus on myself, try and figure things out myself. I distanced myself from everyone at home. I was a bit embarrassed, because everyone knew me as 'the footballer', so I was like 'what am I now?', I didn't have an identity anymore.

"Even still now, it's difficult. Growing up, that's what everyone knew me as. Initially I felt like I'm now just another person. When you're a footballer, that's your thing. When you're no longer a footballer, it's back to normal. It's a difficult transition, I'll be honest. You've just got to be mentally strong and keep on the right track. I just decided if I wasn't going to be a footballer, I still wanted to be something, it was just a matter of what."

Just before he left Charlton, the idea of university was posed to Emmanuel, something that he'd never had to consider before.

"When I was at Charlton still, the support came from the Education Manager. He said university was an option, so he helped me think about that, because I wasn't thinking about that at all. Luckily for the former Charlton apprentice, a cousin of his was in the civil engineering field and that paved the way for Emmanuel.

"I did have a bit of an interest in engineering, but my focus was football. I didn't really know how to get into engineering, but, luckily for me, I had that support. I just kind of followed in his footsteps."

After deciding to pursue a potential career in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths), Emmanuel embarked on a new adventure by enrolling at the University of East London. "When you're a scholar, you do a BTEC, but when I went to go to

university, I didn't have enough UCAS points to get onto a decent course, so that was a bit of a hindrance. I went to the University of East London and I'm from East London myself, so I wanted to stay local. I ended up doing an entry level course in Maths and Physics, which eventually gave me the credits to move onto first-year, but I'll tell you what, after the first month or two, I was about ready to quit.

I was thinking 'I've stopped playing football and now I'm doing crazy maths and science!', but I just kept at it. I knew my plan A was gone, so I had to make damn sure that plan B worked out. I was sure of that, and I was going to do everything in my power to make that happen. I followed the right steps, hung around with the right people, I was very determined. ▶

I'm scared of failure, I'd done it once, I couldn't fail again. That's why I put so much effort into everything that I do."

During Emmanuel's time at university, he was offered an internship at his local council working as a Trainee Civil Engineer, an opportunity which would eventually create a lot of opportunities for the former LFE learner. "When I was in second year at university, my class were offered placement jobs. Only like three of us applied, but I saw it as a big opportunity to gain some good experience before graduating, so I was surprised that most people didn't apply. I was lucky enough to get an interview and get a placement. I did my placement year, then I worked at the same company part-time during my third year at university, for Newham Council as a Trainee Civil Engineer.

That gave me the experience I needed. The company I work for now, Ramboll, they gave me an interview after university, and I got the job straight away! It was a smooth transition."

"I now deal with below ground drainage and highways. When you talk about STEM and engineering, it's important for countries to thrive and develop. If countries don't have this, it's hard for them to develop. When I'm walking down the street now, I look at curbs and drains and I can see what's wrong with them! (laughs). It (civil engineering) helps you understand the world better."

Alongside his day-to-day job at Ramboll, the 26-year-old runs an organisation of his own – The Fest Hub. Founded by himself in 2021, The Fest Hub aims to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and professional football club scholars get involved with

STEM based careers. "The year I started my graduate scheme at Ramboll, I was like four months in, and I was just listening to TalkSPORT, and they were discussing the general lack of support for players. I've always had quite an entrepreneurial mind, so me being an engineer, I thought 'if I can do it, why can't other players who don't make it go into it as well', so essentially, I started The Fest Hub to combine the two. I've been there, you get released and you don't know what to do, so I wanted to use my experience to give back to the boys and girls.

"The FESTHub connects football and STEM. We're reaching out to schools and football clubs to try and engage them with STEM and what's around them in the world as well. Plus, STEM companies are always looking for new people, new talent.

There is always going to be jobs available within the industry.



Footballers for example, what they don't realise is that engineers build their training ground and other facilities. I think footballers should know what goes into it whilst also playing and doing their thing.

"I try to invite different organisations to come in and help inspire and engage the students in STEM learning, because a lot of the time these kids are from disadvantaged communities, so they don't really have that connection with anyone within the industry, so we bring engineers in and try and open their eyes to the different possible careers that they can go into. We discuss roles and responsibilities in a construction project. We also do activities, things that can get their mind working and used to working in a team, but we like to link it all in with football to bring a different dynamic. We're going into football clubs, so the whole aim of the project is to use those clubs to engage the young people in STEM, that's the uniqueness about it all. It's not a common thing

within the industry, I'm the only person who really does this and it comes from my own life story."

Emmanuel's story is one of perseverance and self-belief. Not only did he not allow rejection at a young age define him, but he also used the unfortunate circumstances as motivation to excel in a different field – something that he believes, anyone is capable of. "Don't be limited to just one thing, you've always got to be open to considering other options in case plan A doesn't work out. Think about something else other than football that they could potentially venture into. People don't believe it will happen to them (get released), like me, I didn't think it would happen to me. But just because football doesn't work out, it does not mean that's the end of everything, you can go on and do something else. I think that's the beauty of our programme, I've been in their shoes, I can relate to them. My story is to try and inspire. Don't keep your head down, keep pushing.

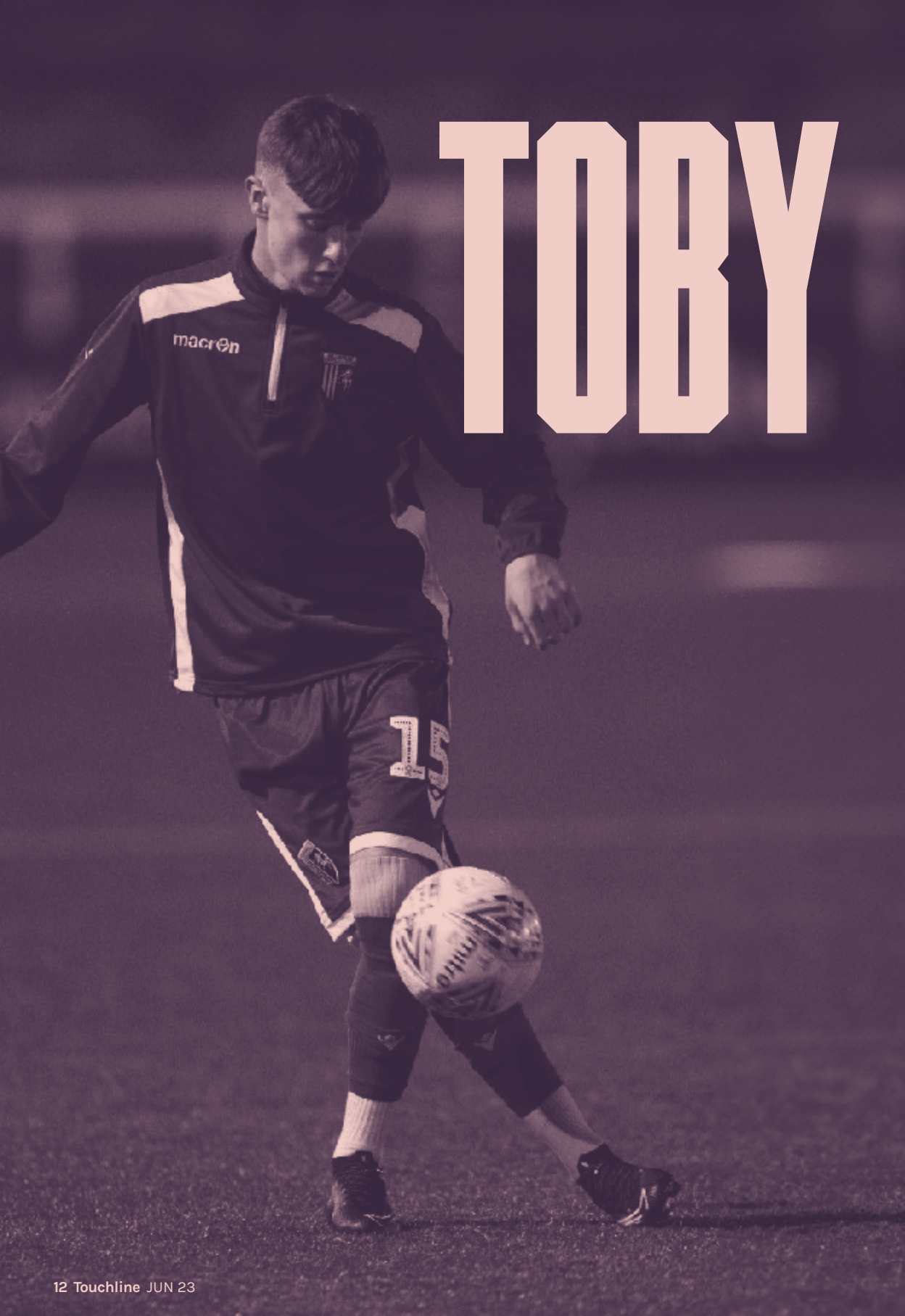
"The FESTHub company slogan is: 'you can't become what you can't see'."

Each year, the company Emmanuel works for, Ramboll, holds awards to recognise the outstanding achievements and work that employees have contributed to the organisation. The winners were recently announced, with Emmanuel picking up the 'Culture & EDI Champion' award. "I am deeply honoured and humbled to win this award. I want to express my gratitude to the organisation worldwide for recognising me and the work we do at The Fest Hub. I am also incredibly grateful to my family and friends, and mentors who have supported me throughout my journey. I've worked extremely hard since I was released from Charlton in 2015 and never let the disappointment affect my mental health. I'm dedicating this award to the all the football academy players, both boys and girls, who never achieved their dream. Life isn't over, you can always change paths and succeed elsewhere" ■



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TOBY

BANCROFT

FROM SOUTH EAST TO MIDDLE EAST

At just 19 years of age, Toby Bancroft took a gamble and left the world of professional football in order to pursue a different dream.

Despite earning a one-year professional contract after previously being released by his boyhood club Gillingham, a series of events one summer saw the forward cast aside.

"I remember it was my 18th birthday on the day we all got our decisions and every single one of us got let go. Toby told LFE. "It was a bit of a nightmare; I remember that birthday very well but all for the wrong reasons! However, just a month later they called me back. Steve Evans was the first team manager at the time, and he said he wanted to offer me a one-year professional contract for the upcoming season. Within such a short time, my life had completely changed around. It went from going so well, to so badly and then really good again.

"We had a game in the Kent Cup against Dover in which I made my debut. I came on in the 90th minute and scored in the 91st. At that point everything was up in the air, I thought 'right, I'm flying here'. I was young, training with the first team almost every day and just living the dream.

"I was doing my first pre-season and it was going really well, but then a little incident happened on the training pitch, and it changed. To be honest, I'm not sure whether the manager really liked my playing style but it's hard to translate what you do in the youth sides into the first team. In the youth team you can be a big fish but not in the first team. It just went downhill from there."

"I don't hold anything against the manager or anyone else, it's just part and parcel of football at the end of the day. A week before the season started, I was back training with the youth team. It went from this ultimate high to 'what am I doing?' I loved the lads in the U18s, but I wasn't progressing or getting any better, I was just wasting time. That was that really."

After his time with the Gills concluded, the Kent born youngster delved into non-league football for a period of time, plying his trade at his local side Sittingbourne. ►

"After I left Gillingham, I went to play non-league. In my first year I played for Sittingbourne and that was great. Darren Blackburn was the manager at the time, and he was absolutely top. Really good guy and a good manager. I was doing well but I was still playing like a youth team footballer. I was more focused on nutmegging people and doing flashy skills when in reality it's men's football and people are paying to come and watch so the main focus is winning the game. So, in that regard, I did find it difficult, but non-league developed me massively on and off the pitch."

Whilst turning out for Sittingbourne in the Isthmian League, Toby began flirting with the idea of moving into the property industry after falling out of love with football. "I went straight into the property game after leaving Gillingham. When I was playing football, I was already going into houses on Wednesdays and renovating them with a company. I probably quit football too early, but I lacked a huge amount of self-confidence after what happened that summer and I gave in."

"When I got to about 18, I realised that it wasn't actually the football that I loved, it was what could come with it. I was training hard and giving my all, but all for the wrong reasons. I hated training but I was doing it because I was money motivated, which is entirely the wrong reason to do it. In reality, that is the wrong reason to do anything in life. You should enjoy what you're doing and then the other stuff will hopefully come with it."

Despite coming to the realisation that a career in football wasn't truthfully the path that he wanted to go down, Toby admits losing his identity as a footballer was tough to deal with. "I think it's something that completely gets put aside. Realistically, it's only organisations like LFE and the PFA that support you on that journey. The support I got from them was really good. I have a fantastic family, really tight knit. They were always around me and supportive at that time and in that sense I was lucky. My family and my work ethic to carry on were my coping mechanisms after leaving football. The hardest thing was losing my identity. I was known as a footballer throughout my whole childhood and then once I wasn't anymore, I had no idea what my identity was. I used to rely on the fact that I played football. It brought me popularity and perks, so it was strange and also very gutting when that all stopped."

Having left the world of football behind, Toby was keen to take the next step in his property career and stumbled across an opportunity that he felt was too good to ignore. "I was firmly focused on property as soon as I left football."

"It's a good business to get into. I saw an opportunity with investing in property, as a private investment director to be precise. I saw it on LinkedIn and realistically knew I didn't have the qualifications for it, but I told myself that I was going to attend the interview anyway and as soon as I'm there, I'll make an impression."

"I THINK IT'S SOMETHING THAT COMPLETELY GETS PUT ASIDE. REALISTICALLY, IT'S ONLY ORGANISATIONS LIKE LFE AND THE PFA THAT SUPPORT YOU ON THAT JOURNEY."

"As soon as the interview started, I really liked everything about the opportunity. I said to them there and then that I will work ridiculous hours and I want to go really far. I was only 20, but I knew I was mature enough and had the relevant skill set to do it."

The former footballer had the courage of his convictions and secured the role as a private investment director for One Investments: a leading property investment company with offices all over the globe, with Toby jetting off to start a new life at their Dubai branch. "I left a lot of things back at home. I had a great girlfriend, great family, and friends etc but realistically if you're going to give something your all and put in the necessary work, sometimes you have to put those things to the side. That was really difficult because you miss out on a lot of opportunities that society says you should be doing as a 20-year-old, but any successful person in any field will tell you that you almost have to be a bit obsessed with what you're doing."

"It's been life changing. The beauty of Dubai is one, it's very westernised, so it's like England in a way, but it's sunny and I don't have to pay any taxes! You can do anything you want, whenever you want. Everything is open pretty much 24/7."



"I'm really big into paddle, I play that more or less every morning. That keeps me sane and keeps me fit. But I'm in the office sometimes from 11am until 1am, that's the reality sometimes, you have to put in the hard yards to reap the rewards. But it's an extremely glamorous place - a really attractive place to come and work, but it's not for everyone but I think that goes for anything. I do think it's an ideal place for people coming out of football in a way. Football is such a high-pressured environment, but through football you learn so many important life skills. Those skills can be transferred into working out here, but without the pressures. I absolutely love it. I love my day-to-day job and routine."

"I wake up about 8am every day and the first thing I do is go for a quick swim to get some sun. Then I'll either go in the gym or play some paddle. Another great thing about Dubai is that you can get anywhere in like 10/15 minutes in a car or taxi. I head into the office at around 11:30. I'll then call leads, call data, and call some clients to keep up to date with them. I will then have some meetings either on Zoom or in person if that client is in Dubai. That is more or less my day, spending time with clients and being personable; that is what One Investments is all about. ►





"I HAD THE BEST TIME BEING A SCHOLAR, I ABSOLUTELY LOVED IT, BUT ONE THING I WOULD SAY IS DON'T TAKE IT TOO SERIOUSLY. I ALWAYS PERFORMED BETTER WHEN I PLAYED WITH A SMILE ON MY FACE."



"We're not an agency, we don't sell property. We do build our own property but we're essentially the middle man between the agencies and the developers, so we're a lot more personable on that front."

Since his move from the South East to the Middle East, Toby has found a new lease of life and believes the flexibility and added incentives that Dubai offers makes it an attractive proposition for anyone. "So many more people nowadays want to have their own business and they want to work for themselves. Now, I'm employed by One Investments, but I'll be working off a laptop or my phone wherever I am in the world, whether that be Dubai, Kent, America... it's the same."

"I can speak to my clients from anywhere, so I am working for myself in that regard. You get out entirely what you put in, it's the same with everything. I believe you make your own luck in any line of work, but especially in this field. Depending on how hard you work, you can determine how much you earn in this industry. There is some people in the office who are perhaps just happy to close a couple of deals and probably earn 40/50k a year, whereas there is some who do everything they possibly can and make upwards of 500k a year. Moving out here and working in this line of work is a great experience and I'd recommend it to most. There is also so many incentives out here. If you work hard, you can win prizes such as holidays to places like the Maldives."

Looking back at his time as an apprentice, he believes it's important for others now in the same position to keep an open mind and maintain a positive outlook throughout their journey. "It's really difficult. I had the best time being a scholar, I absolutely loved it, but one thing I would say is don't take it too seriously. I always performed better when I played with a smile on my face. You're 16/17 years old and you think it's the end of the world if you miss a chance or don't get picked for a match. We've all seen the amazing stories of people like Jamie Vardy who suffered set back after set back but are now playing at the very top. It was the worst day of my life being released by Gillingham, but then I realised there is more to life than football, so much more. You learn a lot of transferrable skills through football, and I translated a lot of them into my next chapter. They're really valuable, regardless of if you make it or not." ■

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SPORTING CHANCE



League
Football
Education

DEBUTANTS

As we head towards the end of another memorable season, let's take a look at a selection of LFE learners who have been handed their league debuts during the second half of the campaign.

Romain Esse

Millwall

The highly thought of Romain Esse made his first team league bow in the Lions' Boxing Day triumph away at Watford, coming on in the 90th minute.



Charlie Hughes

Wigan Athletic

The 19-year-old was thrust into the starting line-up for Wigan's Boxing Day trip to Middlesbrough. The Latics lost 4-1, however it was a valuable experience for Hughes, who has made a further 12 appearances since.

Omar Taylor-Clarke

Bristol City

The Robins midfielder was introduced for the final five minutes of his sides' 2-0 win over Blackpool in March. He joined several Academy products to have been handed their senior debuts by Nigel Pearson this season.



Noah Mawene and Jacob Slater

Preston North End

The Preston North End duo were handed their first taste of Championship action in the Lilywhites' huge 4-1 away victory at local rivals Blackburn Rovers in December.

Emre Tezgel and Nathan Lowe

Stoke City

Tezgel, who is an England U17 international, was rewarded with a brief cameo performance in the Potters' 4-0 thumping of Reading in January, coming on for Dwight Gayle in the 84th minute. Tezgel's team-mate, Nathan Lowe, made his league debut a month later in a 1-0 loss at Blackpool, playing the final couple of minutes at Bloomfield Road.



Aaron Pickles and Connor O'Brien

Accrington Stanley

The Accrington duo were both handed their League One debuts in Stanley's 1-1 draw at Vale Park back in February. Pickles completed a full 90, putting in an impressive display at the heart of their defence, whilst O'Brien was introduced for the final 10 minutes of the match.

**Jack Endacott**

Plymouth Argyle

Endacott made his league bow in Argyle's 3-0 New Year's Day triumph over MK Dons at Home Park. The left-back was introduced in the 70th minute of the game.

**Rio Shipston**

Sheffield Wednesday

The 18-year-old was introduced with minutes remaining of the Owls' clash with Cambridge United at Hillsborough in January, helping Darren Moore's side see out a 5-0 victory.

**Aaron Donnelly**

Port Vale

Aaron Donnelly is another youngster on loan from Nottingham Forest playing their trade in League One. Like Dale Taylor, the 19-year-old is also a Northern Ireland international and made his league debut for Port Vale in a 0-0 draw away to Cheltenham in January.

**Dale Taylor**

Burton Albion

Burton Albion signed striker Dale Taylor on loan from Nottingham Forest in January and the Northern Ireland international took just 49 minutes to bag his first goal on his league debut for the club, netting his teams second to seal a 2-0 home win against Oxford United.

**Jovon Makama**

Lincoln City

Young forward Jovon Makama was rewarded with his League One debut in the closing stages of Lincoln City's trip to the capital to face Charlton Athletic in January. A valuable experience for Jovon, despite the Imps falling to a narrow 2-1 defeat.

**Taylor Anderson**

Mansfield Town

Anderson was deservedly named in LFE's latest edition of 'The 11' for his excellent progress both on and off the pitch after a long struggle with injuries. The right-back has impressed those at Mansfield Town massively and his hard work was recently rewarded with a League Two debut in a 4-0 victory on the road at Carlisle.

**Matus Holicek**

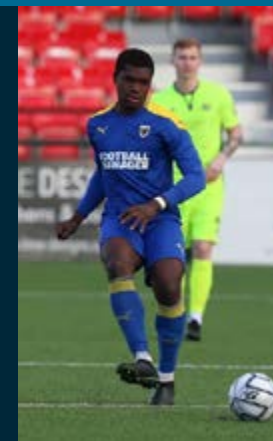
Crewe Alexandra

Matus Holicek has impressed at youth level for Crewe Alexandra and penned a long-term professional contract for the club in January. The Slovakian was rewarded for his continued development with a league debut in March, coming on for the final 15 minutes of the Railwaymen's 1-0 defeat at Northampton.

**Obed Yeboah**

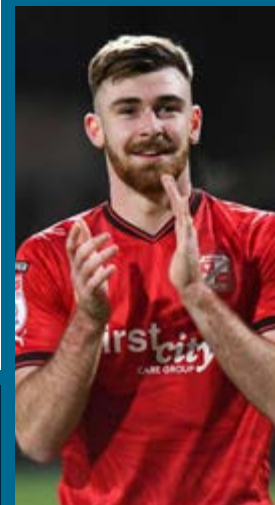
AFC Wimbledon

The 18-year-old centre forward made his Dons bow in a narrow 2-1 defeat at Barrow back in March, entering the pitch in the final minutes as his side searched for an equaliser.

**Harrison Minturn**

Swindon Town

Home-grown defender Harrison Minturn was handed a league debut for Swindon Town in their 3-3 draw at home to Gillingham in January. The 19-year-old helped his side complete a hard-earned comeback.

**Kiban Rai**

Newport County

Rai made his senior debut for Newport during a 3-1 defeat at Salford City back in March, coming on as a substitute in the 87th minute.

LFE

APPRENTICE OF THE SEASON



The winners of the three LFE Apprentice of the Season awards were recently revealed at a star-studded EFL Awards at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London.

ASH PHILLIPS



LFE CHAMPIONSHIP APPRENTICE OF THE SEASON

For Blackburn Rovers' Ash Phillips, the 2022/23 campaign has proved to be a huge success, with the Riversiders defender excelling both on and off the pitch.

The 17-year-old made his professional bow for Jon Dahl Tomasson's side in a 4-0 Carabao Cup triumph over Hartlepool United at Ewood Park back in August, followed shortly by his Championship debut four days later, playing 71 minutes in a 2-1 victory versus West Bromwich Albion.

The England U19 international has since gone on to make a further 12 appearances for the Lancashire club this season and has looked right at home on every occasion. He also put pen-to-paper on a three-year professional contract in September.

However, his progress away from the field of play is just as impressive, with the towering 6'4 central defender well on course to achieve D*D*D* in his BTEC programme.

Blackburn's Head of Education, Neil Chadwick, said: "The fact that Ash is also thinking about his education beyond his scholarship is testament to his attitude towards his personal development and lifelong learning." He was also selected in the latest edition of The 11.

After winning the award, Phillips told LFE: "I'm over the moon, it's a great moment for the family and I'm very proud to have won this trophy."

He also detailed how he balances his on and off the pitch commitments... "It's all about planning really, making sure you're one step ahead. Planning around training, making sure you get the work done because the work is just as important as the football."

"You also want to be performing on and off the pitch, so ultimately, it's about creating a good plan and making sure you stick to it."

"Character of mind is I want to be the best of the best, not only on the pitch but I want to top all the marks education wise."

RUNNERS-UP: Jamie Knight-Lebel (Bristol City) and Emre Tezgel (Stoke City)



Charlton Athletic possess a rich history of producing home-grown talent through their academy system and integrating them into the first team set-up - the talented Zach Mitchell is one of the latest.

The 18-year-old penned his first professional deal with the Addicks last July and has since enjoyed an extremely positive campaign. Mitchell made his maiden first team appearance versus Brighton & Hove Albion U21s back in November, starting the match and playing 65 minutes of the Papa Johns Trophy clash. He then made his second appearance and FA Cup debut just four days later during a 4-1 win against Coalville Town at The Valley. The defender has since turned out for the senior side on six more occasions.

Off the pitch, Mitchell is also excelling. Alongside his BTEC programme, he is also undertaking an A-Level.

Mitchell told LFE: "I'm delighted. Firstly, congratulations to the other nominees, very well deserved, they're great players, but yes, delighted more than anything. I'm also extremely grateful to everyone who has supported me on my journey so far... family, players, staff... I'm excited for the future."

Touching on his additional educational responsibilities, he added: "I do it because I enjoy it. I don't necessarily see it as a burden or anything like that, I almost look forward to it because it can take your mind off football which at times can be a positive, allowing you to step back and refocus."

RUNNERS-UP: Fabio Jalo (Barnsley) and Gatlin O'Donkor (Oxford United)



At just 17 years of age, Josh Tomlinson has already steeped his name in Northampton Town's history books.

At the back end of the 2021/22 season, he became the club's youngest ever appearance maker at just 15 years and 336 days, breaking the record previously set by Ivan Toney.

Then, in October, he scored versus Arsenal U21s in a Papa Johns Trophy tie - a goal that saw the young defender become the Cobblers' youngest ever goal scorer. Josh signed his first professional contract in December.

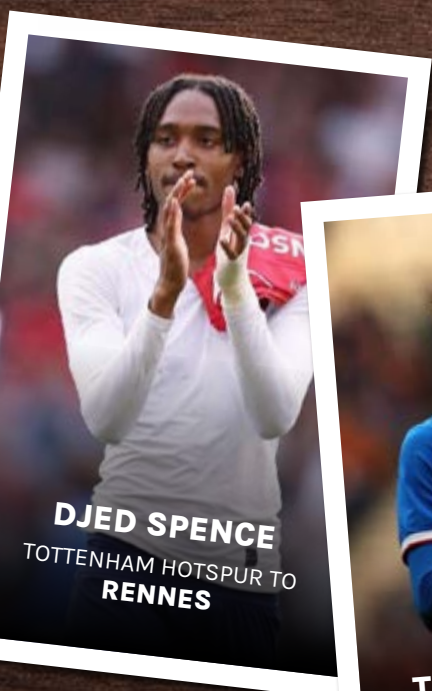
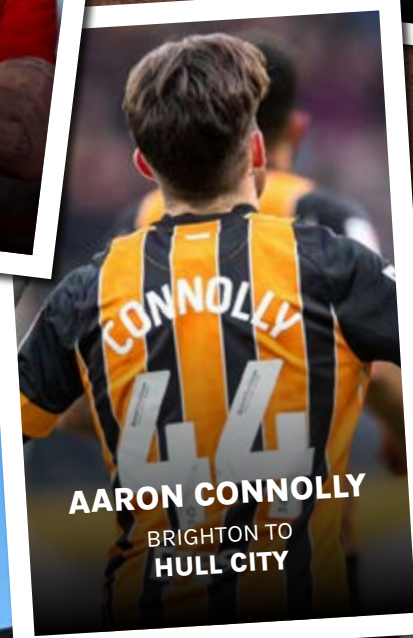
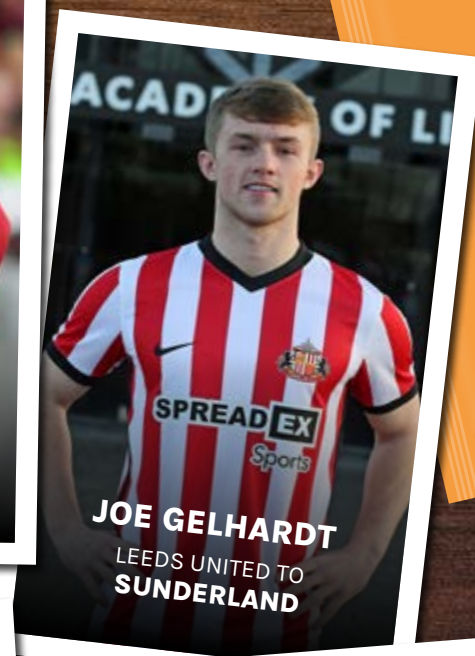
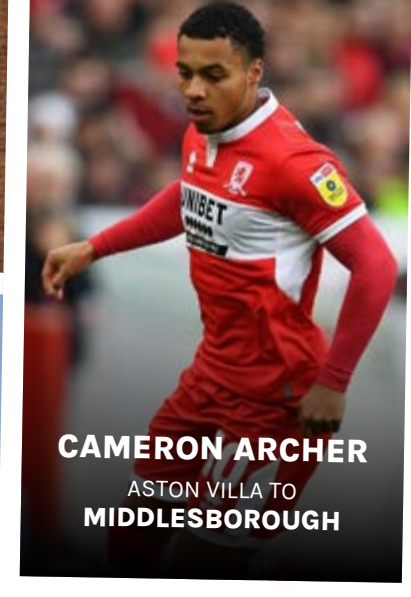
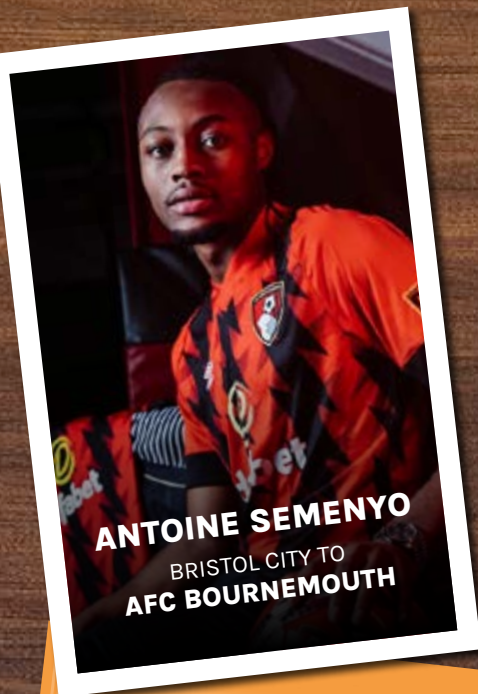
The Kettering born youth product has since gained valuable experience of senior football with two short loan spells at Harborough Town and Barwell respectively.

Away from the cut and thrust of the football pitch, Josh is a high performing learner who's maturity on the pitch transfers into the classroom. He is on track to achieve his targeted grades and always makes the effort to successfully catch up on any work missed due to his commitments with the first team.

Josh said after picking up his award: "It's hard to put into words to be fair. I can't say I expected it, but I'm absolutely buzzing to receive this award."

RUNNERS-UP: Matus Holicek (Crewe Alexandra) and Emmanuel Ilesanmi (Harrogate Town)

ON THE MOVE



With very little in the way of big money moves for former LFE learners during the January transfer window, many ex-apprentices secured loan switches.

Here is a selection of deals that were made during the winter window.

ARMY WORKSHOPS

When people think of the army, the vast majority simply envisage soldiers fighting on the front line. However, despite soldiers being the face of the overall operation, with over 200 different jobs and more than 40 apprenticeships available, there really is a potential career for everyone.

The sporting opportunities are also endless. The British Army provides the chance to pursue high-level participation in sport, while perfecting a trade, gaining invaluable experience, and furthering a career.

Lee Fraser and Barry Rizza both served in the army for over 20 years and are now Sports Engagement Warrant Officers for the British Army and run their own initiative called STEPS (Soldier, Trade skills, Experiences, Personal Development, Sporting Success). As part of the Army's partnership with

LFE, the pair visit football clubs all over the country to deliver workshops to young footballers to educate and open their eyes to the opportunities on offer if a full-time professional career in football doesn't quite work out. STEPS is delivered as an engaging workshop that provides an overview of the journey (the steps) a scholar would take to achieve both personal development and sporting success within the British Army.

LFE recently caught up with Lee and Barry to find out more.



What do your sessions involve?

Lee: "It's a life skills workshop, highlighting opportunities in the Army for those young footballers who don't make it. The initial presentation has a constant underlying football theme as this allows the scholars to relate what we are delivering enabling an engaging workshop throughout the session which is key. It also allows us to create an environment where we can myth bust on some of the areas that are preconceived ideas in the eyes of scholars whilst also re enforcing the message of the hard work and effort involved, required to allow them to achieve their maximum potential. After the workshops, when we ask the lads for feedback, the main thing that comes back is 'they just didn't realise.' They did not realise the opportunities available. They just see what they see on the TV and we're showing them it's not all like that. Following on from the interactive presentation we put on a couple of classroom based team building activities. Our first activity acts as an ice breaker to get them out their comfort zones and to form groups leading onto activity two. The second activity begins with both myself and Barry talking about the values and standards essential to a soldier where we look to get these core values from the audience. From here we turn it on them, in their groups they must come up with their own values and standards of being an apprentice at their academy. This has gone down really well as they academy managers and coaches at the clubs become involved

in judging which group have created the best set of values. It allows an opportunity to empower players to be accountable for what they believe in and can also re instil any values and standards the club we are visiting have already embedded into them.

"We've been delivering STEPS just over a year, and we've done 14 clubs. STEPS will be delivered on a two year cycle to allow for fresh audiences. With the initial relationship built between clubs we have delivered to; further engagement activity will continue every season working on essential skills such as leadership and communication."

What careers can the Army provide?

Lee: "This is an important part of the myth busting segment of our workshops. We ask the lads how many jobs they think there are in the Army. When we tell them there are over 220 trades, they're shocked. You could be a mechanic, an engineer, chef, anything. In the presentation, we try and relate them all to the football pitch, starting with the goalkeeper, these are your medical trades such as nurse, dentist, vet, essentially the "safe hands" all the way up to the striker position, that's your infantry soldier. It's important to make the workshops relatable. We talk about the trades, the qualifications, going from zero qualifications all the way to GCSEs. They can do engagement visits and experience days to see if it's something for them, but where our partnership with LFE comes in is going that little bit further.

"An academy footballer is about 75% there (being a soldier) due to the fantastic work put in by the academies. This is why the link is so good between us and LFE. These young lads know about working in a team, being on time, what to wear, what to eat, being fit and motivated. The transferrable skills are there. Some players won't make the cut at their clubs because they're missing a couple of bits – the Army can give them that."

"We also highlight that again due to the opportunities available with sport where we have over forty sports supported by the Army, it gives them the chance as athletes to realise the peak of their sporting potential could be in a completely different discipline. We have had soldiers not quite there in terms of footballing ability trying their hand at boxing and reaching a professional level in this field." ►

"THE TRANSFERRABLE SKILLS ARE THERE. SOME PLAYERS WON'T MAKE THE CUT AT THEIR CLUBS BECAUSE THEY'RE MISSING A COUPLE OF BITS – THE ARMY CAN GIVE THEM THAT."

What footballing opportunities can the Army give a recently released player?

Barry: “At the highest level of football in the Army, there are four different levels you can represent. You’ve got your regiment where you work on a day-to-day basis, they’ll play on a Wednesday afternoon in a local league against other regiments. Then you’ve got your corps, such as the Royal Engineers and Intelligence Corps. They also play in a league on Friday’s. Then you’ve got the Army, they probably play 10 games in a season. They do a couple days training camp leading up to the game. The pinnacle is to represent the UK Armed Forces which is the best of the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. During the season, you could end up playing 40/50 games and you’re travelling around the country, bouncing between teams.

“I went around the world playing football with the Army, I had the honour of being captain for both the Army and UK Armed Forces. I have played in places like Brazil, Mauritius, New Zealand – all over the world playing constant football. At the same time, I was getting trade qualifications which is what our package involves. I’m now employed by a college through the transferrable skills that I picked up in the Army. I was on that same journey as a scholar with Inverness Caledonian Thistle, I remind the scholars during our workshops that just because you get the bad news, you can still go on and get qualified, make a career, and play high-level sport.”

“We like to highlight Tom Broadbent as a successful

case study. He initially didn’t make it as a footballer because he was missing a couple of bits – such as physicality and confidence... he joined the Army, with the mentoring and development he was provided both on and off the field during his time in the Royal Artillery he successfully plied his trade for both the Army and UK Armed Forces as a left back as during our presentations we light heartedly say how the manager didn’t fancy him as a centre back. With this newly gained confidence and development, he got another chance and ended up winning League Two with Swindon Town just a couple of years ago, as a centre back.”

What is the standard of football like?

Lee: “At corps level, the PFA came down and said it’s probably above the highest level of university standard, so pretty high. We’ve got lads in the Army playing step four or five level at the weekend.”

Barry: “When we were over in Brazil, we were there at the same time as the England team who were there for the World Cup, and we were sharing the training facility with them. We played against certain Brazilian forces who due to national service had guys on their team on the books at big clubs like Flamengo. We’ve travelled to Germany and played in Bundesliga stadiums in front of 20 thousand people, the opportunities and experiences really are endless.”

What is the work/football balance?

Lee: “STEPS as mentioned is our acronym. To achieve anything, you have to go through steps and climb the

ladder to succeed. In football, it’s joining the academy, going through the age groups, getting your apprenticeship, getting your professional deal etc. Same applies for the Army, you get your trade skills, experiences, personal development skills, then sporting success. Get all those bits right, get the hard work done on the training pitch and with an education you are provided. If you work hard on the training pitch and the classroom invariably you start the game. It’s the same with us in the Army. You get your trade skills, work hard as a soldier first and then that opens other opportunities like sport, travel and adventure. Do the hard work first, you’ll then get your reward.”

How have the workshops been received?

Lee: “From the feedback we have received, certainly some of their heads have been turned. Now because they’ve realised there are so many different trades and opportunities, it’s something some of them will consider. It’s a great opportunity, and a very viable one. As mentioned scholars due to their time at an academy are in a perfect position for a smooth and enjoyable transition”

Barry: “The workshops have been received really well. At the end of each one, we ask the attendees if they have learnt anything new and almost 100 percent of the time the answer is yes. We get asked the old classic “have you shot anybody?” but what people don’t realise is that you can go 20+ years in the Army and never shoot a weapon. That’s a huge part of the myth busting.” ■



For one of Lee and Barry’s most recent STEPS workshops, they headed to Luton Town where they spoke to the Hatters’ U18 and U21 sides.

Wayne Polson, Luton Town’s Academy Player Care Officer, told LFE about his experience of the STEPS workshop.

“Lee and Barry delivered a workshop in our analysis room to the U18s and U21s. There was a presentation that described the path roots of players that have been part of the army and what they do in terms of how they joined. You have to do two years in the army and then you can filter into different sectors, and it explains how you can get into the playing side of it as well. Clubs that they’ve played for, players that have had success stories of being in the army and coming into the professional game.

“We actually have Craig Alcock who is our U16s manager who has actually done that route. He was initially in the army and then went into playing professional football. After the workshop, the players were really appreciative

of Lee and Barry giving them his time and the way in which they actually engage the group is brilliant. It’s not just about delivering a workshop, but it’s about making it relatable for the players. That’s what helped the group stay engaged. The activities that he did within the session were good and made it relatable to the club.

“Two of the lads after the session spoke to Lee directly and they were definitely keen to learn more. With boys in this environment, they’re not sure where they’re going to end up but the more options they have, the better. This is definitely one that guarantees a different pathway/option for the boys that are in the academy/development centre. Being in the army gives you the chance to play at a high level as well. One, you’re building a career in the army but two, you can be playing football at a high level as well. I think that was the main takeaway from the workshop.”

LEWIS SIMMONS



In 2019, Lewis Simmons was released by his boyhood club Preston North End at the conclusion of his two-year apprenticeship.

For many young footballers who suffer(ed) the same fate, knowing what to do next can be difficult. However, for Lewis, a potential career in the army was always something that had been of interest to him.

Fast forward four years and the 22-year-old is now a paratrooper in the British Army. LFE spoke to Lewis to find out more about his transition from the footballing world into the Parachute Regiment.

“I got scouted by Preston at eight years old and signed for them when I was nine. I played all the way through up until 16 and from there I signed a scholarship, so a two-year apprenticeship. I was 17/18 playing with the reserves but then I got to the end of my scholarship and wasn’t offered a professional deal,” Lewis told LFE. “I did kind of see it coming, although I did think at the time, I still had a chance. Look, getting a professional contract is one of the hardest things to achieve. Out of 13 of 14 lads in my team, only two got a pro deal in the end. A lot of the lads that I still speak to have pretty much fallen out of the game. A couple of them still play at semi-pro level, but other than that, no one really plays anymore, but I knew I wanted to carry on playing in some sense.

After spending nine years with the Lancashire club, Lewis admits receiving the news that he wouldn’t be getting a professional contract was hard to deal with, but for him, he used it as fuel to go and make something of himself. “Getting released probably was the hardest thing that’s ever happened to me but in my eyes you can either sit back and cry about it and feel sorry for yourself, or get up, go again, and go and do something about it.

“I just made sure I was still playing, I think that was the most important thing, just playing. Taking that initial step of going down and playing non-league football for a bit actually helped me massively. Going from playing with boys my age at 18/19 with the reserves, it’s not as competitive, there’s no real sort of winning mentality because it’s not as competitive in terms of results, it’s all individual performance based. Sometimes taking one step down (to non-league) can mean you then take two or three steps forward. So yeah, playing was it for me. Just because I’d had a little set back, it didn’t mean that was the end of football. ▶



“THERE IS SO MANY DIFFERENT TEAMS YOU CAN PLAY FOR IN THE ARMY. MY UNIT IS THE PARACHUTE REGIMENT BUT THERE IS HUNDREDS OF OTHER UNITS WHICH CAN PLAY AGAINST EACH OTHER.”



“I was playing for AFC Blackpool but then Covid hit. I didn’t know exactly what to do but I had always had an interest in the army, and I knew there were lots of opportunities to play football and at a good standard within the army, so I signed up.

“It’s something I’d always had in the back of my head to be honest. Growing up, obviously becoming a professional footballer was my main goal but I’d always had a back-up plan with the army. My dad was in the army, but he never forced it upon me, it was all off my own back. I don’t think he really wanted me to go in to be fair, but it was something I wanted to do. I joined the Parachute Regiment and that is kind of the elite of the elite. For me, it was either the Royal Marines or the Parachute Regiment. They’re the two most physically demanding in my eyes, the most challenging. I decided if I was going to do it, I wanted to join the best.

Within a year, Lewis had gone from training to try and earn a professional contract with Preston North End, to being put through his paces in brutal conditions in his attempt to become a paratrooper. “I went to Estonia to do cold weather survival training. It was -22 degrees; it was absolutely freezing. I was out there for five weeks and that’s essentially where the money is made because you get paid when you’re on deployment and travelling overseas. I also went to North Macedonia doing an airborne exercise working with foreign nations. Those types of deployments are training, trying to keep yourself ready for the real thing so to speak.”

Not long after the completion of his training, Lewis was thrown in right at the deep end when he was deployed to Afghanistan as part of Operation Pitting. This was a British military operation to evacuate British civilians following the 2021 Taliban offensive.

“We went to extract British civilians and civilians who worked with NATO forces over there as the Taliban were taking over. I was there for 14 days, literally straight out of training and kind of like a rabbit in headlights, but it was a big moment for me.

“I’d only been out of training six weeks, so naturally I was nervous. I’d trained for 30 weeks to be in the Parachute Regiment and then all of a sudden, they’re like ‘you’re going to Afghanistan’ with all of these experienced paratroopers who had been there and done it. It was a shock to be honest. At the end of the day, I’m going to Afghanistan. You know it’s the real thing.

“When I got over there, I was a bit wary and nervous. The first couple of days passed and my adrenaline was through the roof. Yet when you realise, you’re surrounded by the best of the best, you almost feel safe. You’re around people you can trust, people who have been through the same hardship and training as you have. I know it sounds a bit cliché, but they are like your brothers. You can talk to them about anything. If you have any issues at all, you can tell them. It’s one big family and everyone looks after each other.

“Once the first few days have passed and the nerves have settled down and you actually get to work, all your training kicks in and you just realise that this is your job, and this is what I am here to do. It was a scary experience, but one I really enjoyed.”

Alongside his day-to-day job in the army, Lewis has continued to pursue his passion for football. Thanks to the huge amount of investment put into army sport and the endless opportunities that it provides, the footballer turned paratrooper’s transition from a training ground to the barracks has been a relatively smooth one. “There is so many different teams you can play for in the army. My unit is the Parachute Regiment but there is hundreds of other units which can play against each other. You’ve then got the actual army team which is like the ultimate where all the regiments combine together. So, all the best players from the different regiments play together to make up the team. Like myself, you get a lot of players who

have joined the army with experience of playing in an academy previously or at a high level like me. I know lads in the team who have been let go by the likes of York City, Leicester, and Hereford, so we’ve got a lot of players who have played in a professional environment before. To be fair, it’s a really good standard of football.

“Technically, the level playing for the U18s or reserves at Preston was higher we were all training twice a day by elite coaches and getting looked after like professionals but with the army it’s men’s football. I’d compare it to non-league football. We do get some players who play in the Conference South or North division at the weekend and play for the army as well. If I’m being honest, I’d say the standard of football in the army edges the academy standard slightly overall. You wouldn’t realise it from an outsiders perspective because in the army the main priority isn’t football of course, it’s your job but sport is huge in the army. So much money is invested, you get your kit and tracksuits paid for, in the changing rooms we have all the sports gels, nutrition, masseuses, analysts, you get everything. It really is like being in a professional changing room environment.

“It’s made that transition out the academy environment so much easier because the treatment in the army is so similar. It’s kind of like a new lease of life because I still feel like I’m almost in an academy, playing at a men’s level, doing a job I enjoy and getting paid for it too.” ■



GRIMSBY TOWN U18S ORSTED TRIP



Grimsby Town FC U18's recently visited Orsted, a Danish company with a strong presence in the UK who specialise in renewable energy.

The Orsted vision is a world that runs entirely on green energy. Orsted develops, constructs, and operates offshore and onshore wind farms, solar farms, energy storage facilities, renewable hydrogen, green fuels facilities, and bioenergy plants. Orsted is recognised on the CDP Climate Change A List as a global leader on climate action and was the first energy company in the world to have its science-based net-zero emissions target validated by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi).

The trip to Orsted's East Coast Hub in Grimsby was to create awareness of their operation and the numerous apprenticeships and career opportunities available. Harriet Farmery from Orsted kindly facilitated the visit with the club. All attendees were said to have thoroughly enjoyed the visit and learned a great deal about renewables and Orsted as an organisation.

Henry Burt, a player for Grimsby Town's U18s said: "The trip was really interesting and helped us understand how renewable energy can help save the planet. We were given a full tour around the facility, which was brilliant, and shocked us with how much is involved in keeping the wind turbines running. they gave a talk about the range of apprenticeships that Orsted offers and how we could register our interest. It's good that the club and LFE give us the opportunity to see and think about other options if we don't get professional contracts."



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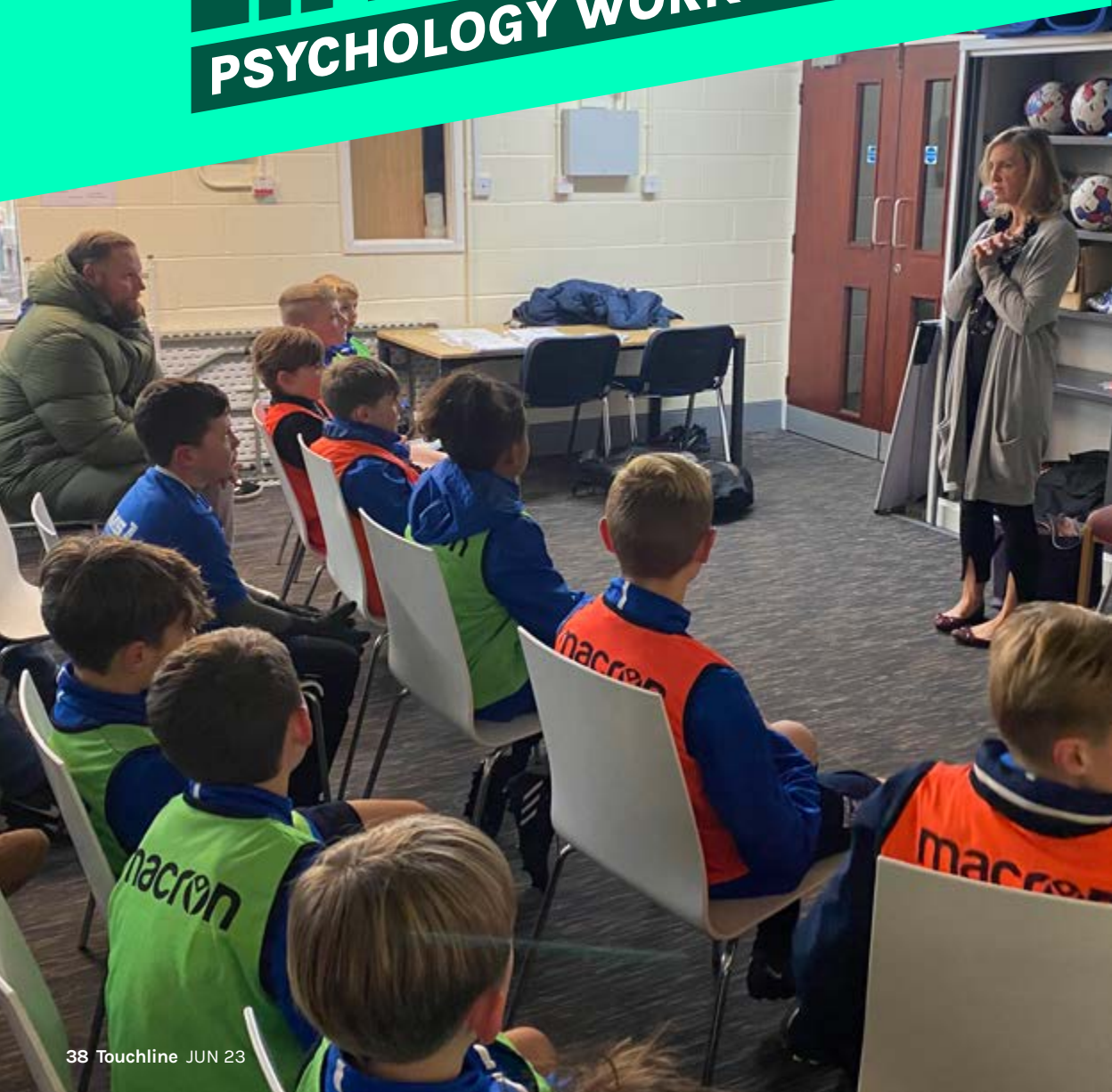
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**For football.
For life.**

LIFE SKILLS

PSYCHOLOGY WORKSHOP



Players from the Gillingham FC Academy and their parents recently took part in a series of psychological workshops delivered by Claire Noyelle, who is an Associate Clinical Hypnotherapist at Inspired to Change.

Claire used a wide variety of practical and theoretical activities throughout each workshop to ensure that players and parents were included and engaged throughout. Claire delivered a range of workshops on topics such as:

- An Introduction to the Human Brain (U9s/U10s)
- An Introduction to Psychology (U11s-U14s)
- Sleep Optimisation (U15s/U16s)

The players, parents and staff were all said to have found the workshops invaluable.

Nick Farrell, Gillingham's Player Care Manager said: "When I walked into the Under 9's session and one boy in Claire's session is wearing a wolf mask whilst the others are all sitting there laughing, including Claire, I could see that Claire had broken the ice and got the boys gripped. The staff are still using some of Claire's phrases to the boys to support them as best they can by using things that they picked up from Claire's sessions. At Gillingham FC Academy within our life skills sessions, we aim to provide learning opportunities on and off the field to the players, staff, and parents. Claire's session gave us a great opportunity to provide that."

Following the most recent session, LFE caught up with Claire to find out more... "My connection with Gillingham dates to when my son was there. When he was training, I'd sit upstairs in the café and study as I was currently doing my hypnotherapy course at that point. I got chatting to Bryan Bull, Head of Academy, and he was curious to find out what I was doing. Not necessarily the hypnosis side, but certainly the performance and visualisation side," Claire told LFE.

"We then came up with a series of workshops, initially starting with the simple topics of how your brain works, how you make it work better for you in terms of performance and resilience and it's kind of grown from there. As the players and coaches moved through the academy, they went down well so I started doing them every year. I then added one purely on resilience, because we all know it's hard for a person to work through the academy system, not knowing if they're still going to be there

next year or not. Putting all your hopes on being a world-famous footballer at the age of 12 or 13 is a big deal, so teaching them about being resilient is important. I then did some more sessions on sleep and how it enhances performance. I then added in a session on relaxation and visualisation.

"The younger groups get more of a basic introduction to the brain, where I talk about how the brain works, but I do it in a scientific way. My background is as a pharmacist, so I'm very big on science. So, I still use all the same technical and scientific language with the younger kids, but they all pick up on it well. We talk about the fact that we have a stress bucket, which we use to store all the difficult things that trouble us and that we must empty that stress bucket regularly because that's quite a nice and obvious visual analogy, however I am now formally known as 'the bucket lady'. Considering they've had a full day at school, and they want to be going out and playing football, they are always heavily engaged and interested which for me, is gratifying."

She added: "Learning how to improve performance, play better, stay focused, let go of certain things, keep your temper... these are all key skills, not just on the football pitch, but they're things they can refocus and take into the outside world and social situations.

"This helps build mental toughness. Not in the sense of 'man up and get on with it', but instead how can I learn from this situation? How can I put it into a different perspective and not view it as a failure. It goes without saying, the journey they're on is going to include disappointment, whether that's not getting picked for a match, or not getting retained for the next year. Having a level of resilience and knowing how to maintain that is one of the key points I try to get across.

"In other workshops we cover visualisation because people are now recognising this can give you an advantage. Using visualisation means that you can practically train and play in your head. You can train on the way to school, on the way to training or on the bus, anywhere. It's a technique that a lot of people are now beginning to use."

Over the past few months, Birmingham City have been doing their utmost to provide young people within the academy with as much room for learning and growth as possible.

Tim Smith, Head of Academy Education at the Championship club details some of the engaging LFE Life Skills workshops that have been delivered throughout the 2022/23 season.

BIRMINGHAM CITY WORKSHOPS

Operation Christmas Child

In December, all of our U18s travelled to Oldbury in the West Midlands to our local Samaritans centre in order to support this years 'Operation Christmas Child' initiative. The appeal asks volunteers to help pack and organise shoeboxes which contain children's books, toys, toothbrushes, toothpaste, gloves, hats, and other important pieces of kit to help children in other European countries, as well as local charities in the surrounding area. In total, our scholars packed over 1,500 shoeboxes in 4 hours - a fantastic achievement by them all.



Life After Professional Sport LAPS – Bristol City FC

In addition to Anthony's session, we took our U18s to Bristol City FC in order for them to experience the 'Life After Professional Sport' day. The event gets them thinking about the importance of their plan B and how they may start to think and execute that during their 2-year apprenticeship. It was a really productive day with some great speakers and companies who were there to share their knowledge and advise all young players on how to think, plan and consider their futures, both inside and out of the game

Ben Colliver Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Also in March, we had the pleasure of welcoming Ben Colliver, a university professor from Birmingham City University who delivered a very thought provoking and informative session to our U18s and schoolboys on LGBTQ+ and how as people we need to work harder to understand equality, diversity, and inclusion. The session covered so many valuable and insightful areas linked to EDI and ensured our young players understood more about this subject and how to deal with this better in their future careers.

Steve Sallis My Future Self

April also saw the U18s treated to an outstanding delivery by Steve Sallis from My Future Self. Steve was a really inspiring, motivational, and engaging speaker who made his talk totally apprentice centred by sharing his own childhood experiences in education, but then linking them to his roles in secondary schools and his numerous roles at professional football clubs. Every individual enjoyed the session, recognised it's value and went away feeling so positive about themselves and the direction they are traveling in.



Colin Avery Playing Safely

Additionally in April, the U18s were visited by Colin Avery from Playing Safely. Colin led a delivery on sexual health, well-being, consent, and many other topic areas linked to healthy relationships. A real interactive, engaging, fun and enjoyable session that was well executed by Colin.

YGAM Gaming

In another February session, the U18s, U16s and U15s had a visit by Ryan from YGAM, who are a national company that helps, supports, and prevents gaming and gambling harms amongst young people. It was a really productive session where all our scholars and schoolboys were engaged, asked lots of questions, and joined in the session with lots of enthusiasm.

Anthony Cato Careers & Transition

In March, the Under 18s had a Careers and Transition session delivered to them by Anthony Cato, LFE's Transition Officer. This presentation supports player transition and helps to ensure that our young players are thinking about potential careers further down the line, whether that be in football or in a different field. It's important to start considering a plan B.

Tarik Shamel Integrity

Again, in February, the U18s were visited by Tarik Shamel, who is Head of Integrity at the Football Association. It was a really informative session for the scholars as it centred around betting responsibilities and guidelines, before moving onto anti-doping protocols. The session was really well-presented, which ensured all of our scholars were fully compliant and fully updated with all the latest information that will support them on their football journey.

Ismail Bhamjil Muslim Chaplains in Sport

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Paul Stewart Safeguarding Awareness

Back in February, the U18s, U16s and U15s were visited by Paul Stewart, the former Tottenham, Liverpool, and England footballer who shared his football journey from the age of 10 and described the personal circumstances he

had encountered throughout his life which had shaped him as the person he is today. It was a powerful and engaging session, delivered by a man who spoke honestly and openly about his life as a young child and footballer.

A true professional who is a real inspiration. We were very lucky to have him speak to us, and our academy players showed him support and empathy, as well as total respect for him sharing his story.

For many sportsmen and women, the prospect of their sporting career coming to an end can be extremely daunting. What will I do next? What will be my identity? How will I replace that buzz? These are just a handful of questions they may ask themselves. This is where LAPS come in.

LAPS (Life After Professional Sport) help people decide which type of career may suit them best in the aftermath of retirement by providing support and advice in preparing CV's and interview techniques and putting people in touch with employers specifically searching for former sport professionals.

LAPS - Life After Professional Sport recently hosted their Ahead of The Game careers events for the 2022/23 season in March. The events took place at Hillsborough, the home of Sheffield Wednesday, Charlton Athletics' stadium The Valley and finished in Ashton Gate at Bristol City.

The continued success of the Ahead of The Game events saw over 800 footballers and athletes from a range of sports attend and gain valuable insight into the potential opportunities available to them in the future. Over 50 exhibitors and speakers attended across the three events, from a variety of industry sectors. Attendees accessed advice on future job opportunities, education providers, franchise opportunities and guidance on how to navigate a career alongside playing football.

The events aim to build on the work that clubs are continuously doing to prepare players for the future. With the support of the LFE, over 40 football league clubs were in attendance and this number is set to increase next season as we aim to get it in the calendar of every football club in the country.

Ahead Of the Game builds on the workshops that LAPS provide to clubs throughout the season and gives players confidence to prepare for their life outside of football. Whether a football career ends at 16 or 36, the need for a post football plan is imperative and LFE and LAPS will continue to work together to provide the best level of support possible.



Here are some shots from the latest round of LAPS events





MIDDLESBROUGH SHOEBOX APPEAL

BORO YOUNGSTERS GO THE EXTRA MILE

Youngsters from Middlesbrough FC's academy have recently gone above and beyond to play their part in helping the Turkey and Syria Earthquake appeal.



In February, a devastating earthquake hit both countries, with up to 55,000 people losing their lives, and millions being forced to relocate or made homeless.

In the weeks following the tragedy, chairman at Central Masjid Mosque in Middlesbrough, Gohar Ihsan, set up an appeal for supplies to be sent over to the two affected countries in a bid to help those in need. The launch of the appeal has proved a huge success, with thousands of bags, parcels and boxes having been donated.

The appeal was then given another boost when a group of Middlesbrough FC academy players took it upon themselves to get involved. Around 50 shoeboxes full of essentials and supplies were donated by the Boro youngsters.

Barry Dawson, Head of Education & Welfare at the academy said: "We watch a lot of news and always talk to the boys about it, so they have an understanding of the world rather than just football. They told me 'If it was me, I'd want people around the world to help us out' so they decided to launch their own shoe box appeal.

"They all went home to their mums and dads and asked for things to fill the shoe boxes or went out and bought things especially. I think in total we took about 50 boxes, and half a dozen bags full of essentials down to the mosque in Middlesbrough."

Barry, alongside club psychologist, Tom Short, and a group of academy players visited Central Masjid Mosque to drop off their shoeboxes where they met Gohar Ihsan, who spoke very highly of Middlesbrough's involvement in the appeal.

Gohar said: "It was a pleasant surprise when we got a call from Boro's academy. It was great for them to come over and deliver those because that message goes out into the community that they're supporting the programme.

"It's good for them too because if they do get into the first team in the future, they can be role models in their communities.

"Hopefully they can influence other youngsters to think alike and think about others just beyond what we see in front of us."

Barry added: "I'm immensely proud of them all and at the club we nurture them into being role models. We teach them three core values of humility, respect, and honesty and that's whether they're out on the pitch, in the classroom or in their local communities as a lot of them are all local lads.

"We were keen in taking them down to the mosque so they could donate the supplies themselves and a couple of them wrote nice messages on the box as well which I think speaks volumes of them as kids. We're trying to create good, honest people and not just footballers who can go out into the world and be positive members of the community, the lads suggested the idea for this appeal, and we've just supported them as much as we could."



"IT WAS A PLEASANT SURPRISE WHEN WE GOT A CALL FROM BORO'S ACADEMY. IT WAS GREAT FOR THEM TO COME OVER AND DELIVER THOSE BECAUSE THAT MESSAGE GOES OUT INTO THE COMMUNITY THAT THEY'RE SUPPORTING THE PROGRAMME."

ASYLUM SEEKERS VISIT THE ACADEMY OF LIGHT



Sunderland recently invited a group of UASC (unaccompanied asylum-seeking children) to the Academy of Light to take part in an organised football session with the clubs' U18 and U21 sides.

The young asylum seekers, who are housed locally by foster families across the north east region were welcomed by Sunderland's academy sides in the indoor astroturf barn, with the U21s, U18s and guests on the day mixing together to face off in a series of matches.

They were then invited for lunch with the academy sides, before being given a tour of the facilities at the Academy of Light.

Alex Simpson, Opportunities Broker at Sunderland AFC, said: "This is a really good initiative. These lads have been through awful circumstances prior to coming to the UK, and this is fantastic for them.

"A lot of them haven't been here too long and consequently don't speak much English or know too many people socially, so to come together and have that chance to socialise through football is massive.

"It's been really straightforward actually to get it planned, and it's something that can have a huge positive effect."

Nicole Butler, Personal Advisor at Sunderland AFC, added: "To come and make friends and to meet new people is a chance these lads need.

"It fosters a real sense of community, through playing football as well which is a great way to get involved.

"The handshaking, fist-bumping, even all of that just breaks down barriers and really boosts confidence for the lads, and it can benefit the Sunderland boys too."



SSSSH!

You are not allowed to pass **inside information on to someone else which they then use for betting.**

Inside information is something that you know due to your position in the game and which is not publicly available, such as information about an injury, team selection or transfer news.

If you are approached by someone with a view to providing inside information for betting, you must call The FA's Integrity Unit on 0208 795 9640 or email them at Integrity@TheFA.com. Players may also contact The PFA on 0161 236 0575.

To view The FA's Rules and Regulations, visit TheFA.com

THE PFA SAFETY NET

HELPING YOUNG PLAYERS WITH THE CHALLENGES OF PLAYING ACADEMY FOOTBALL



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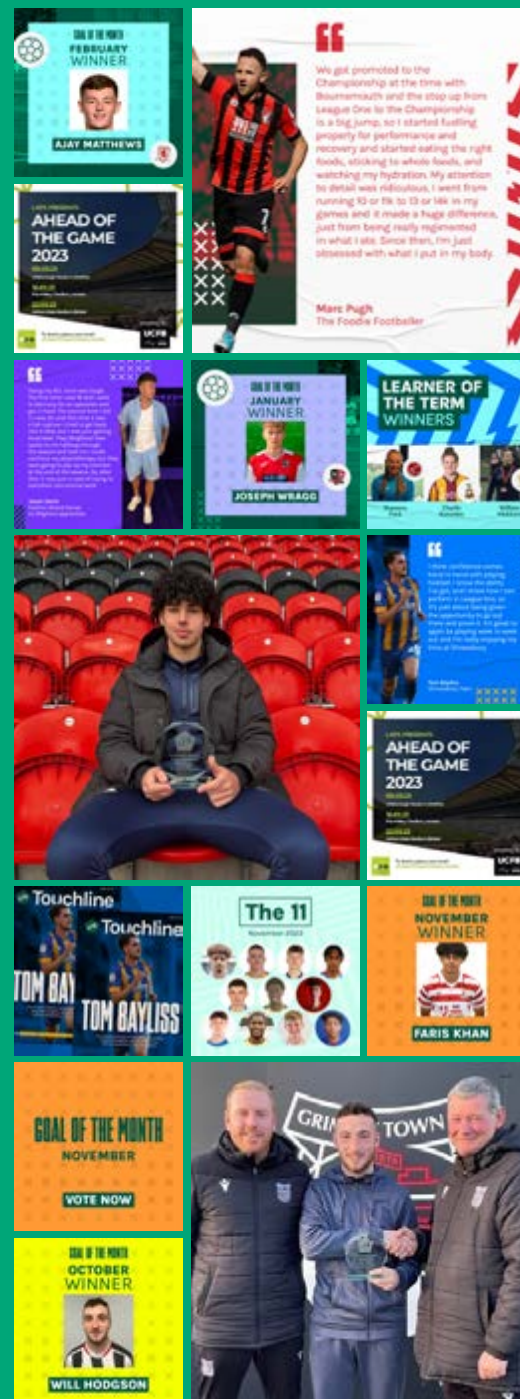


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League Football Education @LFEonline
 @MTFCSTAGSFITC & @NFFC_Community learners visited Nottingham Trent University this week for a 'Student Experience Day' in which they undertook a series of classroom and practical based activities.



Lincoln City Academy @LCFCAcademy
 Scholars attended the @LAPSCareers yesterday. A really great insight into the possibilities that can exist once a players playing career ends.

Thanks to @swfc for hosting!
 @LFEonline | #ImpsAsOne



Ygam @YGAMuk
 Another superb @LFEonline session, this time with the @BCFC academy team.



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