

# **Soccer Review 2007**

**Facilitated by the  
Professional  
Footballers Association**

# Soccer Review 2007

Compiled and edited by

Gavin Mellor & Patrick Murphy

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# Editorial

This is the tenth edition of *Soccer Review* (six editions) and its predecessor the *Singer & Friedlander Review* (four editions). However, Article 1 in this year's *Review* features the views of someone who heads an organisation that has a substantially longer history, for this year the Professional Footballers' Association celebrates its centenary. Some twenty-seven years ago, in 1981, when Gordon Taylor became a full-time official of the PFA, Bert Millichip was head of the FA and Jack Dunnett led the Football League. A great deal of water has passed under the football bridge since then. Presiding over the PFA for such an extended period has offered Taylor a unique vantage point from which to appraise the development of the game. While the interview with Taylor begins with questions relating to FIFA's role, its principal focus is on the ascendancy of the Premier League and the consequences that its rise has had for the rest of the game in England. In Article 2, Stephen Morrow of Sterling University interviews Gordon Smith, the new Chief Executive of the Scottish Football Association. The interview covers a wide range of issues and Smith offers candid and revealing insights into his vision for the game in Scotland and the reasons why some of his views have undergone modification as a consequence of his experiences in post.

The next five contributions are in some ways diverse, but a theme that runs through all of them is the development of young players. This particular issue also features in the interviews with Taylor and Smith. Article 3 is an interview with Sir Trevor Brooking, the Director of Football Development at the Football Association. He offers a frank assessment of his attempts to improve the youth development structures in England and the obstacles in the way of achieving further progress. He does not conceal his present frustrations. Article 4 is by Chris Platts of the Chester Centre for Research into Sport and Society, Chester University. He guides us through the convoluted history of the numerous attempts to bolt on an educational component to the training of young players. He points to tensions between this aim and the priorities of the clubs and the young players. Article 5 is by Jonathon Magee and Chris Olsson, both from the International Football Institute at University of Central Lancashire. They reflect on the barriers impeding the emergence of young British

Asian players and the efforts being made by one club to overcome them. In contrast, in Article 6, Paul Darby of University of Ulster, Jordanstown, traces one of the broader patterns of player migration, namely, the increasing influx of African footballers - some of them youngsters - into Europe. Finally, on this youth developmental theme, Article 7 comprises what has become the annual interview with Simon Clifford. It begins by focusing on his revolutionary approach to the development of football skills in children from six months to four years of age. It offers insights into how he developed the idea of Socratots and its achievements to date. It then moves on to elicit progress reports on his Brazilian soccer schools and his club, Garforth Town FC.

The focus of Article 8, Stephen Morrow's second contribution to this edition, is junior football in Scotland. Readers could be forgiven if they thought that he was pursuing the same general theme of developing young players as the previous five articles. However, this initial impression is deceptive, or, at least, it is likely to mislead many people brought up south of the border. In Scotland the term junior football refers to the non-senior leagues. In England the existence of the football pyramid allows all clubs, in principle at least, to dream of the possibility that one day, albeit in the distant future, they might achieve Premier League status. In Scotland this has not been the case because, until recently, a rigid system of segregation has prevailed. Senior and junior clubs have been prohibited from playing one another. Even today the level of competition sanctioned is strictly limited. The comparison with England is illuminating partly because of the justification ideologies that grow up to bolster such traditional arrangements.

In Article 9 Gavin Mellor interviews Neil Watson, He was the Director of Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme 1989-2002, the Director of the Home Office Positive Futures Programme, a national sport and activity based social inclusion initiative 2002-06 and between 2006-2007 he was an Assistant Director at the Government's Respect Task Force. He now works as a Senior Executive with Substance. He is asked to consider the trajectory of his career and how it reflects some of the key historical and contemporary issues faced by football and



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community schemes across the professional game in England. Article 10 is by Jamie Cleland of Staffordshire University. He examines the enormous growth in media outlets offering coverage of local football. By an analysis of four clubs, he sets out to determine the ways in which this growing diversity of sources has affected the way in which football fans seek information on their clubs. His broad conclusion is that supporters tap into a combination of 'new' and 'old' sources, both official and unofficial. Yet, notwithstanding the rise of the electronic media, the single most important source of information for supporters at three out of the four clubs surveyed remains the local newspaper.

As usual grateful thanks are due to the PFA for their support with the production of this publication and their non-interference with editorial policy. Our thanks also go to Niels Nyholm for supplying the incidental photographs. In keeping with the central theme of this edition, they feature junior footballers.

**Gavin Mellor, Substance**

**Patrick Murphy, CCRSS, Chester University  
Editors**



# The State of the Game: An interview with Gordon Taylor OBE, Chief Executive of the Professional Footballers Association

## Interview conducted by Patrick Murphy

**PM:** I'm going to begin with a difficult question. Assume that the whole institutional structure of world football has been abolished and you are given a freehand in establishing a new organisational framework. How would you set about the task?

**GT:** It's a bit like one of those 'what if' examination questions. It's not easy to respond in a systematic way on the spur of the moment, but I'll have a go. I should begin by saying that I think that FIFA has done a pretty good job of establishing itself as the world governing body. After all, it has to preside over the football associations of some two hundred countries, each with its own culture and different traditions in terms of fairness. So, it's not an easy task. Having said this, if we were starting again, I think we need to be very careful about giving too much power to a world body. I think that ideally the whole structure should be more transparent than the present set-up. It should also be more inclusive. It should be organised in such a way as to give the national associations equal rights and equal responsibilities and these principles should be extended down to league representatives and the players' organisations and beyond them to the supporters and the media. The football family is a phrase that is often used glibly, but I would want the organisation of the game to include all the stakeholders. While international football is important, the essence of the game is regular club football. So we would also have to find ways of removing or, at least mitigating, some of the anomalies and tensions in the present structure of the game. The gulf between the elite level of the game and its lower reaches has grown far too wide. In a word, my guiding principles would be transparency and inclusiveness.

**PM:** It seems to me that FIFA wear two hats. The first hat is the one that symbolises its claim to be the moral guardian for the game. The second one is worn when FIFA is concerned with expanding its own power base. The conflict between these two objectives emerges when, for example, they urge a reduction in the size of the English Premier League on the grounds that players are over-played, while, at the same time, it is trying to free-up time for its own tournaments, such as its own embryonic world club competition.

**GT:** While FIFA does claim to be a moral guardian of the game, I have to say, that its words sometimes speak louder than its actions. It is prone to make statements like: we must give priority to the health and well-being of the players and not allow club's to engage in too much international travel; we must promote the quality rather than the quantity of our competitions; we must protect the interests of our supporters. But such objectives ring a little hollow alongside trying to establish a world club competition under their own auspices and setting-up their own international merchandising operation. Engaging in these practices leaves FIFA open to the accusation that it is trying to emulate the Premier League and the European Champion's League.

**PM:** Turning to the organisation of our domestic game, in retrospect do you think that it was a mistake for the FA to have offered an organisational umbrella to the Premier League?

**GT:** Well, I would say yes with the benefit of hindsight and also yes, but I did tell you so. The FA's remit should be to look after the interests of the game as a whole and in order to fulfil this responsibility it has to maintain its independence. The trouble is that once the governing body enters the field of play, as it were, rather than simply concerning itself with overseeing the game, problems are bound to follow. For example, when the FA became more and more involved in commercial activities this was bound to give rise to conflict with the clubs. What can be said without any shadow of a doubt is that the battle between club and country has already been fought and won by the clubs in England. It was supposed to be the FA and the FA Premier League. The FA thought it had a golden share, but the reality is that the Premier League is running the show. It's very much the tail wagging the dog. The upshot is that the FA has shown itself to be incapable of controlling the Premier League. The Premier League's power stems from the outstanding commercial success of its satellite television contracts. Given this outcome, it could be argued that the Premier League should accept the responsibility that goes with their dominance and run the whole domestic game, including the FA Cup and the England football team. At the moment they're not sufficiently accountable.



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While the FA, as the formal governing body, is supposed to be responsible for the overall game, it hasn't got the power to perform that role. While the incorporation of the Premier League was probably inevitable at the time, the FA should have gone to far greater lengths to keep it at a distance. But we have to deal with things as they are and, given the present circumstances, the only body with the power to run the whole show is the Premier League.

**PM:** What is your view on the appropriate balance that should be struck between football as a business and football for football's sake?

**GT:** The game can't survive just as a business because running it solely on this basis will sooner or later alienate the fans that attend matches, those who view it on television, listen to it on the radio and read about it in the papers. If the richest clubs continue to win everything then unpredictability, the essential ingredient of sport, will disappear. Ideally, all of the participant clubs should have an equal chance, but, at the moment, football in England is mirroring the business model. The biggest challenge that faces the administrators of the game in this country is to find ways of ensuring that the income that accrues to the game is spread more equitably because this is the key to re-establishing the unpredictability of competitive outcomes. The great moments in sport are those that are unexpected. Sport has to be unpredictable. It has to be exciting with the possibility that on several occasions the underdog will triumph. I think it is a little bit sad that more and more people are seeing football as a cash cow. The willingness of the football authorities to play matches at times convenient to the television companies rather than the supporters is but one example of the skewed priorities that presently prevail in the game.

**PM:** The structure of football, cricket and rugby union in this country throws up an interesting comparison. In football the professional clubs dominate. In cricket the ECB dominates the counties. While in Rugby Union, a sport that didn't formally turn professional until 1995, the struggle between the RFU and the leading clubs is more finely balanced. I'm not suggesting that any of these outcomes are superior or trouble-free, but rather that

the dominance of the big clubs in football does seem to have negative consequences for the national team. Isn't this something we should recognise and – given the prevailing balance of power - probably learn to live with rather than become locked into a recurring cycle of bemoaning the failings of the national team?

**GT:** That's a very interesting comparison. There are similar tensions in cricket, but in that sport the national team has proved to be the main attraction. The counties are dependent on the national game. It's the test matches and other international competitions that bring in most of the revenue. And, as you say, rugby is still trying to strike the right balance. In football, as I said before, the clubs have won the battle for supremacy and this reflects itself in the lower priority given to the national team. I find the fact that England will not participate in the European Nations Championships highly embarrassing.

**PM:** Picking up on this point, the game in England is awash with money and English football has achieved a measure of global prominence via satellite tv and yet the national team consistently under-performs on the international stage. Clearly, this is a complex problem, but how would you begin to explain this malaise?

**GT:** The malaise can be traced directly to the fact that the FA and the clubs haven't given sufficient attention and priority to the declining pool of English-born/qualified players playing for Premier League clubs. There just aren't enough players of the right calibre coming through the system. I'm not questioning the talent of players like Rooney, Owen, Lampard, Terry and Gerrard. They are rightly regarded as world class, but the fact is that the demands on this group of players are enormous. They play for their clubs in domestic league and cup competitions, in the Champions' League, in their club's pre-season friendly matches as well as for their country. They often play when they're not fully fit or when their batteries are run down. England alone among the major countries doesn't have a mid-winter break and research has shown that, compared to these other leading football nations, England has twice the number of injuries in the months of February and March and four times the number in April and May. In addition, rather than address the

faults in the system, when the national team fails, the administrators of the game, pressurised by the media, tend to respond in the same way we do at club level. If things are going wrong we change the manager. But unlike clubs, the newly appointed England coach can't bring in new players because the pool is so small. We have to face the fact that the interests of the England team don't rank very highly in the Premier League's scale of priorities. The weight given to it has also been reduced further by the influx of foreign managers and foreign owners who have no reason to support England. However, it's as well to recognise that while supporters of the national team want it to do well and are disappointed when it doesn't qualify for international tournaments, if you were to ask many of them the blunt question - who would you prefer to do well, your club or your country? - I suspect that most of them would opt for their club.

**PM:** The FA has demonstrated itself to be a body that is quite capable of running league and cup competitions and organising international tournaments although now, of course, the top clubs now prioritise the Champions League and the Premier League. However, in many other areas it doesn't seem to have the capacity to act in a co-ordinated and consistent way. For example, at the press conference to announce the dismissal of Steve McClaren as England coach, Brian Barwick promised that the executive were determined to carry out a root and branch enquiry into the apparent malaise that grips England national team. Within weeks Fabio Capello was appointed. It's as if the two issues aren't related. Is this not further proof of the FA's inability to engage in joined-up thinking?

**GT:** I have no doubt that the FA would love to be able to engage in joined-up thinking. However, the speedy appointment of Fabio Capello had at least something to do with the fact that the FA was in a crisis. The hope was that a rapid appointment would take some pressure off them. I'm by no means sure that the FA Executive Committee even discussed Capello's appointment until it was a done deal. Italy is a country that has managed to achieve more success at club level and in terms of the national team and, it may be that, coming from this culture,

Capello with his Italian staff may be able to turn things around. But, irrespective of whether or not he succeeds, his appointment is still a sad indictment of our failure to produce suitably qualified English candidates for the job.

**PM:** But if the speedy appointment of Capello was, at least partially, an attempt to reduce more general pressures on the FA administration isn't this an example of fire brigade thinking?

**GT:** I think so. It's certainly reactive rather than proactive thinking and it's clear that the problems faced by the FA executive run very deep. When Adam Crozier was Chief Executive of the FA he tried to re-establish the FA's authority. However, the Premier League and the Football League thwarted his attempts and, lacking sufficient support, he was forced out. In their attempts to resolve these problems the FA have chosen a range of chief executives from different backgrounds and with different skills. Adam Crozier's expertise lay in advertising and public relations. Mark Palios was a financial man, although he had played professionally, and the present incumbent, Brian Barwick, comes from a television background. The leaders of the Premier League have usually come from business backgrounds, with an emphasis on an ability to deal



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with television companies. Whilst commercially this has been very successful, politically it has not been so smooth. These limitations have been exposed in the West Ham third party ownership case and the recent proposal for Premier League clubs to play a thirty-ninth game at an overseas venue. There is a considerable difference between negotiating television contracts behind closed doors and presenting a controversial matter in public. The proposal for a thirty-ninth game is a case in point. It meant that the leaders of the Premier League had to put their heads above the parapet. In this context, they had to be prepared to engage in a public debate. In the event, they misjudge totally the level of opposition they might encounter. In football terms, England is the wealthiest country in the world. We have around ten of the top twenty richest clubs in the world. On occasions, this leads our elite clubs to have a rather different agenda. Understandably, this situation can generate a considerable amount of envy and no little resentment in the outside world. When the Premier League seeks the support of external bodies it's not too surprising if it doesn't prove to be forthcoming. I have been involved in the administration of the game in England probably longer than anybody else who is still alive and kicking and I know that there's a lot of love for the game and if any individuals or group dares to be too arrogant or too pre-occupied with their own interests, they could come a cropper. It will be interesting to see whether Lord Triesman will be able to provide the kind of leadership necessary to re-establish the FA's overseeing presence and a suitable degree of independence.

**PM:** Clearly, from what you've said previously, you're not very impressed by the present system of youth development in this country.

**GT:** The FA's Technical Control Board, the committee dealing with the youth development system in this country has gone eighteen months without convening because of tensions and disagreement between, on one hand, the FA and, on the other hand, the Premier League and the Football League. One bone of contention is who has the authority to oversee youth development. The Premier League won't acknowledge that the FA is the governing body in such matters and is, in effect, saying to the FA and

Trevor Brooking: 'You stay out. We'll organise our own youth development'. With these kinds of things going on, who needs a root and branch enquiry to tell them what's wrong? If the FA was an educational establishment and was asked to demonstrate its success in terms of its examination results it would probably find itself subject to 'special measures'. The millions of pounds poured into youth development via the academies and the centres of excellence have borne little fruit. It's not a pretty picture. While we have had some success at under-21 level, we still need to ask: where is the pattern of progress; where is the continuity of playing-style linking this level to that of the full senior team? It's all rather disjointed and ad hoc. In light of its inept performance, the administration surely stands accused of not being fit for purpose.

**PM:** Switching tack, the increase in parachute payments to clubs relegated from the Premier League is a way of ensuring that they experience a softer landing than would otherwise be the case. However, these payments also extend the inequalities of competition in Premier League to the Championship. Do you agree and, if so, what might be done to reverse this process?

**GT:** The Premier League has almost created a mirror image of itself in the Championship with the rich getting richer and the poor poorer. There is a great deal of resentment among Championship clubs about the way the Football League conducts itself in its negotiations with the Premier League. But, at the same time, it is only fair to recognise the vastness of the power discrepancy between these two bodies. For its part, the Football League are very much aware that the present system of parachute payments is distorting competition in the Championship. They have tried to get these moneys paid as a benefit to the league as a whole rather than to just the few relegated clubs. Clubs are desperate to gain promotion to the Premier League and, if they are successful, they are equally desperate to cling on to this hard-won status. So much so, that they have tended to over-commit themselves financially. And, as we have seen these aspirations and associated pressures have led to a record number of clubs going into administration.

**PM:** Looking to the future and returning to the 'what if' theme of my opening question, if you had the power what practical reforms would you introduce to improve the operation of football in England?

**GT:** My guiding principles would be the same as those I applied to FIFA – inclusiveness and transparency. These two objectives are intimately connected. I would want to establish an FA executive committee that included all the stakeholders with everybody having a role to play. If you ask me why I want to involve everybody, I would say that it's because it's the only strategy that gives you chance of achieving your goals. Having established this body, I would set out to establish the financial viability of the game. First and foremost, we need a much more even distribution of the revenues generated by our national game, but, at the same time, I would be mindful of the fact that our top clubs need to be able to compete at the European level. How to reduce the domestic dominance of Manchester United, Arsenal, Chelsea and Liverpool and, at the same, time ensure that they retain their capacity to compete in Europe is probably one of the most difficult issues we have to deal with. But the distribution of revenue should not be seen in isolation. There are other connected issues that have to be addressed. For example, we have to try to make sure that football stadia are full week-on-week and set out to do this by ensuring that sections of the community are not priced-out of the game. This could be done by expanding family stands and also by ensuring that season tickets are reasonably priced. And, moreover, those fans that cannot attend matches should be able to afford to watch games on television. At the same time, we also have to ensure that clubs are run more effectively. We have to deal with the growing number of clubs going into administration, particularly since the 1980s. In the drive to succeed clubs have gambled with their future. They have spent money they haven't got, much of it on salaries. Because we are a union people tend to think we are against imposing limits on what clubs can spend in income. Well, it may surprise some people to know that, while we are against salary capping, we are not against clubs having to limit their salary bill to, say, sixty or sixty-five percent of their income. Therefore, I am in favour of a strong central organisation that is

capable of ensuring that clubs are only run by 'fit and proper persons' and that club finances are strictly monitored. Nevertheless, I still think that we have to face up to the fact that the only way we can ensure the financial viability of clubs and offer them realistic chances of success is to establish a more equitable distribution of the game's income.

My second broad priority would be to restore our international pride by striving to ensure that our national team achieves some international success and the only way we can realise this end is by establishing a far more effective system for developing young players. We need to become increasingly sensitive to the fact that all age levels need age-appropriate coaches. We need to establish a comprehensive system of coaching that involves instilling consistent patterns of skill and technique from the grassroots through to the clubs and on to the international level. It is all a question of striking the right balance between the different levels of the game – the grassroots, the clubs and the international game. I am aware that some people may dismiss some of these objectives as being unrealistic and I don't want to give the impression that I think they can be achieved easily. I know everyday brings with it new challenges, such as third party ownership of players. Third party ownership is a response to the Bosman ruling. This ruling encouraged a further influx of agents into the game. Just as agents became involved in the film industry, they were attracted by the money. In much the same way foreign owners, television companies and sponsors have this same butterfly mentality. If football's star declines their interest will shift to other sports. My point is that if the game is popular and attracting inward investment these kinds of problems go with territory. The problems are compounded if some of these fair weather people get involved in the administration of the game. In doing so they quickly demonstrate that they have no affinity with the football traditions of this country. Their primary objective is to run the game in their own interests.

**PM:** Are you optimistic about the future?

**GT:** I am an optimistic person and need to be as a leader of the players but there is certainly a great deal to be concerned about. The Premier League



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dominates the FA and shows no signs of assuming the responsibility that goes with that power. Our record of developing enough young players of international standard leaves much to be desired. On one level, our domestic league is thriving, but the reality is that the Premier League contains three sub-leagues. There are those clubs that are aiming for the Champions League, those trying to secure a place in the UEFA Cup and those whose primary concern is to avoid relegation. All these problems are linked to the unequal distribution of football income. We need a strong independent-minded governing body that can make decisions for the general good of the game rather than owners viewing their clubs as businesses and only voting for what is in their own best interests. If we can't achieve the necessary adjustments, the situation can only get worse. If our failure to qualify for the European Nations Championships doesn't motivate the FA to try to reassert some control over the situation then, perhaps, the moment has gone forever and we might be en route to becoming more like Spain, that is having a strong league and a relatively unsuccessful national team. As in Spain, the dominant clubs may come to negotiate their own television deals, thereby, compounding the existing inequalities. Perhaps we ought to derive some lessons from the way that the biggest capitalist country in the world, the United States, runs its sports. There the sports federations work hard at maintaining the unpredictability of their games. Individual clubs are not allowed to get too

strong. They recognise that the key to achieving this end is to ensure that the collective income of the clubs is distributed more equitably.

**PM:** In the distance past you were talked about as a future Chief Executive of the FA. Have you any regrets about not achieving this position?

**GT:** No regrets. I have loved looking after the players' interests. After having taken over from Cliff Lloyd, I have derived enormous satisfaction from developing the PFA. When I took over there were just two of us in an office at the Corn Exchange in Manchester. Today, we are an organisation with four offices in Oxford Court, Manchester, an office in the midlands and one in London. On reflection, I suppose one regret would be that the PFA hasn't been given the opportunity to run football and that the football players haven't been able to achieve the same level of influence as golfers and tennis players. In terms of my own playing career, while I don't want to appear ungrateful, I wish I'd signed for Manchester United. Instead, I chose to go to Bolton Wanderers and then on to Birmingham. Opportunities come and go in football and you have to live with your choices. I also regret never having played in a cup final after making three semi-final appearances. I would have loved to play for England. Maybe I would have enjoyed managing a club. But, in the end, you've only got one life and it's very satisfying to have been involved in so many campaigns on behalf of the PFA - those relating to the development of the game and player unions worldwide and those relating to broader social issues like the anti-racist campaigns and community programmes. I have been allowed to get on with my job at the PFA whilst keeping my members and executive committee fully informed and giving their approval. This would not have been the case at the FA and will never be, unless this CEO is given a role akin to the role of the Professional Sports Commissioners in the USA where they and they alone are accountable.

*Interview conducted at PFA Headquarters,  
Manchester on February 18th 2008*



# A New Broom: The views of Gordon Smith, Chief Executive of the Scottish Football Association

## Interview conducted by Stephen Morrow

**SM:** To many people the SFA's decision to appoint you as its Chief Executive was something of a surprise. By the same token, many people were surprised that you decided to accept the position, given that you were successful in your various roles in the media, in agency work and in business. What made the position of interest to you?

**GS:** It's a good question. A recruitment company approached me and I was told that those involved in the appointment process had mentioned my name on two or three occasions. While I was quite surprised, it indicated that perhaps those involved were looking to have a change in the type of person appointed to the role. My first reaction was that it was not for me. But then, talking to my family and friends, they more or less all said: 'it is a big job, but why not?' It was a big change for me. I was leaving my comfort zone to a degree, because I was very content with what I was doing with the media and my agency business and I could control my own life. But it was also a big opportunity. More than that I was also proud to be offered the position in the sense that I was being offered an opportunity to influence the direction and role of Scottish football; to try and put into practice some of the policy initiatives and ideas that I have been talking about over the years.

**SM:** Have you come into the position with a vision of how you want the Association to develop?

**GS:** What I had in mind was to try and grow into the role, in the sense of identifying those areas that I felt I could have a real influence on. There are some things that people know I am all for changing, for example, the need for a winter break. However, I was very well aware that an initiative in this sort of area has to come from the clubs and from the Scottish Premier League (SPL). However, there are things that I can influence in terms of how the game is run, for example, at youth level with the implementation and development of the youth action plan, a plan not purely focused on football, but also concerned with offering guidance to young people. What is important is not just developing footballers, but developing people: informing them about diet, health, lifestyle, behaviour, even psychology. When young players

don't make it, the aim should be to make them more rounded and better individuals; to help them be team players; to help them to be able to apply the things they learn in whatever walk of life they enter.

One of the things that we can change is the playing season for kids. Again, as many people know, I am a great believer in playing football in the months of the year when the weather is usually kindest. To me it makes no sense to have kids playing football in December and January. Why does anyone think it makes sense to close playing fields and take the goal posts away in summer? This is precisely the kind of area that the SFA should be taking ownership of. It is at the grass roots, at the amateur level and at the kids' level that we can have the biggest influence.

**SM:** Is it difficult to sell your vision of football and the idea that football should have a broader social role within the governing body and within football more generally?

**GS:** No. We have had a good response from the people in the SFA and beyond. There are lots of different elements to this. In part it's about communicating the message. One of the things that I was aware of before I joined the SFA was the poor quality of its website as communication tool. That is a problem when we want to engage with the kids. One of the things we want to do is make the website an active place; to encourage coaches and others involved in football development to communicate with the kids through it. As we know only too well, kids make much more use of websites than we do. So this is where we need to get our message across. In other areas our new press officer is trying to ensure that we communicate in a more positive way; that we emphasise what is happening at the SFA, what our strategic vision is and so on. We need to ensure that we set the agenda rather than reacting to events and other people's initiatives. At another level it is about engaging with the SFA's staff. For example, just yesterday, the senior management team had a 'strategy away-day' in which we focused on the SFA's operational plan, identifying the major factors that we need to concentrate on in order to move us forward. Now clearly, the international team is a major responsibility for us. By that I don't just mean the men's international team, but also the women's



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international team. That said, one of the challenges in this kind of organisation is the emphasis on the men's international side. While there has certainly been a revival in the fortunes of the national team, we haven't qualified for the finals of a major tournament since 1998. Nevertheless, by getting ourselves a second seeding, we now have an opportunity to make an impact in the 2010 World Cup qualifiers. We want to see Scotland back, competing at that level again and I am well aware that, ultimately, we will be judged on the success of the national side.

**SM:** How do you cope with that kind of peculiar football business situation where you find yourself being judged on the behaviour and performance of a team that, while you may have some influence on, you certainly can't control?

**GS:** I think it comes with the position. To an extent at least, I know I will be judged on how well George Burley does as our national team manager. While I had no previous experience of selecting a manager, given my background, it was the kind of thing that I wanted to be involved in. I thought that my participation could make a difference. The SFA's board gave me a great deal of responsibility and I did a considerable amount of ground-work in terms of speaking to people in the game, carrying out due diligence on the prospective managers, finding out about the candidates and so on. But once the manager is appointed there are certain aspects that are then completely outside my control - how well the players perform, their mistakes and so on. For me, however, it is just a case of trying to put everything in order to ensure that those who have the direct responsibility for the national team have the right environment in which to operate and to take their opportunities.

**SM:** You mentioned the SFA's board of directors. Can you say a little more about the board's role and about your interaction and relationship with board members?

**GS:** I am the only executive member on the SFA's board. The other members are appointed from the SFA's Council. I am still involved in something of a learning process at the moment - finding out what things I am responsible for; what things I can make decision on; what things have to go to the board for



approval. Already, however, certain things have come up where I have questioned the need for them to be referred to the board. I have said: 'this is a decision which I am happy to take and I am happy to be judged on' and the board have responded positively to this approach so far. More generally, I would like to see the introduction of a corporate management structure, that is, as opposed to the traditional governing body structure. Clearly, there are certain things that the board need to comment on and to take decisions on, but equally, there are many issues that are being taken to the board that could and should be decided at executive level.

**SM:** How will you try to bring about procedural changes of this type?

**GS:** It has to be through negotiation because, ultimately, the board of directors run the place and my job is in their hands. While I have to take this structure into account, in truth, I am quite relaxed about it. I am quite fortunate in one respect. If this job doesn't work out I am in a position where I can walk away from it in the knowledge that I can do

other things. That helps me to be a little bit more relaxed about the job and maybe it strengthens my position a little. It is not like that it is part of my career pathway. I'm not worrying about where my next chief executive's position is coming from. I would like to be in a situation where, if there are certain things that I feel should be decided at the executive corporate level, then I am going to push for control, rather than wait for a month or so until the next board meeting comes around. I'll give you an example. In July 2007 I'd just been appointed. Based on my knowledge of the game, I made the decision that the club that finished runner up in the Scottish Cup should not end up in the UEFA cup. My thinking was that a team could have four or five relatively easy games, and then find itself in the final against, say, Celtic, a club that had already qualified for the UEFA Champions' League. So I put forward the proposal that the UEFA cup place should go to the club that finished fourth in the SPL. We then had to wait until September to discuss the proposal at the next board meeting. While the Board accepted the proposal, it was rejected by UEFA on the grounds that while the Scottish Cup had not started, the league season had. Now if I could have made that decision in July ... As I say, it is a learning process.

**SM:** Clearly, the Board members are drawn from the members of the association and, on occasions, there are some co-opted members. To what extent do you think there is a need to widen board membership to include other groups from within the football family?

**GS:** Yes, there has been some discussion about this possibility and I can see why having other football people involved would be beneficial. They may have a clearer appreciation of how particular decisions might affect different groups within football. They can also have great knowledge of different aspects of football in this country. There has also been discussion that perhaps an independent board member from outside football would prove to be a useful addition. It would provide the Board with different insights. In some respects I perform this function because I've got a business as well as a football background. I have been on the outside of football looking in and, therefore, I've seen things from a different perspective to insiders who may have become a little institutionalised.

**SM:** Are there other ways in which football's stakeholders, like the supporters or players are involved in the activities and operations of the SFA?

**GS:** Yes. For example, since I came into the job, I've been having regular meetings with the supporters' association, the Tartan Army, in order to get their viewpoint on various issues. Clearly, they don't represent all Scottish fans, but arguably, it is the closest you can get to them. So, on this basis, I'm quite willing to sit down with them and take on board their viewpoint. Often, what is most valuable is discussion and dialogue. For example, we have discussed issues like the ticketing problem with the Euro 2008 qualifier versus Italy. I even raised the possibility with them of re-introducing the England v. Scotland games at Wembley. I did that because I felt it was important to gauge their views. We also speak to the players' union, to the players, to the media, to the coaches association, to the referees and so on. I think it's important to listen to the different viewpoints and to take them into account when going forward. Funnily enough, this is something I learned from being a media pundit. In that role my best answers were sometimes given when I came into the discussion as the third or fourth contributor. This gave me the opportunity to listen and listening helped me to formulate my contribution more clearly. I enjoyed debates on the radio and in my new role I also want to hear people's opinions, whether it's those of my executive team or whoever. I want people to let me know what they think. If they don't, then there's a risk that a decision could be taken that they are not happy with. Dialogue is fundamental in any business environment. It also strengthens my position at board meetings, where I might be the only executive member present. It enables me to demonstrate that I have the support of colleagues or others. I am in a stronger position if I can say that this is what 'we think' in terms of taking the business forward.

**SM:** Can we turn to a more specific aspect of regulation, namely, the club licensing system? This has become a particularly prominent issue in the context of the Gretna crisis. Do you think the system is sufficiently rigorous in terms of its financial criteria?



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**GS:** The licensing system is something I've only become exposed to since I have been in post. It is easy to see why UEFA have put in place much of the regulation. They needed a mechanism for controlling quality. UEFA has developed strict criteria that must be met by clubs if they wish to participate in its competitions. The SFA is trying to adopt a lighter touch: trying to take into account the difficulties that our clubs might face in striving to meet the licensing criteria. But while it is correct to say that we are flexible, there is also the need to address the issue of consistency of treatment. In particular, along the way, we are finding that while some clubs are spending the money on fulfilling the criteria, others just don't bother. Understandably, it can lead to resentment if the sanctions that are in place are not applied. But, even then, things are not straightforward. For example, if we fine a club for not doing something or other, we are reducing its capacity to abide by the regulations and invest money accordingly. As a result, there is probably even less chance of them fulfilling their obligations. Another alternative is to follow the UEFA model and to use licensing as criteria for entry into our competitions. Again, the same issue arises – how do you impose sanctions without exacerbating the underlying problem?

In terms of the financial side of things, one of the challenges we face is to resolve whether an issue falls within the jurisdiction of the League or that of the Football Association. We're looking at licensing, but the SPL has its own strict code for clubs in terms of criteria that must be met for a club to be permitted to play in its league. Gretna's situation is interesting because it was given a license to play in the SPL because, firstly, it agreed to ground share with Motherwell, and, secondly, it accepted time specific commitments to improve its facilities or build new ones. Given their present league position, one wonders whether these commitments might be reconsidered.

**SM:** Broadening the discussion out a little, we are a country of five million people, yet we've got forty-two professional clubs and three governing bodies looking after the professional game. What would you say to people who say that the whole structure needs to be streamlined?

**GS:** I have always felt that it would be better to have one ruling body looking after the whole of Scottish football. But funnily enough, since I've been in post, given the amount of work I've had to deal with, I'm glad I'm not looking after the SPL and/or the SFL as well. Quite simply, I've changed my mind on this matter. I think we still need three chief executives in some shape or form, because my workload is a full-time job. There are so many issues to deal with that in practice you would need three departments within the governing body to handle it. So, in light of my experience in post, I would say that it's probably right that there are three separate bodies and I'm not going to fight for an integrated one.

**SM:** Within the prevailing structure, how difficult is it for the various bodies involved to develop a strategic vision for Scottish football as a whole?

**GS:** We're been trying to meet as a group on a regular basis in order to discuss broad issues, like taking the game as a whole forward. We have established a professional group, almost like a board-type arrangement, where we, that is, the office bearers and executives of the SFA, the SPL and the SFL, come together to discuss the issues that affect Scottish football and discuss our various perspectives on its future direction. It goes without saying that there are vested interests, but sometime we can look beyond these. For example, when UEFA suggested it would introduce a rule by which the Scottish Cup winners would gain a place in the Champions' League, it was clear that the SPL were opposed to this reform. From one perspective, since the Scottish Cup is our competition, we could have seen this proposal as way of maximising its value or attractiveness and taken a position in opposition to the SPL. But in the end, I supported the SPL in its stance, namely, that the Scottish Cup winners should not be in the Champions' League. I adopted this position because I always try to look at things overall: try to determine what is best for the Scottish game as a whole.

**SM:** Do you think there's a need for other groups to participate in this type of meeting? I am thinking here of players' representatives, supporters' representatives etc.

**GS:** Again, I think there is merit in bringing in other bodies. But, at the moment, just getting the three organisations talking to each other is a real step forward. One risk would be creating a body that was too cumbersome and which amounted to little more than a talking-shop. We also need to think about issues like confidentiality of information.

**SM:** One of the changes that the SFA has introduced this year has been the introduction of junior clubs into the Scottish Cup. What was the rationale behind this move?

**GS:** We knew that junior football had undergone a reconstruction and expanded in recent years, with its top clubs being concentrated in a new super league. The rationale behind our decision was to extend our competition to that level; to take a first step towards some form of pyramid system for the game in Scotland. We saw this as an opportunity to bring in the top three or four junior teams, a move that should add a little bit of spice to the competition. And it has worked. The junior clubs have certainly proved that they are stronger than some of the clubs who have been playing in the Scottish Cup.

At Newton Stewart I watched Linlithgow Rose hammer the home side six goals to nil. Newton Stewart had been expecting a crowd of fifty-odd people and they ended up getting a crowd of some eight hundred, and they were mostly from Linlithgow. That has to be healthy for the game and good for the competition. We invited junior clubs to participate to see if they could add something to the Scottish Cup and, from where I am sitting, I certainly feel this move has been a success.

**SM:** So could this be the start of a pyramid system in Scottish football?

**GS:** It's not an easy thing to introduce. It would involve quite radical change. Not least it would involve the introduction of some form of Conference League below the Scottish Football League, similar to the arrangement in England. We would then have to address the question of whether it needed to be regionalized along the lines of, say, a Highland League and a Southern League. If you only have one league then it could prove to be too expensive for the participating clubs. For example, you could have

clubs as far apart as Newton Stewart and Wick playing one another. There is also the question of whether some of the junior clubs would want to become part of this structure. That said, I do think it could add some excitement to the game. Some of the clubs in the Third Division of the SFL have, to some extent, had it easy for too long. I believe there should be opportunities for clubs like Gretna and Inverness Caledonian Thistle to come through and become SPL clubs. That they have done so demonstrates that there is potential beyond the present league structure. You could say that the Scottish Cup experiment was the start. Now we need to move on to the next stage. This would involve putting some proposals for discussion down on paper. We need to make this idea more concrete. Some one needs to take responsibility for it and to begin the debate. I did something similar with the SPL a few years back in relation to a winter break. After talking on the radio about the idea of a winter break, I was approached by the SPL and invited to write a paper on how it might work. When I took my paper to an SPL meeting, I fully expected to hear all the counter-arguments. In fact, what I was met with was agreement. I was shocked. Although, I should add, that the two-month winter break I proposed hasn't been implemented.

**SM:** Turning to another issue, what was your response to the proposal made by Richard Scudamore and the FA Premier League for the introduction of a thirty-ninth FAPL match overseas?

**GS:** I thought to myself, this is not a football decision at all. It's a purely financial one. It is simply about generating more money. I asked myself whether there was any need for it. But, given how popular English football is in so many countries, I can perfectly understand why the FAPL might see it as a good idea. I am not opposed to the idea in principle. Basically, it's down to the clubs as to whether they think there is any mileage in it. I would hope though that the clubs would discuss the idea with their supporters. I don't think it's much of an issue for Scottish clubs. The only game we would see being played abroad would be Rangers versus Celtic. If the FAPL initiative came to pass then one could imagine Rangers and Celtic looking to do something similar, that is, if they



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thought it would be financially beneficial. Again, if both clubs wanted to do it and came to us, I wouldn't have a problem with such a proposal.

**SM:** What about the other way round? How would the SFA respond if the FA PL wished to play a game in Scotland?

**GS:** If they wanted to come and play a game in Scotland I wouldn't have a problem with that. I would offer them Hampden. It would be up to them to decide if they thought that hiring Hampden and staging a fixture here in Glasgow was the right thing to do. From my point of view, it would be a business decision.

**SM:** Turning to another issue involving our neighbours, what is your view on Scottish players being involved in a United Kingdom side in the 2012 Olympics in London?

**GS:** When I took up this position here I didn't have a problem with the idea. I didn't see it as an issue. I actually brought it up at a board meeting, just in order to establish the SFA's position on the matter. The board said that it had discussed this issue before and rejected it. In part, this has to do with our representation within FIFA. In particular, the board is concerned about the implications that a joint side might have for Scotland's membership status. I took this view on board and, if that is the policy, I am happy to work with it. Since then I have looked at the issue again and I've identified other concerns. For one thing the timing of the event in August takes no account of the fact that this is a busy time for football. It makes me think that in the overall scheme of the Olympics, football is little more than a sideshow. Another issue is that the Olympic regulations are discriminatory. Only players aged twenty-three or under are eligible to compete. There isn't any other event in the Olympics that has an age restriction applied to it? Do we have a 100m event for the under twenty-fives? Why not make the football competition an event for left-footed players only? Nevertheless, my own view is that we are now strong enough as a nation not to be so concerned about the FIFA issue. Of more concern to me are the issues of discrimination and the poor timing.

**SM:** In summary then, are you optimistic about the future of Scottish football and the role of the SFA?

**GS:** Yes, definitely. There are many things going on, some of which will take time to come to fruition. One is the youth action plan. Encouraging more participation in the game is a great challenge. If we can get more kids participating, then hopefully, down the line, we can have an impact, not just in terms of football, but a social impact via the broader guidance issues that kids will learn about. At the moment, I am more excited about that than anything else because I feel that, to a certain extent, this is something which has been missing for many kids because of changes in the way schools work and what teachers can get involved in. This presents us with an opportunity. Of course, we also want to see more participation through schools football and elsewhere in order to develop more players. Another thing that excites me is seeing the development of top-level Scottish players. One of the positive things that came out of the financial challenges that our clubs faced a few years ago was that more Scottish players started to get opportunities with our top Scottish clubs. That can only be good for their development and for the development of the national side. We have a good group at the moment. I feel we have made a good decision in appointing George Burley as manager, but of course, only time will tell. As I've said on a number of occasions, I think it's important to listen to different people's opinions about how to develop the game. We have more opinions these days than ever before, what with phones-ins and chat-rooms and so on. But while everyone has an opinion, much of it is unqualified opinion. While I want to listen, I'm not fooled into thinking that a larger number of people participating in the discussion necessarily add up to a more valid view. Equally though, when it is qualified opinion, it's worth listening to. I want to learn from people who have knowledge and experience of the game and other relevant areas. Ultimately, I'm trying to do everything for the right reasons. I have a passion for football. But more than that, I have also got a passion for the Scottish game. That is the principle reason I accepted this post. It is an honour to have this position and I want to do my best for the Scottish game.

*This interview was conducted at Hampden Park, Glasgow on 20th February 2008.*

# Developing young talent: The views of Sir Trevor Brooking, the Football Association's Director of Football Development

## Interview conducted by Patrick Murphy

**PM:** Can I begin by asking you why you accepted the post of Director of Football Development at the Football Association? What was the attraction? What was the challenge?

**TB:** Mark Palios and David Davies of the FA approached me towards the end of 2003 to offer me the position of director of football development. They wanted someone to assess the state of coaching across the board. Prior to my appointment, the technical director of the FA had tended to focus on the professional game and they now felt that the professional side had become too detached from the grassroots. They knew I was interested in the lower levels of sport from my time with Sport England. This particular interest was also fostered by my appreciation that what skills I had as a footballer were largely in place by the age of eleven. As such, I have long been aware of the need to concentrate upon the five to eleven age group. At the time they approached me I was a director at West Ham and, on a couple of occasions, I had been asked to step into the role of caretaker manager. The first time was when Glenn Roeder suffered a tumour and I took over for last three matches of the season. The second time followed relegation when we had a faltering start to the next season. The board wanted to appoint Alan Pardew, but rather than release him immediately, Reading put him on gardening leave. In the interim, I took over for about eleven matches. However, having done the job twice I was very conscious that my presence might be seen as a threat to the manager in post, particularly if ever the team went through a poor spell. Consequently, I felt that a move to the FA might also make life easier for Alan Pardew. In the event, I took up the post at the FA in 2004.

**PM:** There seems to be push-pull elements at work here. On one hand, you felt a need to distance yourself from West Ham and, on the other hand, you were attracted by the challenge of the job at the FA.

**TB:** I could have stayed at West Ham. I got on very well with Alan Pardew. At the same time, I didn't want the possibility of me stepping in as caretaker-manager to be seen as an easy option, if we ever hit

a bit of rough water. Nevertheless, having had this recent, albeit brief, experience of being a manager proved to be very useful because it made me appreciate just how much the task of a manager had changed since my playing days.

**PM:** Perhaps we will touch upon these changes later, but for the moment let me concentrate on the broader front. I know you appreciate, particularly from your time at Sport England, that wider social processes impact upon football. You have pointed to the inadequate fitness levels of a large proportion of youngsters in this country and, of course, football clubs draw from this well. Is this not a limitation, among other limitations, that you in your role at the FA have to accept and operate within?

**TB:** I think that much of the decline in general fitness of youngsters can be traced to the dispute in the teaching sector in the late 1970s when teachers withdrew from extra-mural activities, including their involvement in sport. The length of the dispute meant that, by the time it was settled, the teachers had fallen out of the habit of extra-curricula involvements. One specific consequence was that in the course of the 1980s and 1990s the responsibility for much junior football came to be assumed by parents. More generally, it was also becoming clear to us at Sport England that our pool of talent was shrinking. Such talent as we had available to us was coming increasingly from the private educational sector, as opposed to the state sector, where it has recently been established that half of the eleven year olds in that sector are physically illiterate.



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**PM:** How did you settle in at the FA? How did you begin your appraisal of the task before you?

**TB:** Unfortunately, my arrival at the FA coincided with an extended period of uncertainty. Mark Palios, the Chief Executive, left soon after I arrived. We had a period of six months before Brian Barwick was appointed and, obviously, he then required a few months to get his feet under the table. These developments coincided with the Burns Review that took place over a period of eighteen months. I soon became aware that the football establishment was rife with political sensitivities. These principally coalesced around the questions: Is the professional game part of the organisation and what position should the grassroots (what we at the FA called the national game) occupy in the organisation? Given these upheavals, it wasn't until 2005 that we really started to assess the coaching side. It quickly became apparent that one major problem was the dire need for well-qualified, full time coaches for the under-16s. The existing programme of qualifications ran from Level 1 for parental involvement to Level 5, the pro-licence for the professional game. The glaring omission was that there was no age appropriate differentiation for coaches at any of these levels. It's self-evidently the case that the challenges and needs of coaching different age groups require distinctively different skills and sensitivities. With regards to the professional game, the Charter for Quality, introduced by Howard Wilkinson, had ensured that national coaches were in place for each year between the ages of sixteen to twenty-one, with the regional coaching dimension being absorbed into this system. The result was that while we had a national coaching structure at the higher levels of the game, the grassroots was suffering from neglect. This was the problem we set about trying to rectify after 2005.

**PM:** Having identified the problem, what action have you taken?

**TB:** The Burns Review continued over the period from late 2005, through 2006 and into 2007 and during this time the organisation was more or less in a state of limbo. The Technical Control Board, the main decision-making body in the coaching area, didn't meet for eighteen months. These administrative problems meant that we couldn't

achieve anything on the professional side, so this led me to focus upon grass-roots level, an area that had been starved of resources over a number of years. I got the National Game part of the FA to fund nine regional coaches who were assigned to the grassroots - Levels 1, 2 and 3. I also got the funding for another sixty-six full-time coaches for ages five to eleven from Tesco and National Sports Foundation. This funding will run over a period of three years and will be concentrated on twelve counties. It will involve coaches working in nine teams of six and three teams of four – sixty-six coaches in total. This programme has now been running for six months. Our aim is to emphasis the fun element, allow the children to express themselves and foster individual skills. In a word, it's an attempt to establish structured sessions of informal play. Therefore, the emphasis is on age appropriate, full-time coaches in the age group five to eleven, although we would also like to extend the scheme to the eleven to sixteen year olds at a later date. There is much more individual ball work, particularly with the younger ages, revamping the games playing, that is more small sided stuff: two versus two, three versus three and four versus four, games conversion – transferring individual skills to the game itself. Youngsters have to be able to utilise the skills they possess in an effective way. We need to take the competitiveness out of the game, remove the intensity. There's no place for shouting and hollering. By such means we aim to produce young players who aren't robots, but spontaneous and effective decision-makers who are capable of selecting the passes that will inflict most damage on the opposition. As Ron Greenwood, my coach at West Ham, used to say: 'it's all about vision and weight of pass. Always have pictures in your mind'. He would snap his fingers as a signal for me to close my eyes. At this point he would expect me to have a mental picture of who was around me. This advice helped me enormously because I wasn't the quickest of players and this awareness bought me time. It was a key part of whatever I achieved in the game. In terms of passing, he urged us to cherish and caress the ball. It's these qualities that enhance a team's capacity to retain possession. The problem is that most of the parents involved in junior football haven't got this level of understanding. They make the game too intense. This is why we need

more full-time, age appropriate coaches to work with the younger age groups. We need them to instil these basic habits in youngsters – watch your first touch, side-ways on, pictures in your mind, weight of pass, pass selection – they're all core skills. I also think that it would be beneficial to give young players the opportunity to play in a number of positions. This would encourage their development as more rounded players. In this country we are prone to pigeonhole players at too early an age.

**PM:** When some people of a certain age talk about the relative dearth of talented English footballers, they often conjure up images of a by-gone age when our footballers emerged from street football and from honing their skills by kicking a tennis ball against the back-wall. If these practices were to magically reappear how much relevance would they now have for the development of football in this country?

**TB:** It's an unavoidable fact of life that if you want to reach the top levels of any sport, including football, you've got to practice. My generation did practice, but it took the form of informal 'kick-about's'. To be fair I only had one black and white BBC channel to distract me, so I grabbed every opportunity to play with my mates. I practiced, not because I wanted to be a professional footballer, but simply because I



wanted to get better. By the time I reached the age of eleven I had acquired most of the basic skills. This type of informal play has more or less disappeared. Today, youngsters may play two or even three matches a week, but there's nothing in between. They seem less willing or able to practice when so many other attractions beckon. This is perhaps the principal reason why we're not producing a reservoir of talent to the depth that you would expect from country of our size and with its football traditions. We are not producing youngsters with the equivalent talent to those emerging in France, Spain and Portugal. In my time I was only competing against other British youngsters, whereas today the elite clubs in this country have the capacity to bring in sixteen years olds from all over the world. The academies are beginning to be dominated by overseas lads. Therefore, the bar that aspiring British youngsters now have to clear has risen appreciably.

**PM:** Pursuing this theme, Brian Barwick has recently been critical of the Premier League clubs' record of producing insufficient players of international standard and Baldini, Capello's right-hand man, made some critical comments following the friendly with Switzerland. He questioned the technique of the cream of our players. On the assumption that you agree with these comments, how would you account for these deficiencies?

**TB:** It's a combination of things. You have to improve the quality of our English youngsters by the time they get to sixteen. The need is to focus on the age ranges five to eleven year olds and the eleven to sixteen year olds. Unless you come within the compass of the big clubs like Manchester United, Arsenal and Chelsea there are relatively few specialist, full-time coaches working with these age groups. The vast majority of coaches that work with the lower age groups can only do so on a part-time basis. If they want to become full-time coaches they have to move up and focus on the sixteen-plus age group. In contrast, other European countries have age-appropriate, full-time coaches for these groups and they are well remunerated and widely respected. At the moment, we're not producing enough fullbacks that are comfortable in the attacking third, creative midfielders or strikers. Most coaches at the elite level



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don't appreciate the technical standards that our sixteen year olds now have to achieve if they are to compete successfully at international level. It's the job of the governing body to gather the knowledge on coaching techniques and then to ensure that it's disseminated to the domestic game. At present we don't have sufficient investment to do that and so I think that we'll continue to lose ground. We will never get talented youngsters with the requisite technical abilities coming through in sufficient numbers unless and until we put the right coaching structures in place for the five to eleven year olds. I'm trying to start this process.

**PM:** In 1998 I interviewed Howard Wilkinson, your predecessor, about the introduction of his blueprint for academies. I put it to him that if reforms to the youth development system were to prove to be more effective, they would have to take account of the broader structure of professional football in this country. In particular, I pointed to two characteristics. The first one was the short tenure of managers. Their average length of stay is two to three years. Managers are under increasing pressure from impatient fans, boards and the media, to opt for quick fixes. They sign players who they hope will immediately fit the bill. Understandably, under these pressures most of them feel they haven't got the luxury of providing young players with the time to bed-in. What in practical terms would you do to reduce this pressure on managers and encourage them to give young players a reasonable crack at establishing themselves in the first team squad?

**TB:** First of all, it's important to understand that fifteen or so years ago, when a new manager was appointed, he would bring in all the coaching staff and when he departed they would go with him. This was an enormously destabilising process. There was no continuity. When Howard set up the Charter he tried to insulate the academy structure and staff from these cyclical comings and goings. To start with these measures worked really well. However, a major shortcoming relates to the question - who conducts the quality assurance assessments? In my view, the governing body should perform this task. At the moment the FA is excluded from having any input into this process because the two Leagues are

monitoring their own respective performances. Let me put it this way, if the examinees mark their own papers the likelihood is they will get better marks than if the examiner performs this task. In my view, the upshot of this self-assessment process has been a decline in the quality of the academy system. Now to the second part of your question, last year the England under-17s lost to Spain in the European finals. They then went to Korea to compete in the World Cup and lost to Germany in the quarterfinals. This is probably the best group of players we have had for some time. Yet, as we sit here, only one of them is in any club's first team. In my generation there's no question that a number of these eighteen-year old players, would have been flitting in and out of first teams. By the age of twenty-one they would have acquired a substantial amount of first team experience and some of them would have established themselves at this level. In the present climate it is doubtful whether the majority of them will ever be given this opportunity? In the context of Premier League sides, if they are fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to play for the first team, they have to perform at the requisite level more or less immediately. While they may rise to this challenge in one or two matches, eighteen or nineteen-year olds are not going to achieve this standard of performance every game and they are not allowed the luxury of indifferent games. Managers are under too much pressure to grant them this luxury. Some get the opportunity to go on loan to a Championship side, but are these teams going to play the quality of football that will enhance their capacity to make the step-up to the Premier League? In short, denying young players the opportunity to establish themselves in the first team, simply writes off a number of those who might have come through had they been given a little more time to develop. So, I agree with you, this lack of opportunity is a major challenge we face.

**PM:** The second characteristic I raised with Howard Wilkinson was the engulfing nature of the traditional football culture. Managers and coaches have been brought up in a particular culture. During their playing careers they may have experienced life under a series of managers and coaches and absorbed a variety of lessons along the way. It's understandable for aspiring coaches and managers to see these

experiences as the bedrock of their own approach. Of course, these experiences can be a rich source of knowledge, but they can also act as a barrier to innovation. Do you think that enough is being done to ensure that aspiring managers and coaches are able to view their own experiences as players in a more constructively critical light?

**TB:** There's no question that the game has changed. My three games as caretaker manager of West Ham in the Premier League was a different world to the eleven games I had in that role when they were in the Championship. The atmosphere in the dressing room of a Premier League club, with its many strong personalities, egos and mix of nationalities, makes the possession of man-management skills the number one prerequisite. You can be a decent coach, but you will get buried if you haven't got the skill and strong enough mentality to deal with all the different types of personality you are going to encounter. The old days when a manager could batter and bully the dressing room into compliance have gone. You are dealing with a group of people who are largely millionaires. They aren't easily intimidated. You haven't got the same leverage in terms of any anxieties they might have about their next contract. They have got more options available to them. As such you're massively reliant on your man-management skills to maintain discipline. As long as you're tactically astute and have the requisite man-management skills you can always supplement these qualities by bringing in specialist coaches. You don't have to be the best coach around or to have necessarily played at the top level.

**PM:** And by mental strength you don't mean the ability to shout and lose your temper? While the Eduardo incident indicates that Wenger can get highly emotional, I find it difficult to imagine him shouting too much, if at all.

**TB:** I agree. The days of the bullying manager or coach are gone or, if this type of manager is still around, he will certainly have great difficulty surviving at the top levels of the game. What's more, the pressure is immense. If you lose, say, three matches in a row, the media are immediately on the case, speculating on your chances of being sacked. Admittedly, they are well rewarded for living

with these pressures, but you can't blame them for focusing on the short-term. And, of course, these pressures mean that it's not easy for academy coaches to grab the attention of the manager. He has problems that need solving today. This in turn makes my job more difficult because I'm trying to persuade clubs to have a longer-term vision. Again, this problem is compounded by the likelihood that most directors or managers won't be at the club in ten years time when the fruits of a longer-term strategy will start to be realised. I find these obstacles to reform frustrating. They persuade me that the FA, as the governing body, should have the overall power to put in place structures that it thinks are for the benefit of the longer-term health of the game. At the moment this is difficult because the reality of vested interests means some of my bosses come from the two Leagues that the FA are supposed to have authority over.

**PM:** Your last comment touches on a question I raised with Gordon Taylor. I asked him if in retrospect he thought that FA's incorporation of the Premier League had been shrewd move and he responded by saying that 'hindsight was a wonderful thing' and, tellingly, he added that 'it's now the tail wagging the dog'.

**TB:** Of course, all the groups will have their interests to defend and advance, but I can't think of any other country where this kind of situation prevails.

**PM:** More specifically, in what ways are you critical of the academy system as it's presently working?

**TB:** When Howard set-up the Charter for Quality he estimated that there would be between twelve to fifteen academies. However, when the programme was introduced virtually every club wanted to be involved. As we sit here there are now forty-one academies and about forty-nine centres of excellence. In order to achieve academy status a club had to commit to the provision of certain facilities - a sixty by forty metre indoor facility, changing rooms and pitches of a requisite standard and so on. But the way these specifications were worded offered a degree of flexibility and this eventually allowed forty-one clubs to achieve academy status. A Premier League unit monitors the nineteen Premier League



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academies and a similar unit at the Football League monitors its twenty-two academies and the centres of excellence. By the time I came in – five years after the scheme had been launched – the Premier League and Football League representatives were conceding at a Technical Control Board meeting that a number of academies were not up to the required standard. The problem was the vagueness of the stipulation that the facilities had to be ‘adequate’. Clearly, such a term is open to various interpretations. In the course of a year, and after much heated debate in December 2005 a group consisting of two representatives from each of the three bodies visited three clubs in the Premier League and three in the Football League to impress upon them that they needed to improve certain aspects of their operation and we gave them seven months to comply. We then wrote to the Premier League and Football League Boards informing them that this is what we intended to do. They responded by saying that they didn’t think that we had the power to pursue this course of action. At this point our attempts to improve the development of young elite players more or less ground to a halt. We were at an impasse because there appeared to be no agreement on the required standards for academies, and so there was a clear vacuum of leadership. No one could impose sanctions on those clubs that were falling short of the required standards.

**PM:** Did some of the clubs smell the money that might follow from their achievement of academy or centre of excellence status?

**TB:** It should be said that some clubs have invested a great deal of money in youth development, but not everyone is willing to be patient over a long-term period. Since I’ve been a member of the West Ham board I do have some insight in how club boards think. At weekly board meetings they’re not always aware of how the under-10s team did at the weekend. They’re far more likely to ask if any young 17-18 year old players are coming through this year. I understand this preoccupation with the present. It’s not for me in my role at the FA to tell clubs how they should spend their money. However, the money going from the FA to the clubs should be of a different order. For example, at the moment the Premier

League and the FA distribute a ten million pounds package to sixty-nine football clubs. They each get one hundred and thirty-eight thousand pounds towards their academies or centres of excellence. The amount that each club adds to this sum varies considerably from, say, ten thousand to perhaps four hundred thousand pounds. These differentials are bound to reflect the varying quality of the academies and centres. In my view, the clubs should place all this external money in a designated ‘youth account’, but again, because we are unable to conduct the quality assurance exercise we can’t always determine how these moneys are being used. These funds have tended to be absorbed into the main account at some clubs and, therefore, it is not easy to see if it has been invested in youth development. In consequence, we want to ensure that we get value for money through better financial procedures.

**PM:** You said earlier that you have been compelled to focus exclusively on the grassroots, but wouldn’t the principle of joined-up thinking suggest that the reforms at the grassroots should be linked to reform at the professional level?

**TB:** I entirely agree. In the summer of 2006 when the Technical Control Board met for the first time in eighteen months, I said that it was obvious that the professional game needs to undergo a similar transformation. Following this meeting the FA, Premier League and the Football League met and, as a result, it was made clear to me that the FA didn’t have to power to pursue my proposals. The decision-making power over this area resided with the Leagues because the FA will always get out-voted two to one. This means that the FA cannot currently govern the game. It can’t impose proper sanctions or introduce quality assurance systems. I find this state of affairs difficult to accept because throughout Europe it’s the governing body that has authority to determine youth development policy.

**PM:** In 2000 I interviewed Peter Taylor, when he was the manager of Leicester City, and I asked him what sort of balance he struck between individual and team coaching. He said that the emphasis was definitely on teamwork. I make this point because it’s apparent that so many players carry the same weaknesses through their entire careers, one-

footedness being the obvious example. While football is a team game, it is undoubtedly a game based on the skills of the individuals involved. The way Arsenal play is probably a good illustration of the importance of this blend between individual skill and teamwork. I'd appreciate your observations.

**TB:** There's no doubt in my mind that if you get a child at an early age you can make him/her two-footed. I was naturally right-footed, but by practicing over a period of time with my dad I became equally competent with my left foot.

**PM:** In which case you're one of the few exceptions because most players greatly favour one foot.

**TB:** We have to recognise that there are some exceptionally gifted one-footed players. That having been said, for the most part, if you are one-footed and play at the higher levels game this will restrict your potential because your opponents will always have the option of channelling you on to your weaker side.

**PM:** But why do you think that players are allowed by coaches to go through their careers limited by this weakness? In a professional game such a deficiency just seems so unprofessional. I think most people are of the view that professional footballers have enough time to practice and develop their skills, but judging solely by the one-footedness of the vast majority of player, they don't take this opportunity to practice, presumably because they don't see it as an occupational obligation.

**TB:** I agree, it is bizarre and I can only trace it back to the coach you first encounter and the individual's desire to practice. It's easier to develop this ability when you're younger. Once you develop a particular approach to the game, when certain habits become embedded in your approach to the game, it is more difficult. The key to learning to kick with your weaker foot is to recognise the importance of your standing foot. Initially, there is a very strong tendency to put your standing foot in the wrong place in relation to the ball.

**PM:** On paper you appear to be in a powerful position to influence the development of football in this country. However, I'm sure that you appreciate



there tends to be a considerable gulf between having formal authority and the capacity to bring about substantive change. Therefore, let me ask you to summarise what you think are the principal obstacles to you achieving your objectives?

**TB:** There have been encouraging developments at the grassroots level. We now have sixty-six specialist coaches in post. Our aim is to have skills coaches in every specialist sports college. That would give us around four hundred fifty coaches in all. But, as I've already been at pains to point out, the biggest frustration and challenge for us is how can we extend our influence to the elite level of the game? That frustration has taken a long time to reach its present heights. Some people say to me why don't you rant and rave and, if it comes to it, walk out. The failure of England to qualify for the European Nations Championships this summer has caused a massive reaction. While, of course, this defeat was unwelcome, it has at least helped to underscore what we have been saying for the last few years, namely, that in terms of technique we simply aren't good enough. If we do not learn our lesson now, I believe we will continue to be left behind by some nations and overtaken by others.

**PM:** And finally, if I can add a rider to my last question just in order to be crystal clear, would I be right in concluding that you view the future with considerable pessimism?

**TB:** You will have gathered that I have found these last two and a half years highly frustrating in many ways. However, let me be more optimistic. Richard Lewis, the Executive Chairman of the Rugby Football League, was asked by the three ruling bodies of the



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game to review the role of academies and centres of excellence in developing young players. At the moment it looks as if a 'youth development group' might be established and Howard Wilkinson might become its independent chair and undertake the job of trying to pull the three bodies together. This could mean that on some occasions the vote might be split two-two. It would be nice to think that he might have the casting vote, but that has yet to be agreed. I also think that any funding should go through this group and, hopefully, this will give us the accountability and quality assurance we need. In March we held six regional meetings with Academy and Centre of Excellence managers. We have gained their views on what they want from the FA. At the moment they appear to want a similar regional structure to that of the national game. With the money coming from the new television deal we could dovetail the national game with the club structures and put a skills coach in every club for both the five

to elevens and eleven to sixteen year olds. On the basis of these meetings we will formulate our recommendations and these will go to a committee know as the Professional Game Board (PGB). This Board has asked for details and feedback of views from the recent regional meetings, and are interested to hear the recommendations of the top coaches throughout the country. It is then for the PGB members to consider the investment options.

I believe we must acknowledge the need for major change after the National team's limitations were so cruelly exposed in the Croatian game, because, surely, now is the time to embark upon the necessary reforms? The next six months should reveal whether the game is prepared to embrace change or whether political interests win the day.

*Interview conducted at the Football Associations headquarter in Soho Square on the 19th February 2008.*



# 'Education, Education, Education': The Development of Educational Provisions in English Professional Football Clubs

Chris Platts

## Introduction

In the wake of England's failure to qualify for the 2008 European Championships in Switzerland and Austria, an abundance of ex-players, managers, ex-managers and journalists have clamoured to offer their thoughts and ideas on the reasons behind the seemingly poor qualifying campaign. In this regard, critics have pointed to, among other things, the supposed negative impact that the growing number of 'foreign' players has had on the standards of the English game. Another widely cited reason for the national team's failure to qualify for next summer's tournament has been the shortcomings of the academy system at professional football clubs. The accusation is that it has failed to produce sufficient numbers of English players of the required talent. In the heat of this debate it tends to be overlooked that, according to the Football Association (FA), the Football League (FL) and the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) and, ostensibly, the participating clubs themselves, the objective of the academies and centres of excellence is not solely to produce football players for the first team. By virtue of running an academy or centre of excellence, a club is required to meet a number of criteria, one of which relates to educational provision for the young players (The FA, 1997). In line with this stipulation, the FA claim that 'the advent of Football Academies has seen the mandatory appointment of a full-time Education and Welfare Officer to each one' (The FA, 2007). Against this backdrop, this short article aims to outline how this concern about the educational provisions offered to young players within the professional game in England emerged and developed. However, before proceeding, it is important to note that little data exists on the education of apprentices, and that which does exist tends to focus on particular aspects of what education provisions are currently available to players in academies. With some noticeable exceptions (see, for example, Parker, 1996, 2000), the compilers of these data have not addressed or identified their underlying objectives.

## The emergence of an educational component

According to Monk and Russell, prior to the 1960s, the recruitment and training of young players 'appears to have been typified by a lack of any coherent structures or formal schemes across the sport' (2000: 63). Generally, there was a lack of consideration given to the education of players. The dominant perception was that junior players constituted a useful form of cheap labour. They were used as a means of servicing the clubs' needs in such areas as ground maintenance. In this period it was illegal for clubs to take on boys under-17 as full-time professionals and, therefore, hiring them for other purposes was a means by which the clubs attempted to circumvent the prevailing regulations (Monk and Russell, 2000).

During the course of 1960s the FA modified their regulations to allow clubs to enrol players at the age of fifteen under the status of 'apprentice' and, as Monk and Russell indicate, whilst there was no formal requirement for football clubs to provide education for apprentice players, the FA insisted that these apprentices should be allowed to undertake any form of educational activity they wished (2000). However, in reality, this informal requirement seems to have been insufficient to persuade clubs to incorporate an educational component into their apprenticeship schemes. Notwithstanding this pressure from the FA and later from the PFA, throughout the 1960s and 1970s it seemed that clubs continued to treat young players in their traditional way, that is as a source of cheap manual labour (Dabschenk, 1986).

## Education through the 'crisis'

For a variety of reasons, in the three decades following the post-1945 period, professional football was characterised by increases in the wages of players, falling attendances at matches, and by the beginning of the 1980s, 'the game was seen to be in a state of crisis' (Murphy, 2004: 46). The financial plight of the clubs was compounded by the general economic recession of 1979. As Monk and Russell have noted, under these conditions, many clubs and



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the lower division clubs in particular, came to see apprenticeships as luxuries that they could no longer afford. This tightening of belts found expression in the fact that the number of apprentices in total at all twenty-four clubs in the Fourth Division numbered only thirty-three in 1983 (2000).

Partly in response to these developments, and in a further attempt to enhance the prospects of footballers finding alternative careers away from football, in the late 1970s, the PFA and the FL established the Footballers' Further Education and Vocational Training Scheme (FFEVTS) (Dabscheck, 1986). Its proponents sought to ensure 'that post-career educational/vocational preparation ... not only [became] a compulsory element of a football trainee's life, but [also] a heavily subsidised ... feature of professional player status' (Parker, 2000: 63). While this initiative was primarily a reaction to the growing concern about the low number of apprenticeships being recruited by clubs, an attempt was also made to monitor the impact it had upon the educational experiences of young players. This in itself was an innovation because, prior to the 1970s, rarely, if ever, does there seem to have been any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of any policy or measure introduced to improve the educational provision for apprentices. Even after the introduction of the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) awards into professional football in the 1990s, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how, if at all, these developments have impacted upon the education of young players.

Despite the lack of available evidence on the consequences of the introduction of the FFEVTS on educational provisions of young players, what is clear is that organisations such as the FA, FL, and the PFA were placing greater emphasis on the educational dimension on the apprenticeship schemes of professional football clubs.

#### **Introduction of YTS and YT**

In the same year that the FFEVTS was established, the newly elected Conservative Government set out to reduce the high unemployment rates that beset British society. In 1983, with the aim of ameliorating youth unemployment, the Conservative Government introduced the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) and in the following year the football authorities adopted the

scheme (Stewart and Sutherland, 1996). It was widely accepted as providing 'the essential framework that the game had lacked for so long' (Monk and Russell, 2000: 64). Unlike the mostly *ad hoc* apprentice schemes of previous decades, the YTS was underpinned by three central and interrelated objectives. Firstly, it allowed participants access to training, education and work experience and did so in an attempt to provide a superior form of entry into the labour market. Secondly, it aimed at providing employers with young workers who were better equipped for life in the work place. And thirdly, it was intended that, in combination, these two objectives would benefit the economy as a whole by producing a more adaptable, highly motivated and productive workforce (Stewart and Sutherland, 1996). It is clear that this Government initiative was in the first instance aimed at reducing youth unemployment figures. However, it is safe to say that these broader intentions were of little concern to football clubs. For them, and in particular those clubs in perilous financial circumstances, it offered a lifeline. It helped them to recruit young players and, at the same time, provided some much needed income (Monk and Russell, 2000). It should also be pointed out, however, that, in much the same way as previous schemes were characterised by an absence monitoring, there is little evidence to indicate that the money the clubs received was in practice used by them to fund the education of their apprentices.



In return for YTS funding, clubs were required to release apprentices one day per week to undertake educational courses. However, it seems that the courses on offer were limited to leisure and tourism, together with supplementary training in areas relating to alternative careers in the football industry, such as groundsmanship. (Monk and Russell, 2000). What was noticeable throughout the 1980s, and particularly following the introduction of the YTS to professional football in 1984, was the increasing number of apprentices taken on by clubs (Monk and Russell, 2000). One can only speculate on the extent to which the clubs were attracted by the funding that accompanied this scheme. However, it does seem to have led the FA and other controlling bodies to give more consideration to the educational provisions that were available to the apprentices.

At the beginning of the 1990s the YTS was reformed and renamed Youth Training (YT). Its introduction was accompanied by a greater emphasis on the education of players (Monk and Russell, 2000). The following five years or so witnessed the introduction of externally ratified examinations for football apprentices in the form of Intermediate or Advanced level GNVQs. While the courses continued to centre on leisure, tourism and sport, the move towards more externally ratified awards for players was indicative of a growing awareness of the need to provide apprentices with qualifications that would help them to pursue alternative careers if their ambitions to be a professional footballer were thwarted.

It is certainly the case that football's embrace of these schemes was part of a growing societal emphasis on the education received and qualifications obtained by young people. As Roberts puts it: from the 1970s onwards many 'young people [had] become keener to remain in education so as to become as well qualified as possible' (1996: 107). Yet, as far as football was concerned, there continued to be variations in the ways in which the clubs administered their schemes and it is also possible that many young players within football did not 'buy into' them. In this regard, Parker argues that 'for the majority of trainees, dreams of footballing success far outweighed issues of post-career vocational planning in terms of lifestyle

prioritisations' (2000: 74), not least because 'for, amongst other reasons, education and schooling represented sub-cultural metaphors for occupational failure' (2000: 67).

### **Education since the 1990s**

In the mid-1990s the Government expressed serious doubts about the way in which football clubs were administering YT. It seems these doubts were engendered by the belief that it had been devalued by the clubs and that a substantial number of the participants had come to view the scheme as having little intrinsic interest for them (Monk and Russell, 2000). At the same time, on the broader front, there were moves by central government to shift the emphasis away from YT towards 'Modern Apprenticeships', not least because, as well as being seen to be more vocationally-orientated, they placed a smaller financial burden on employers (Monk and Russell, 2000). By 1998, the Modern Apprenticeship had been rolled out to all League clubs and, in an attempt to emphasise its academic component, it was named the 'Football Scholarship' and it became compulsory for every club to adopt the scheme (Monk and Russell, 2000). It was distinctively different from previous approaches. Among the changes, limits were placed on the number of funded trainees at each club. They were limited to enrolling eighteen trainees in total, at a rate of six per year. Any trainees in excess of this number had to be funded by the clubs themselves (Monk and Russell, 2000). One of the possible reasons for this restriction is that the funding, introduced in the 1980s as part of the YTS, seems to have had the consequence of increasing the number of apprentice players that were released at the end of their contracts. In other words, it does not appear to have encouraged prudence on the part of at least some clubs. It could be inferred that some clubs were rather more interested in the associated funding than they were in the well being of their young charges. The new Football Scholarship lasts three years as opposed to the two years of YT and the claim is that it is better tailored to the individual needs of players. Furthermore, this Scholarship programme made it mandatory for players to receive funding for three years even if clubs decide to release



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players from their contracts after only two years. It also requires players to undertake twelve hours of academic study per week in a range of A-Levels, GNVQs and NVQs, depending on the grades they attained at secondary GCSE level. In this respect, the Football Scholarship was designed to be more in line with the needs of individual players rather than the 'one size fits all' approach characteristic of the YTS and YT. For example, the more academically gifted players were allowed to undertake A-Levels, while those with fewer GCSEs at grades A to C were able to take some A-Levels together with advanced GNVQs.

In short, the Football Scholarship is intended to persuade players of the importance of undertaking educational qualifications of one kind or another. It is aimed at achieving this through offering qualifications that are considered more useful in the hope that the 'scholars' will be more inclined to study. The question arises therefore, are these objectives being realised in practice? While, in the present context, a comprehensive response to this question is not possible, Monk and Russell have undertaken some preliminary research on the matter. They argue that while a third of the twenty-one players whom they interviewed were sufficiently qualified to undertake A-Levels – in that they each possessed eight or more GCSE passes at grade C or above – just two were placed on such an academic programme. As such, they are of the view that the uptake of A-Levels has not increased in the post-YT era (2000). Therefore, they argue that if the aim of the Scholarship scheme has been to increase the academic nature of the educational provisions offered by professional football academies it does not seem to have achieved its goal. Monk and Russell conclude that in practice it is likely that 'the academic aspirations of apprentice footballers remain fairly low' (Monk and Russell, 2000: 67).

The research by Monk and Russell, together with research undertaken by Parker (1996, 2000), seem to point to the marginal impact made by these educational initiatives within professional football. These findings seem to reinforce the view that in the football culture the achievement of a career in the game dominates all other considerations. However, it is as well to emphasise that the conclusions of Monk

and Russell are based on a relatively small sample and further research is necessary in order to assess the adequacy of their findings. Nevertheless, overall, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, over the years, the various schemes that have been designed to improve the range of educational opportunities available to young players have not, for the most part, achieve their objectives.

Around the time that the Football Scholarship was introduced, Howard Wilkinson, the then FA Technical Director, produced the 'Charter for Quality'. In it he made a series of recommendations on the education of young players. He proposed an Academy System 'distinct from first team management' (The FA, 1997: 17). Under this proposal, clubs would receive funding for an Academy or Centre of Excellence as long as they fulfilled certain criteria. One proposed criterion for awarding Academy status to professional football clubs was that they should ensure 'that appropriate and adequate educational provision is available for each Academy player, including primary, secondary, further and higher educational provision' (The FA, 1997: 4.7.1). Similarly, for football clubs to have an associated Centre of Excellence, they were 'required to clearly outline the rules and guidelines concerning Centres with regard to; registration, welfare, educational needs, priority and objectives' (The FA, 1997: 2.15). On the formal level the introduction of the 'Charter for Quality' has had a widespread impact. Most clubs belonging to the Premier League (PL) and FL now run either an Academy or a Centre of Excellence, and many of the proposals outlined in the Charter have since been adopted in the FA's 'Football Development Strategy' (The FA, 2001). However, Sir Trevor Brooking, the FA's present Director of Football Development, has recently conceded that the FA does not have sufficient control over what occurs in Academies or Centres of Excellence. What he would like to see is the establishment of a much stronger link between the funding that each club receives for running an Academy or Centre of Excellence and a range of key performance indicators, one of which would place a strong emphasis on education. At the same time, it has also become clear that funding players through a three-year course in whatever subject they decide to study has proved to be beyond the resources of the



football clubs and the funding bodies. With clubs receiving funding for eighteen players it became impossible for the FFEVTS to cover the costs when players opt for a range of educational programmes. These often involve individual tuition or small group teaching. In 2004, under the burden of this requirement, the FFEVTS devolved into the Premier League Learning (PLL) and League Football Education (LFE).

It is the PLL and LFE that are presently responsible for the delivery of educational provision in Academies and Centres of Excellence and other English professional football clubs. An example of this is the Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (ASE) offered by the LFE. Rather than allowing apprentices to select from a range of different qualifications, the ASE is aimed at helping players to gain qualifications in areas that are held to enhance their chances of developing into professional footballers. The courses cover such subjects as nutrition, coaching and rehabilitation. However, despite the growing significance that has come to be placed on ensuring that players receive an 'adequate' education, and whilst the LFE and PLL are subject to inspections from external auditors such as OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate (see, for example, Adult Learning Inspectorate, 2007), there continues to be little academic research into the extent to which Academies and Centres of Excellence are fulfilling their educational remit.

## Summary

The purpose of this article has been to outline the emergence of the concern surrounding the further education being offered to young players within professional football in England, and, in light of this concern, how educational provision for young players has developed. At the moment there exists very little systematic research into young players' experiences of education within football academies or the experiences of education and welfare officers. The author of this article is part of a research team that aims to address this gap in our collective knowledge. We hope to be able to be in a position to report on the preliminary findings of this study in a future edition of the Soccer Review. In the interim, however, it seems that just as has been the case with the recent discussion of the national football centre at Burton, the debate surrounding football academies and the way they should be developed will continue to be the focus of attention and concern for professional football, the media and interested followers of football.

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# Football, Ethnic Diversity and the Asian Community: A Case Study of Burnley Football Club

Jonathan Magee and Cliff Olsson

## Background

Burnley, a traditional mill town in east Lancashire, is one of the most deprived areas in Britain. Over fifty percent of its population of 88,500 have an average annual income of less than £15,000 (Experian Income Data, published at [www.burnley.gov.uk](http://www.burnley.gov.uk)) and 18.6% of its households are on income support (Housing Benefit Statistics, published at [www.burnley.gov.uk](http://www.burnley.gov.uk)). The ethnic composition of the town is 92 percent white British and eight percent Asian heritage (mainly Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin), and – as is well known – it, along with Oldham and Bradford, suffered racially motivated civil disturbances in the summer of 2001. Following clashes in June 2001 between two gangs – one white and one Asian heritage – violence lasted for three days and exposed graphic racial tensions within the local population. Subsequent reports – the Government-commissioned Cantle Report and The Burnley Task Force Report – involved extensive research of these disturbances and concluded that the white British and Asian heritage communities were ‘fearful’ of each other and were consequently ‘living separate lives’.

Dave Edmundson, the then Chief Executive of Burnley Football Club, delivered a Keynote speech at the International Football Institute Conference, *European Football: Influence, Change and Development* in September 2004 in Preston entitled, ‘Re-imagining Burnley Football Club as “A Club for its Community”’. There was a strong focus in the presentation on how Burnley FC is an important catalyst for community identity, pride, regeneration and inter-group relations. Edmundson argued that in times of commercial pressure and as a result of its proximity to Premiership ‘giants’ such as Blackburn Rovers and the two main Manchester clubs, Burnley FC had to maximise its links to ‘its community’ to make sure that the club had enough customers through the gate each home match. He also expressed the view that the club felt a strong responsibility to bring different communities in the town together following the disturbances and that it had a clear opportunity to do this through the re-

imagining of Burnley FC as ‘a club for its community’. Examples of community and leisure programmes and initiatives that illustrated how the club was promoting widening participation, ethnic diversity and support for the ‘Kick Racism out of Football Campaign’ were provided in order to demonstrate good practice regarding engagement with the Asian community. It was argued that these initiatives were a positive response by the club to the findings of both the Cantle and Burnley Task Force Report. They showed how the club was working to include the local Asian community as part of its ‘own community’.

Following the presentation, dialogue occurred between Edmundson and the audience – mainly academics but also some individuals from the football industry – and the pro-active nature of Burnley FC’s activities was welcomed. However, a key issue kept reoccurring within the discussion: ‘Why has Burnley FC not produced an Asian heritage player, given that it (Burnley) has a significant local Asian population?’ Answers ranged from ‘Asians only play cricket’, ‘Asians do not want to play football’, ‘Asians are not strong enough for the game’ to ‘Asians have not the heart to make it’. In the event, no consensus emerged in response to this ostensibly simple, but deceptively complex and multi-faceted, question. However, it was generally recognised that towns like Burnley, with well-established professional clubs, a substantial local Asian community and a recent history of racial tension, were strategically placed to deliver football opportunities for British Asian youngsters, especially in terms of holding out the prospect of professional careers.

In the months following the Conference the ‘Asian player question’ generated dialogue between Burnley FC and the International Football Institute (IFI) and funding was secured to commission IFI to conduct a research project on Burnley FC, ethnic diversity and engagement with the local Asian heritage community. Our subsequent findings were published in the report: *Burnley Football Club, Ethnic Diversity and the Asian Community: an Analysis of Leisure and Community Programmes and Youth Player Recruitment*, (Magee and Olsson, November 2005). The central focus of the report was on ethnic diversity, firstly within the



community and leisure programmes operated by the charitable Burnley Football Club Community Sports Trust, and, secondly, in terms of youth player recruitment policy operated by Burnley FC. This article deals with the findings of the latter section, namely, the recruitment of players of Asian heritage into Burnley FC's Centre of Excellence.

### **The Project in Context**

Even a cursory perusal of the players selected for England national squads over recent decades is enough to establish their increasing racial and ethnic diversity. This is a far cry from the white only selection that was dominant up until the late 1970s. This ethnic diversity breakthrough, so to speak, has centred on English born players of black African and Caribbean heritage, and it is now common to see black players represent their country of birth. Indeed, Paul Ince and Sol Campbell have captained England. Indeed, during Sven Goran Eriksson's tenure, there were sufficient black players in the squad to have made it possible to have a team consisting entirely of black players.

Whilst there are increasing numbers of black, English players in the professional structure, if one broadens the ethnic diversity lens the picture is less positive. There is a negligible number of professional players of British Asian heritage in the professional game, with only five players of British Asian heritage employed across the ninety-two professional English clubs. These include Michael Chopra (Sunderland), Zesh Rehman (Queens Park Rangers) and Anwar Uddin (captain of Dagenham and Redbridge). In times of widening participation, ethnic diversity and increasing engagement with minority groups it remains puzzling as to why there is such a dearth of British Asian players pushing for places in Premier League, Championship and England squads.

### **The Football Community and The Asian Community**

An acknowledgement of the absence of British Asians from English football is not new. The *Asians Can't Play Football* report, compiled by Jas Bains with Raj Patel (1996), produced information on the experiences of Asians footballers, professional clubs' perceptions of the Asian community with regard to

playing football, and also structural and organisational impediments to minority communities seeking the opportunity to play football. Graham Kelly, the then Chief Executive of the Football Association, commented at the time:

The Football Association, as the governing body of the sport in England, has a clear responsibility to ensure that the world's most popular game is enjoyed by every section of the community. We welcome the contribution made by the *Asians Can't Play Football* project and look forward to working with other football bodies to encourage greater participation of Asians at all levels, including the professional game (cited in Bains with Patel, 1996, p.3).

Gordon Taylor, Chief Executive of the Professional Footballers' Association, was similarly supportive:

The Professional Footballers' Association has been pleased to contribute financial support to the *Asians Can't Play Football* project with a view to proving that the title is wrong and that members of the Asian community can indeed play football very well. However, it must be acknowledged that there is a need to create a structure that allows young Asian players to achieve their ambitions in professional football (cited in Bains with Patel, 1996, p.3).

These are strong words from the head of the footballers' union. Nevertheless, progress for the Asian community within professional football has been painfully slow. Significantly, no player of British Asian heritage has yet been able to establish a career at the very top level of the game. Perhaps unsurprisingly the report 'Asians Can Play Football – Another Wasted Decade' was presented at the *National Asians in Football Forum* in September 2005. The report did point to examples of good practice at youth, amateur and semi-professional levels, but its general conclusion was that 'the massive under-representation, lack of access and denial of opportunities to young Asian players, coaches and administrators in football in England, arguably, remain the same [as 10 years ago]' (p.5). Despite the lack of Asian heritage representation in



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the professional ranks, within supporter groups and at key administrative levels – especially within the FA and professional clubs – the report sought a future of ‘Looking Forward – Not Back’ for British Asian players:

Whilst we remain frustrated, we prefer to look forward rather than back because of what is at stake. We owe it to new generations of young British Asian footballers and administrators in this country. The British game will remain poorer without their vital contribution at the very top. Both the social ‘inclusion’ and business case arguments grow stronger as we, in the UK, undergo major demographic changes and, in particular, as many of the heavily urbanised sections of towns and cities gravitate towards British minority ethnic majority status (p.7).

Given the social and cultural importance attributed to football, anyone reading the report would quickly realise that the ‘football potential’ within Britain’s Asian population needs ‘releasing’ into the football ‘community’.

Brown *et al*, in their 2006 study *Football and its Communities: Final Report*, explored the issue of football and ‘its communities’ in considerable depth. A key conclusion of the report is that a wide interpretation of the ‘communities’ with which football engages is required and, moreover, that clarity is needed in terms of football’s obligations to these groups. It is surely the case, then, that the British Asian community should be ‘recognised’ as part of the football ‘community’ and clubs should recognise their ‘responsibilities’ to the ‘community’ as a whole, including those of Asian heritage.

Recruiting British Asian players into the professional structures of the game, arguably the most important issue, is fundamental to this engagement and one should not under-estimate the impact of a player of Asian heritage playing for England, especially in terms of providing a role model for a so far untapped source of talent within the football ‘community’. What follows is a case study assessment of Burnley FC’s Centre of Excellence scheme with regard to ethnic diversity and Asian heritage players. While this is a study undertaken in 2005, it continues to offer relevant insights.

## **A Case Study of Ethnic Diversity within Youth Player Recruitment at Burnley FC**

### *Introduction to Youth Player Recruitment*

Burnley FC has a proven record of producing home grown players who have had successful careers in professional football through its Centre of Excellence scheme (COE). The most notable recent example to have come through the development system and establish a first team place is Richard Chaplow. He was subsequently transferred to West Bromwich Albion for £1.5m in season 2003/04.

Burnley FC’s COE is situated at Gawthorpe, approximately two miles from Burnley town centre. The ethnic composition of the three nearest Primary Schools is as follows:

- Padiham County Primary has 98 percent white British school children.
- St Leonards: Padiham has 97 percent white British school children.
- Padiham Green has 97 percent white British school children.

The COE operates age groups for every year from Under-9s to Under-16s and registers approximately twelve to eighteen players per age group. Registrations are for a one year duration for nine to twelve year age groups and at the age of twelve the club is allowed to register players for two or four years. At sixteen years of age three-year modern apprenticeships are offered to those showing the most potential. The apprenticeship scheme has allowed the club, supported by a government subsidy, to employ eighteen players (six per year) and develop them with the prospect of them becoming professionals.

The COE is administered from Burnley’s Turf Moor ground and overseen by the Head of Youth Development. He is supported by a COE co-ordinator and a youth team manager. In addition, the COE employs nineteen part-time coaches who deliver the coaching programme throughout the season and act as coaches to the teams at different age levels in COE fixtures each Sunday. As well as COE staff, Burnley FC employs twenty-five scouts with sixteen of them based in the local area (primarily Lancashire, North Manchester and parts of Cumbria).



### Statistical Information

The purpose of this section is to investigate the recruitment of youth players at under-14 and under-16 levels to the COE from seasons 1995-96 to 2004-5 with a view to ascertaining the numbers of Asian Heritage players recruited during that period. These age groups were selected because they are the critical ages for the development of youth players in

terms of gaining a place on the modern apprenticeship scheme. The modern apprenticeship scheme allows clubs to receive a subsidy from the Learning and Skills Council to support the development of up to six players per year. As part of their training, young players are also expected to undertake educational training at a local College and an additional recognised qualification such as "A" levels. The following table presents the recruitment statistics:

#### Burnley Football Club

##### Recruitment pattern for the under-14s and under-16s of its centre of excellence from 1995 to 2005 with particular reference to youngsters of Asian heritage

Year	Total Number of U-14s Signed	Number that were Asian Heritage	Proportion %	Total Number of U-16s Signed	Number that were Asian Heritage	Proportion %
1995 – 96	15	0	0%	14	0	0%
1996 – 97	16	0	0%	15	0	0%
1997 – 98	13	0	0%	15	0	0%
1998 – 99	17	1	6%	14	0	0%
1999 – 00	14	0	0%	15	0	0%
2000 – 01	16	0	0%	12	1	8%
2001 – 02	15	0	0%	15	0	0%
2002 – 03	16	1	6.25%	14	0	0%
2003 – 04	15	0	0%	16	0	0%
2004 - 05	18	2	11%	12	1	8%
<b>Totals</b>	155	4	<b>2.6%</b>	142	2	<b>1.4%</b>

### Analysis

At under-14 level four players out of 155 were of Asian heritage in the ten-year period. These involved one player from 1995 to 2002 and three players from 2002 to 2005. This constitutes 2.6% of all players signed for that period. This bears little relationship to the ethnic composition of local Asian heritage school children that stands at fourteen percent. However, the figure of Asian heritage players signed for the season 2004-5 is more encouraging having risen to eleven percent.

At under-16 level two players out of 142 were of Asian heritage and these were signed in seasons 2000-1 and 2004-5. Again, this pattern of recruitment considerably under-represents the fourteen percent of school children in the Burnley education district. Nevertheless, the number of Asian heritage players participating in the COE is now increasing. In the season 2005-06 two players were recruited to the Under-14 age group and one to the Under-16s.



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### *The Processes behind COE Recruitment and Youth Players of Asian Heritage: Preliminary Findings*

As well as the gathering of statistical information, informal interviews were also conducted with:

- Jeff Taylor: centre of excellence co-ordinator at Burnley Football Club.
- Andy Farrell: under-16s manager at Burnley Football Club.
- Vince Overson: head of youth development at Burnley Football Club.
- Hussain Khalid: scout for Burnley Football Club.
- Afrisiab Anwar: chairperson of Daneshouse FC and member of Burnley Borough Council.
- Jimmy Khan: Preston's sports development manager and an advisor to the *Football Association* Advisor on ethnic diversity and race issues.

The purpose of the interviews was to explore the processes that lay behind the COE recruitment policy with regard to youth players of Asian heritage and, as a result, the following preliminary observations have emerged:

- There is a significant amount of work being done to establish positive relationships with the Asian heritage community and these provide a solid foundation to build upon.
- The location of the COE in Gawthorpe, a primarily white British residential area, is likely to discourage attendance by youth players of Asian heritage.
- There is a low number of coaches & scouts of Asian heritage within the COE. This absence of a prominent visible presence of Asian authority figures is again likely to deter the recruitment of Asian heritage youth players.
- There is a need to increase the number of Asian heritage scouts and coaches to tap into and develop the potential of Asian heritage youth players.
- The establishment and successful development of clubs like Daneshouse FC (see next section) could act as a pathway between Asian heritage youth players and the COE (and subsequently Burnley FC in the longer term).

- Clubs such as Daneshouse FC would be interested in solidifying links and relationships with the COE with the aim of developing opportunities for Asian heritage youth players
- Within the Asian heritage community there is some evidence of a lack of parental support for youngsters who might otherwise participate. This affects participation and manifests itself in such areas as the provision of transport to the COE, especially on weeknights.
- Within the Asian heritage community a high priority is given to family, religious and cultural activities and these often clash with COE activities.
- A lower profile is afforded to the sport of football within the Asian heritage community. Messages related to how participation activities organised by the COE improve the quality of life, provide career opportunities, and have benefits for social integration and cultural assimilation have had limited impact on the Asian heritage community.
- Nevertheless, there are indications that a significant amount of football is taking place within the Asian heritage community in a form that might be loosely termed 'organised disorganised football'. By this we mean football that is recreational in nature and, as such, it stands outside the formal parameters of the organised football structures in the area. These activities are not affiliated to the FA, formal league arrangements or clubs and do not attract scouts from Burnley FC. However, these informal football activities involve a significant body of untapped Asian heritage young talent engaging with football.

### *Daneshouse Football Club – A Case Study*

Daneshouse is an area of Burnley that is predominantly Asian heritage and has experienced racial tensions in recent times. The emergence of Daneshouse Football Club in 2002 as a club for Asian youngsters is clearly having an impact with over 100 Asian heritage school children playing regular football at the club. Importantly, for the community, the sessions are delivered by young Asian coaches from the locality. Currently, Daneshouse has one Under-12 team in the local

Warburton League with plans to enter two more teams next season. This appears to have heightened the profile of football in the area and provides an opportunity for the COE to establish a pro-active approach to fostering and nurturing the talent of Asian heritage youngsters in the Burnley area. With appropriate support, Daneshouse FC can help to create a sustainable flow of talented young Asian boys to the COE. It can also constitute a blueprint for other clubs to emerge in the area.

Formal and informal links between Daneshouse FC and Burnley FC have recently emerged, most notably with the delivery of football programmes and an offer for Daneshouse FC to attend recent first team games. The continuation of such relationships is important for the development of football opportunities for young players of Asian heritage. The growing involvement of young Asians in organised football in Burnley is to be welcomed on several different levels and the contribution the sport can make to wider social issues within the Burnley area can hardly be over-estimated.

#### *Conclusions - Youth Player Recruitment*

- The number of Asian heritage players being offered trials and signed as registered COE players is extremely low and in no way representative of local ethnic composition. Encouragingly, however, this figure has risen recently and is now getting closer to being more representative. It is hoped that this trend can be maintained. Such a development will provide further opportunities for Burnley FC and, indeed, football in general to enhance the profiles of football and Burnley FC within the Asian community.
- The location of the COE at Gawthorpe may be problematic, given the predominance of white, British school children. This could affect the attendance of Asian heritage school children because they require transport to and from the area. Moreover, they may also feel unsafe in an area they perceive to be hostile to them. The accessibility of the COE is a key issue for all communities. In addition, there may be issues surrounding the programme schedule and timing of coaching sessions since they may clash the

family and religious commitments of Asian heritage school children. Therefore, to ensure that the COE engages with such children, the coaching sessions may need to be re-scheduled.

- It is evident that informal links of a positive nature have been made between the COE and Daneshouse FC. These have included opportunities for Daneshouse FC under-12s to play at the COE and for club members to watch games at Turf Moor free of charge.
- The profile of football within the Asian community is rising, partially as a consequence of individuals within the Asian communities advocating participation and pointing to the inclusive potentiality of the game. These individuals are key to future football development among the Asian heritage community and require support from the Local Authority and Burnley FC.
- More generally, some non-white, British communities seem to associate football with racism. This is a broader challenge that faces football and its various organisations, authorities and clubs. All these bodies need to work towards making the game more accessible and welcoming to all by offering a sense of belonging. At present, the general impression is still too often conveyed that football is not a sport accessible for ethnic minority groups like those of Asian heritage.

#### *Recommendations - Youth Player Recruitment*

1. Burnley FC COE should continue to develop its good work with Daneshouse FC. This could take the form of coaching workshops delivered by COE staff at Gawthorpe, with coaches from clubs like Daneshouse FC being invited. Alternatively, when the COE is running in-house coach development sessions for its own staff, coaches from clubs like Daneshouse FC could also be invited to participate.
2. Burnley FC COE should examine the possibility of running a satellite centre located in the Daneshouse area. It could be used for trials and player development and be supported by qualified coaches and scouts of Asian heritage.



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### Overall conclusion

This article has been principally concerned with one local case study. Nevertheless, its findings can be used to offer guidance to other clubs situated in similar communities to Burnley FC. It is clear that the club's COE recruits mainly white, British schoolchildren, but this does not have to be the case. Following the IFI report, the club has come to recognise the importance of engaging with its local Asian community. To this end the COE has extended its recruitment processes to include local Asian heritage schoolchildren and introduced a more formalised network of scouting. In February 2006 the club invited the IFI to present its findings to an audience that included representatives from the professional football community, local councils, the Commission for Racial Equality, and the local Asian community. The ensuing debate was positive and particular importance was placed on the need for professional football clubs to provide recreational and other opportunities for Asian heritage schoolchildren. Representatives of the local Asian community were keen to stress that much talent existed within 'organised disorganised football' played by Asian youngsters. The day was extensively reported upon by local and national television and radio and Burnley FC should be commended for publicly accepting their obligation to engage further with the local Asian heritage community with the aim of making the game more inclusive.

It is pleasing to note that since the IFI report's publication Burnley FC has taken the identified recommendations on board and worked at engaging the local Asian community, and in particular Asian heritage schoolchildren. At one stage discussion took place with key stakeholders within the Asian football community with regard to the opening of a satellite centre for the COE in an Asian part of the town. However, instead it was decided that the club should offer free transport to local Asian heritage school children in order that they can have easier access the facilities of Burnley FC. It was argued that this alternative approach would avoid segregating Asian heritage school children in an independent centre and also lead them to mix with other youngster and develop a greater affinity for Burnley FC.

In addition, the football development centres that are operated by the Burnley FC Community Sports Trust, have made significant progress in engaging local Asian heritage schoolboys and schoolgirls within their programmes that are geared to ensuring football fun and physical activity. These centres play a key role in the recruitment processes for the COE.

In this respect the research identified that the Community Sports Trust and the COE needed to work more closely together to engage local Asian heritage school children and identify the better players for consideration by the COE. Allied to this is the increasing number of scouts from the local Asian community now affiliated to the COE. These key individuals not only act as identifiers of youth talent from within their own communities, but also act as critical links between the communities and the local professional football club. This can only be to the benefit of Burnley FC in its endeavour to solidify its standing as 'a club for its community'.



Disappointingly, the three Asian players within the COE structures at Under-14 and Under-16 level in 2004-5 were not offered places as scholars on the modern apprenticeship scheme. Thus, we must wait a little longer for the prospect of Burnley FC producing a player of Asian heritage. The competition for places on the modern apprenticeship scheme is extremely high, but if the club continues to expand its COE recruitment within the local Asian community, the chances are that sooner or later it will produce a professional player of Asian heritage.

On a broader scale, the research has highlighted the continuing difficulties regarding the provision of opportunities for the Asian community with regard to its engagement with football. Jaz Bains, co-author of the 1996 *Asians Can't Play Football* report and Chair of the National Asians in Football Forum recently said: 'We are light years away from unearthing a role model like Monty Panesar ... we need to build a critical mass of British Asian "wannabees", a production line churning out not dozens but hundreds from which someone can emerge', (<http://www.kickitout.org/index.php?id=9&StoryID=2719>).

This study, whilst focused on only one club, has demonstrated how the traditional structures of the English game have largely failed to establish recruitment processes and practices for the British Asian community in the way they have for other ethnic groups within football's 'community'. Until this omission is addressed, especially with regard to recruiting from the 'organized disorganized' football enthusiasts, the above comment from Jaz Bains will have a lingering resonance within the English game.

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- [www.kickitout.org/index.php?id=9&StoryID=2719](http://www.kickitout.org/index.php?id=9&StoryID=2719) (accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2007).



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# African Labour in the European Football Industry

**Paul Darby**

## **Introduction**

A perfunctory glance at the squad lists for African national teams participating in recent editions of the World Cup Finals or the African Cup of Nations reveals that the majority of that continent's most talented football players are plying their trade in the elite leagues of Europe, including the English Premiership. This process has been the focus of much media and academic interest in recent years. Some analysts have lauded the influx of Africans to Europe as a process that has enriched the European game, contributed to the development of African football and allowed individuals to escape a life of abject poverty. While there are elements of truth in all of the above, there are others who have argued that the transit of African football talent to Europe has had more nefarious consequences. For example, in December 2003, Sepp Blatter, President of FIFA, described the player exodus as 'unhealthy if not despicable' and suggested that recruiting European clubs were increasingly conducting themselves as 'neo-colonialists who don't give a damn about heritage and culture, but engage in social and economic rape by robbing the developing world of its best players'.<sup>1</sup> This article does not intend to review this debate. Rather, it provides a considered overview of the history, geography and economics of African football labour migration to Europe and concludes by assessing some of the concerns that have been raised by various agencies and individuals about the increasing presence of African labour in the European football industry.

## **History and Geography**

The recruitment of African players by professional European clubs has a long history which extends back to the colonial era. In this period African colonies were recognised by Europeans as being rich in natural resources, raw materials and cheap labour, not just in the economic sense but also in relation to football. It should come as no surprise that the football clubs of those countries that had a significant imperial presence in Africa were the main beneficiaries of the export of African talent. This was particularly the case in France and players from the 'motherland's' North African territories were visible in

the French professional game from its inception in 1932.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the domestic game, the French national team also benefited from the naturalisation of African talent, a process which began with Moroccan born Larbi Ben Barek who won 17 caps for his 'adopted' country during the late 1930s and 40s and has continued to the present day. A similar pattern of player migration was also apparent in Portugal's African territories, particularly Mozambique and Angola.<sup>3</sup> The potential that identifying, nurturing and transferring players from their country's colonies offered Portugal's leading clubs was spectacularly realised in 1961 when four of the team that brought Benfica its first European Cup success hailed from Africa. On the international scene, Portugal also benefited from African talent, most notably in the shape of Mozambique born Eusebio.

The collapse of colonial rule in Africa did little to restrict the migration of African players to Europe, and by the 1970s there was a steady flow of African football talent to France and Belgium. By the early 1980s African talent began crossing European borders in even greater numbers. This trend accelerated significantly in the 1990s and by the mid-point of the decade there were an estimated three hundred and fifty Africans playing first or second division football in Europe. At the start of the new millennium this figure had increased by over one hundred percent.<sup>4</sup> This exodus of African footballers cannot only be measured in quantitative terms but also in a qualitative sense, with the majority of Africa's most talented footballers playing their club football in Europe. This is exemplified by the fact that at the 2000 African Cup of Nations, co-hosted by Ghana and Nigeria, just over fifty percent of the players were signed to a European club. For the 2002 competition in Mali this figure had increased to sixty-six percent and for the 2004 edition in Tunisia it stood at sixty-seven percent.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of the geographical patterns that underpin the flow of African players to Europe, colonial and neo-colonial linkages are clearly apparent. As outlined earlier, up until the early 1960s, a number of European colonial powers benefited greatly from football talent from their African colonies. From the 1960s colonial history has continued to be significant



in determining the direction and pattern of migratory flows between African and European football. Running parallel to this neo-colonial pattern of migration however, has been a much more diffuse and seemingly random movement of African players to a range of leagues throughout Europe and beyond. For example, at the African Cup of Nations in 2002 the sixteen qualifying teams included players from twenty-six non-African leagues.<sup>6</sup> This reveals that colonial history offers only a partial explanation of a complex process which has not only accelerated exponentially since the early 1990s but has also taken on features not previously seen in the history of Africa's football exodus. A fuller explanation of football migration patterns between Europe and Africa must therefore move beyond colonial or neo-colonial geography and take into account a range of factors specific to football's global economic and political climate.

#### **'Supply' and 'Demand' Dynamics**

The growing profile and status of African national teams in the international arena since the mid 1980s, has undoubtedly been one of the most significant factors in the increasingly rapid flow of Africans to the European game. This development was closely linked to radical transformation in the political economy of FIFA and world football, heralded by the election of the Brazilian, João Havelange as the world body's President in 1974. Havelange's election brought about dramatic changes in FIFA's mission and resulted in an increase in political, financial and technical support for football in the Third World.<sup>7</sup> A by-product of this was the allocation of more places at the World Cup Finals to African teams and improving performances from African qualifiers from the 1982 edition onwards. The profile that this allowed the African players to acquire in the international arena was augmented by excellent performances from African teams at the under-20 and under-17 level world youth championships which were introduced by Havelange's FIFA in 1977 and 1985 respectively. These developments began to challenge the traditional stereotype of African players as merely 'natural footballers' who relied on their instincts, speed and skill but lacked the tactical maturity, discipline and organisation to compete effectively on

the international stage or in the European game. In doing so, African successes at world senior and youth levels effectively showcased the potential of emerging African talent to European clubs and created the 'demand' for African players in Europe.

The specific conditions that gave rise to the 'supply' side of this migratory equation were undoubtedly rooted in the fragile political economy of African football *vis-à-vis* the economic strength of the European club game. Largely on the back of the revenue generated by the UEFA Champions League and the sale of media rights, clubs in Europe's top level leagues, particularly in England, Germany, Spain, Italy and France, have been in a position to offer the type of salaries that simply do not exist elsewhere in the football world, and least of all in Africa. This explains the attraction of European football, but what is it about the African game that made, and continues to make, the 'lure' of Europe so irresistible for African players? A brief analysis of the economics and administrative culture of football in Africa's two primary player, exporting zones, North Africa and those coastal nations in the sub-Saharan west of the continent, sheds light on this question.



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In parts of North Africa, particularly Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt there exists in some clubs the type of professional infrastructures that can provide the sort of salaries that encourage players to remain at home, at least in the early part of their careers. Some clubs, such as Al Alhy in Egypt and Esperance in Tunisia, have slowly built up the professional foundations that have allowed them to not only hold on to their most talented players for longer but also buy and retain players from other African countries. Other clubs, such as Arab Contractors in Egypt, have relied on investment from the corporate sector and have been able to do likewise, albeit with less long-term security. Despite these varying levels of professionalism in North Africa there are still significant differentials in the finances that the region's most successful professional clubs and European teams, even those playing outside the elite level, have at their disposal for player salaries. For example, the annual operating budgets of the two Moroccan clubs, Raja Casablanca and Widal, generally recognised as being amongst the wealthiest clubs on the continent, represent only one third of that of some of the smallest teams in the French first division.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the wage gap between professional clubs in North Africa and their counterparts in France can often be as large as twenty to one.<sup>9</sup>

These stark statistics represent one of the key reasons for the migration of significant numbers of North Africans to professional leagues in Europe and beyond. However, these financial disparities and the 'push' factor that they generate are magnified in the coastal nations of the sub-Saharan west of Africa where the precarious socio-economic and political climate has wreaked havoc on domestic football infrastructures and has negated any potential for setting up well-organised professional clubs and leagues. The vast majority of clubs here operate without significant corporate or individual sponsorship and few have been able to offer the sort of contracts that afford players the regular, guaranteed salaries and labour protection found in Europe, or for that matter, parts of North Africa. Whilst broader issues such as extreme poverty, political instability and the debilitating legacy of colonialism have undoubtedly featured amongst the

problems afflicting football here, there are other ingredients, specific to sub-Saharan football's administrative culture and economic structure that have prevented clubs from raising the type of funds that might allow them to retain players.

Internal administrative malaise, or what the respected Tunisian journalist Faouzi Mahjoub referred to as a 'culture of mediocrity',<sup>10</sup> has long been one of the key constraining factors in the development of African football and has, by implication, had a negative impact on the extent to which clubs have been able to persuade young talent to stay in their domestic leagues. The endemic corruption that invariably characterises the administration of the game in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>11</sup> has done little to ameliorate this problem and has made the creation of the sort of professional infrastructures that might restrict the talent exodus virtually impossible to achieve. Government interference in football has also compounded this problem. In the aftermath of independence, newly constituted African governments provided financial subsidies for the game and thus argued that they were entitled to play a central role in its running. However, since the economic crisis of the 1980s and subsequent structural adjustment programs, the levels of funding provided for the game by African governments has diminished dramatically. For example, the budget of Cameroon's Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1970 accounted for 5.58% of the country's national budget but by 1996 it had been reduced to a mere 0.06%.<sup>12</sup> This has led to a situation whereby African governments, eager to accrue the political capital that comes with success in international sporting competition, have concentrated what limited finances there are for football on the national team. This focus on and interference in the management of the national team on the part of sub-Saharan African Sports Ministries has not only weakened the domestic game but has also often undermined the work of national football federations.

This analysis of the political economy of football in those regions that export the highest number of players to Europe highlights the stark choice that young African footballers with aspirations to make a career in the game are confronted with. There is little

in the way of infrastructure, professionalism or the possibility of a good salary to encourage them to remain in their home nations and eschew the potential of earning the almost unimaginable riches, by African standards at least, that the European game offers. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to be critical of the choice that the majority of Africa's most talented players have made in terms of where their best career options lie and for seeking to achieve their ambitions. However, the system of recruitment that facilitates African player migration and the consequences of this process for African football and the many players who are unsuccessful in their quest for a contract with a European club has been the subject of scathing criticism from football administrators, sections of the liberal European media and human rights activists.

#### Critique

African football administrators and government officials have long been critical of the export of African football labour to Europe. In the immediate aftermath of independence, the Confédération Africaine de Football (CAF) as well as a number of African governments, conscious of the damaging impact that the talent exodus could have for the development of the African game, initiated measures aimed at restricting the loss of the continent's football resources. For example, CAF introduced a regulation in 1965 that prevented national teams from fielding more than two overseas-based players while the government's of Zaire and Mozambique prohibited their players from migrating abroad. Despite such measures, CAF struggled to restrict the flow of football talent from Africa to Europe and was effectively powerless to prevent players and clubs from accepting offers of contracts or trials from European clubs and talent speculators. The inception of the African Champions League in 1997 by his successor, Issa Hayatou, did go some way towards creating the economic incentives necessary to encourage players to remain with some African clubs. However, this applied only to a handful of clubs who qualified for the competition and at best it served only to delay the migration of African players to more lucrative leagues.



The increasing use and abuse of young African talent during the 1990s by unscrupulous agents and speculators who recognised in the trade of African talent an opportunity for personal financial gain, also began to cause serious concerns within Europe.<sup>13</sup> As outlined earlier, the growing profile of African football at world senior and youth levels since 1990 led to a scramble on the part of talent speculators, recruiting agencies and scouts working on behalf of European clubs to secure the services of the continent's most talented players. The rush to sign Africans was most marked at those tournaments that offered the potential of picking up young players cheaply. The U-17 world championship was a particular target because a significant proportion of the talent on show was available either for free or for a minimal fee and allowed European clubs to exploit the aspirations of young players and their families who saw a contract in Europe as their only escape route from extreme poverty. Antonio Mataresse's, then President of the Italian Football Federation, criticism of Torino's signing of three Ghanaians from an Italian recruiting agency following Ghana's Gold medal in the 1991 Under-17 World Youth Championship was indicative of the reservations of some European football administrators. His declaration that, 'Torino have concluded a 'deceitful' transaction', and that 'it would be a shame for Italy to give away kids to speculators. We must not plunder in Africa'<sup>14</sup> encapsulated the concerns of those within the European game who began to question the ethics and morality of the trade in African players.



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Beyond those players who had signed contracts, albeit often highly exploitative ones, with European clubs there was another strata of migrants linked to the trade in African players that was causing concern not only within the confines of the governance of the game, but also amongst human rights activists with a particular interest in child trafficking. For example, Paul Carlier, founder of a pressure group called Sport and Freedom in the early 1990s, began campaigning on behalf of the young African players who had been brought to Belgium by clubs and agents for trials and simply abandoned if unsuccessful. This group highlighted the fact that many of those who were not successful in securing contracts were often not returned home by those who had organised the trials and were left as illegal immigrants on the streets of Belgium. In some cases these migrants turned to child prostitution as their only means of survival.<sup>15</sup> Although the situation in Belgium improved with the passing of legislation in 1999 which prevented the more sinister features of the influx of African football talent to the country's clubs, what effectively constituted child exploitation continued to characterise aspects of the European trade in African players. The depth of the concern over this was perhaps best exemplified by the fact that the United Nations Commission on Human Rights commissioned a report on the problems of young African players being effectively bought by agents and then taken to Northern European countries to be offered to clubs. The report, published in 1999, concluded by making reference to the 'danger of effectively creating a modern day 'slave trade' in young African footballers'.<sup>16</sup>

While Carlier's pressure group had been successful in introducing a degree of regulation in the export of African players to Belgium and the UN report had raised the profile of the nefarious features of this process, the intervention of Sepp Blatter in the debate in the late 1990s was crucial. His criticism of the loss of Africa's football resources to Europe went beyond political rhetoric and he became the key driver in a set of transfer regulations, introduced in September 2001, which effectively prevented clubs from signing African players under the age of eighteen. In addition, these regulations made

provision for those African clubs involved in the training and education of players between the ages of twelve and twenty-three to receive compensation from the buying club.<sup>17</sup> This tighter regulation has had the effect of ensuring that clubs cannot legally poach players under the age of eighteen, has provided African clubs with more compensation than they have had in the past and this has curbed the most exploitative practices of talent speculators. However, this is not to say that minors no longer feature in the continued trade in African footballers. Indeed, a new system of recruiting young talent through football academies in Africa has been gathering pace since the early to mid 1990s that both CAF and FIFA fear may allow European clubs effectively to circumvent the new transfer regulations and continue to procure the services of young African players who may subsequently be subject to the worst excesses of the European football marketplace.<sup>18</sup>



## Conclusion

Political agitation on the part of African football administrators and interested pressure groups, coupled with the introduction of tighter regulation of the transfer of young football talent has had an impact on the more nefarious aspects of the trade in African footballers. However, it has done little with regards to the scale of African football's talent exodus. Indeed, at present, almost twenty percent of all migrants moving between European leagues are African players. This stark statistic combined with the rapid expansion of football academies in Africa and the continued financial strength of European football vis-à-vis the African game, reveals that Europe is set to continue to benefit disproportionately from Africa's football resources well into the twenty-first century.

## Notes

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# From the cradle to the pitch: Simon Clifford, the director of Socatots, the Brazilian Soccer Schools and Garforth Town FC

**Interviewed conducted by Patrick Murphy**

**PM:** When I interviewed you last year you described the establishment of Socatots as the achievement that has given you the most pleasure. Since in previous interviews with you I haven't focused upon this aspect of your activities, let's begin by taking a closer look at Socatots. What is Socatots?

**SC:** Trevor Brooking recently identified the fives to eights as a key age group and we accept children into our soccer schools at the age of five. However, Socatots is a physical play programme for children from six months up to the age of four.

**PM:** Where did the idea come from?

**SC:** I began to think about these ideas when I saw a clip of Steffi Graff playing tennis at about the age of two. Later I read that Tiger Woods first picked up a golf club at eighteen months and the Williams sisters were introduced to tennis rackets around the same age. I also noticed that there were gymnastic activities for pre-school children. When visiting one of my soccer schools in Thailand I came across a swimming class for children of six months, the Bangkok Dolphins. It guarantees to have children swimming by the time they were nine months old. These combined experiences set me to wondering whether there was anything we could do for children of this age to foster the development of the kinds of skills applicable to soccer.

**PM:** What are the central characteristics of the programme you've devised?

**SC:** It took me two or three years to develop and trial my ideas with a local play group that included my own daughter. Unlike many other activities for children of this age, the underlying principle of Socatots is directed learning not learning by discovery. The programme I settled upon consists of three phases - six months to eighteen months, eighteen months to two and a half years and, finally, two and a half to four years of age. The equipment we employ is specific to each phase. There are no more than eight children to a class and the participation of parents is essential. Initially, the

children sit between their parent's legs and they engage in various foot manipulations with a static dome, a skittle or a specially designed ball. The younger children prefer to kick a skittle because it's more likely to remain within reach rather than a ball that rolls away from them. We might ask them to kick over a green skittle with the inside of their left foot or kick over a yellow skittle with the outside of their left foot. By such means they develop the ability to use six parts of both feet.

The two crucial characteristics of our approach are the need to work with small groups and the need for a parental presence. One coach taking a larger group on his or her own would be organised chaos. With our approach the parent, in effect, becomes the auxiliary coach. Our initial insistence on the presence of a parent arose out of concern for safety and security. However, in practice, it has also proven to be an indispensable dimension of the teaching process. For example, it is inevitable that the participants in all our groups will have differential skills. Some children aren't as proficient as others. However, to bridge this gap, they can practice at home because we give them a home-set, consisting of a ball and instruction books, so that they can practice under the supervision of their parents. And, by the way, a not unimportant side effect of our programme is that it also helps to develop the children's numeric, colour recognition and literary skills.

**PM:** It seems to me that the parental qualities involved are likely to have more in common with middle-class child-rearing practices. Whether you intend it or not, are middle-class parents disproportionately attracted to Socatots? My experience of running a junior football club that was based on a relative deprived estate was that some of the parents of the participants seemed to view us as a child-minding service. Freeing up time for themselves was perhaps one of the attractions.

**SC:** This is certainly the case. For example, we have about thirty Premier League players who send their children to Socatots. They include the Everton striker, Andy Johnson. He takes his child to a group in Cheshire. This bias does concern me because I didn't



initiate this programme with business goals in mind. If people come to us from the Government sponsored programme Sure Start we offer them a more attractive financial deal. This enables them to charge less per session and, therefore, they're more likely to attract a more representative clientele.

**PM:** Do you control the prices that the franchisees charge?

**SC:** No, we just offer advice. In our soccer schools contract we have a clause that stipulates that 15% of the places have to be offered free of charge to children whose parents aren't in a position to afford the fee. At my soccer school in Leeds more than half the children pay no fee. However, we haven't imposed this condition with Socatots because prospective franchisees tend to be more business orientated than the franchisees of the soccer schools. This requirement would be likely to put them off. The Socatots sessions last forty to forty-five minutes. In Leeds we charge around £4 to £5, while in London the charge can be as much as £7 a session. Having said this, some of our soccer schools franchisees also run a Socatots dimension. About one in eight of our soccer schools franchisees run both.

**PM:** How long has the Socatots project been running?

**SC:** I began working on the idea in 1999. We piloted it between 2001-02 and launched the programme in Leeds in 2003.

**PM:** How extensive is the Socatots network?

**SC:** There are seventy-five franchises in UK and they run up to 60 sessions per week. It is now also established in Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia, Australia, and Holland.

**PM:** What do you anticipate the outcomes will be?

**SC:** I think that this approach will change football across the board in this country. The issue that dominates football discussion at the present in this country is the relative lack of technique displayed by English players. Some people scoffed at my Socatots idea. They dismissed it on the grounds that it was impossible to begin to develop these skills in children before they could walk? But, the reality is that it has worked. Our Leeds soccer school now has a mix sex group of twenty graduates from Socatots and they

are all two-footed. In the future I don't see relative lack of technique as being a major problem in England. Of course, I would like to see Socatots as the premium brand, but I think the approach will become so widely recognised that other providers will emerge. It may be that football clubs will begin to establish their own groups.

**PM:** Of course, it's one thing for you to have these expectations, but doesn't the programme have to be monitored independently?

**SC:** Yes and this is precisely what we're doing in conjunction with Leeds Metropolitan University. We are concentrating on monitoring the twenty Socatots graduates in our Leeds soccer school. To see some of these five-year old boys and girls with a football is simply jaw dropping. They're the best group of five-year olds we have had by a long way. I also understand that Chelsea have recently started a young soccer group. I think it begins at under six. Four of this group came from Socatots. Apparently, the guy running the group asked the children what foot they favoured. It was a question that puzzled our Socatots graduates because they kick with both feet and use various parts of each foot.

**PM:** Since Socatots is focused partly on the development of co-ordination and balance these attributes are surely relevant to the development of skills in many sports. Because your Socatots groups exhibit a middle-class bias and, traditionally at least, the vast majority of football players come from working-class origins, the likelihood is that other sports could prove to be the principal beneficiaries of this accelerated development.

**SC:** Yes, I agree, but this doesn't bother me. Some of them will come in the direction of football, witness the recruits to my Leeds soccer school and we relish the opportunity to work further with these children. My primary interest is in the development of footballers in terms of their technical, physical, psychological abilities and tactical awareness. I believe that football is a relatively undeveloped sport. The amount of thought and reflection put into it remains inadequate. If in the process of helping to correct this deficiency in football, I also make a contribution to the development of other sports, so much the better.



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**PM:** Socatots is in many respects more radical than your Brazilian soccer schools initiative. How have the football authorities reacted to it?

**SC:** I don't really know. I have given them a wide berth because of the obstructionist and negative way in which the FA reacted when I initially approached them with the Brazilian soccer schools idea.

**PM:** Since they haven't contacted you how would you account for their apparent lack of interest in a project as extensive and radical as yours?

**SC:** The roots of my involvement in the soccer schools project lie in my disillusioned response to England not qualifying for the World Cup in the USA in 1994 and, at the moment, there's another big debate about the lack of technique displayed by English players. It's a recurring theme. The press will get off on it for a while and, then, as is their way, they will drop it and move on to something else. This short attention span also characterises the FA. Most of their thinking about football is short-term because they know that they'll only be in their jobs for a few years. I don't think that there are many people involved in football that are interested in developments that might take twenty years to come to fruition. 'Short-termism' is the dominant ethos. That's why Trevor Brooking impresses me. He seems to have a longer-term perspective. When the FA appointed him they probably thought that he would adopt an ambassadorial role, but, to his great credit, he hasn't been prepared just to tow the line. I'm a big fan of his.

**PM:** Let's now turn to developments in your Brazilian soccer schools. Can you give me an up-date on the scale of your operation?



**SC:** In the UK we have around one hundred franchises. While they vary greatly in size, between them they run seven hundred and twenty five Brazilian soccer schools. These in turn offer approximately five thousand coaching sessions per week. Worldwide we now operate in sixty-one countries with a million participants. The franchisees in Nigeria and India are classed as master franchisees and they involve tens of thousands of children. At the last count the Nigerian franchisee was working with around 30,000 kids in Lagos state. The Indian franchisee is based in Pune and Bangalore and he plans to go into Mumbai and many other cities. He aims to work with three thousand schools across India. We are trying to establish a similar scheme in The Gambia. Therefore, in terms of the numbers of participants we have gone through the roof, but we haven't made commensurate financial gains. We didn't make a charge for the Nigerian deal and the franchisee in India pays a fee of only two thousand pounds per year.

**PM:** Are there any emerging youngster worthy of note in the UK?

**SC:** John Farnworth is a product of our soccer schools. He first saw me on television and, as a result, bought our training DVDs. He practiced for up to eight hours a day to perfect some of the complex skills. He also attended sessions at our Leeds soccer school. As a result he began to focus on the freestyle element of football, defeating the then world freestyle champion Mr Woo in 2006 and retaining the title the following year. He has featured in a number of television programmes, half-time displays at Premier League stadia and breaking the world record for the number of 'around the worlds' in one minute.<sup>1</sup>

**PM:** What of mainstream football? Following the example of Micha Richards, are there any star pupils that you anticipate will make the break through into the elite level?

**SC:** John Bostock of Crystal Palace springs to mind. He's fifteen years of age and attended our soccer school in Lewisham for five years. He continues to train at this centre during breaks from his club. At the moment he's the subject of much speculation and I understand the both Arsenal and Chelsea are interested in him.

**PM:** Let's now switch focus to the adult dimension of your operation - Garforth Town FC. When I met with you this time last year Garforth Town were mid-table in the Northern Counties East League. Nevertheless, you predicted that they would still gain promotion and, in fact, they did, but, as I understand it, there was an element of off-the-pitch good fortune involved.

**SC:** This is only partially true. In early December 2006 it was announced that the Unibond League was going to split into the North and South Divisions and four clubs from our league, the Northern Counties East League, would be promoted into the new Unibond North. When I spoke to you around this time last year I made the prediction that we would achieve promotion on the basis that this arrangement would hold. However, it was later announced that only two clubs would be promoted from our league. Then, later still, they changed it to three clubs. All these changes affected our playing strategy. When we thought that only two clubs were going to be promoted we threw caution to the wind, particularly when playing our promotion rivals. The fact that we lost our final league game to Carlton meant that they finished third and we finished fourth. However, immediately after the game, their manager told me he had heard that Durham, a club from a parallel league, didn't want to be promoted because of the additional costs involved. A month later this rumour was made official and we were promoted in their place. So you could say our promotion had an element of fortune about it, but our plans and predictions were made on the basis of the original four-up arrangement.

**PM:** Garforth are now in the Unibond First Division North. At the moment they are lying seventh in a league of eighteen clubs. On the face of it, not too bad a position, but it's also apparent that Garforth have played around three to four matches more than most of the other clubs. How did this state of affairs come about?

**SC:** The fact that we've played more matches than every other club is solely down to the good quality of our pitch.

**PM:** Given last year's surge up the table, I'm reluctant to draw hasty conclusions from your present position. Therefore, let me ask you for your assessment of their prospects for the rest of this season?

**SC:** I think we'll finish mid-table or, perhaps, even slightly below that. Only one club will get relegated from our league. Since we have already played twenty-four games and gained thirty-five points I believe that the team is already safe.

**PM:** Is the first team squad much changed from last year? Are you getting a continuing influx of players from your soccer schools?

**SC:** I moved a couple of players out and made the team younger by bringing in Mark Piper from our soccer school in Southampton. Sebastian Muddell has also joined us. He's just been released by Norwich. They are both aged eighteen. Our youth team is our reserve team. They play in the football conference youth league. They finished fifth last season. It's an under-19 league. Nevertheless, this year we have opted to play with an under-17 team. We're bottom at the moment, but I'm quite happy with the situation because while the bottom club would normally be relegated, Newcastle Blue Star have asked to be relegated.

**PM:** And what of the management front?

**SC:** I took the pre-season one month later than the previous year. We were poor in the pre-season games. I then managed the team up until the fourteenth or fifteenth game. At that point I had a meeting with the players and I told them that I wasn't going to continue as manager. We haven't announced this formally, but the managerial role is now split between Steve Nichol, Vernon Blair and Alan Billingham with Nichol as the senior man. When I stepped down we were fourth and, as I said before, I felt we were safe. At the moment I'm not even attending games. Last season took a lot out of me. After having come back from Southampton I worked very hard with the team from Christmas to May. But this was at the expense of other parts of my operation - SocaTots and the soccer schools. Since I took the view that the team weren't ready for promotion this season, I decided that my time would be better spent focusing on the other parts of my operation. The coaching staff and the players still think a place in the play-offs is a possibility - positions two to five - but I think this will be difficult, with or without me. The club just isn't geared up for promotion this year.



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**PM:** So you view this season as being one where you are simply concerned to consolidate the club in its present division? You think the squad needs time to mature?

**SC:** Yes, they do need time to mature and we may even continue this strategy of consolidation through next season as well. We played a match two months ago and started with nine teenagers, all of them under contract. They're here for the long-term. At the same time, I have found that I can't throw myself into winning promotion after promotion. What really kick-started me with Garforth Town was the level of sponsorship that I obtained in 1999. It allowed me to pursue the three dimensions of my operation. Last year the energy that I poured into Garforth Town's promotion campaign, together with my spell at Southampton consumed me. In consequence, I neglected the other dimensions of the business. If I hadn't had sponsorship in the early days I wouldn't have been able to buy a football club. I need to work on the business side to ensure the continued viability of the club.

**PM:** Have you still got the same managerial ambitions as you started out with?

**SC:** Exactly the same. I recently met with the players individually to reassure them and explain to them my vision of the club's future. I'm giving myself six to eighteen months to sort things out in the office and then I'll go back to the club full-time with renewed vigour.

**PM:** At the moment you are three promotions below the Blue Square Premier (the old Conference). You have to win promotion to the UniBond Premier Division and then from the Blue Square Northern. Knowing what you know now, would you be prepared to make a prediction about when Garforth Town will reach the Blue Square Premier?<sup>2</sup>

**SC:** I think we will be there or there about by 2014 because the players need around six years to mature.

**PM:** You've been the manager of Garforth Town since 2004 and you had no managerial experience prior to that. Admittedly, you have the advantage of being the owner of the club as well as its manager, so you're not living with the threat of the directors'

dreaded vote of confidence. Nevertheless, in this short time, what have you learnt about football management that you didn't know before.

**SC:** I think the main thing I've learnt is if you're looking to stay at a club for the amount of time that I am, it's not possible to attack the job with the intensity that I do without some fallow periods where I take time-out.

**PM:** You have the advantage over other managers in this respect. They can't take time out to recharge their batteries and then return to the same club.

**SC:** Yes, this is true. I am lucky in this respect. At the same time, I'm also subject to pressures that other managers don't have to endure. There have been times when I've been in the dugout at Garforth and the thought has crossed my mind that I will be sitting here every Saturday for the next twenty years. And this train of thought can be quite depressing. At times, this season, I have felt that I was coasting. I was there in the dugout, but my mind was elsewhere. On one level, I think my spell at Southampton was actually good for me.

**PM:** You certainly didn't say that at the time of your departure from Southampton.



**SC:** I agree. But in retrospect I can see it was a fortunate break for two reasons. Firstly, I work very intensively with players on an individual basis and if this is a continuous process I'm not sure that it's good for me, or the players. That degree of intensity is difficult to sustain. Secondly, while Garforth's results are a bit topsy-turvy at the moment, I think the players are enjoying playing in a more relaxed mode, free from the pressure that I heap upon their shoulders. I suspect that the strictness and discipline that I try to impose can only be lived with for short periods.

**PM:** This suggests that you have acquired greater self-knowledge as a consequence of your managerial experiences. Will this greater knowledge have practical implications for your future approach to management? When you return to management do you think you will play it differently or do you anticipate that once again you'll be swept along with the same intensity?

**SC:** In all honesty I think I'll be the same. The only difference will be that I will be more aware of the need to build fallows periods into my regime.

**PM:** If the average manager stays at a club for two or three years and, in the process, gives numerous team talks, the players have probably heard all he's got to say umpteen times and they just switch off.

It's said that Brian Clough use to limit his contact with the players with a view to preserving his impact value. This might suggest that in order to retain the freshness of one's influence on players one has to ration the contact one has with them.

**SC:** I concede that this year I was in danger of losing my impact value. When I gave my pre-match team talks, I was acutely aware that there were two or three players present who had been with me since the 2004-05 season. They had heard it all before and I was aware that they needed a break from me. From the beginning of this season I have deliberately tried to say less and some of the players noticed this change of tact. After this break it may be that they will look forward to my return.

#### Notes

This interview took place in Leeds on Friday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2008.

1. You can find what 'around the worlds' are and view other examples of John Farnworth's skill on [www.johnfarnworth.com](http://www.johnfarnworth.com).
2. The Unibond League is presently made up of two divisions. The Premier Division has twenty-two clubs. Unibond's Division 1 is divided into the First Division North and First Division South and both contain eighteen clubs. Garforth Town are presently in the former. In order to gain promotion to the Premier Division Garforth Town either have to win the league or win the play-off involving the clubs that finish in second to fifth positions. Clubs promoted from the Premier Division go into the Blue Square Northern. A subsequent promotion will take them into Blue Square Premier (the old Conference).



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# Junior Football: the base of the pyramid or just some 'Tosh'?

**Stephen Morrow**

To many the phrase junior football will conjure up images of boys or girls football. To those familiar with Scottish football, however, a different image may present itself, as in Scotland junior football refers not to the age of the players but rather to the level of football played.

But even in Scotland the images conjured up by the term junior football will vary greatly. While for some it will be the romantic names of clubs like Dundonald Bluebell, Stonehouse Violet, Carnoustie Panmure, Hill O'Beath Hawthorn, Irvine Meadow or Crossgates Primrose<sup>1</sup>, for others it will be about violence and unruly behaviour, both on and off the field of play. Indeed on the few occasions that the mainstream media report on junior football, the latter tends to be the focus of their attention.

Another, more positive image, comes from focusing upon the community significance of junior football and its clubs. While senior football clubs often present themselves as community clubs, to many it is in the junior ranks that such claims are turned into reality; that is, it is at this level that football clubs have a substantive community presence.

Watching a local junior club was my first introduction to live football, back in the mid 1970s. That club, Glenrothes Juniors, played an important role in helping to develop a sense of community in that particular Scottish New Town through its on-field success - the club won the Scottish Junior Cup in 1975<sup>2</sup>. Its facilities also acted as a hub for other sports and social activities. This view of junior football clubs is also found in Scottish literature: Robin Jenkins's novel *The Thistle and the Grail*, written in 1954, follows the fortunes of a Lanarkshire junior team in its pursuit of the Scottish Junior Cup and, in the process, considers the broader relationship between football and society in Scotland. Many still hold this to be one of the finest football books ever written. Back on the field of play, some of Scotland's most recognizable footballing names have played for a time in the junior ranks: for example, Kenny Dalglish was farmed out for a season by Celtic to Cumbernauld United, Billy McNeil was signed by Celtic from Blantyre Victoria, while Jim Baxter, played for Crossgates Primrose prior to signing for Rangers.

Junior football in Scotland is governed by the Scottish Junior Football Association (SJFA), one of a myriad of football bodies which are affiliated to the Scottish Football Association (the game's governing body in Scotland) and which have responsibility for particular aspects of football in Scotland. Formed in 1886, the SJFA runs the Scottish Junior Cup and acts as an umbrella body for six regional associations throughout Scotland.

This year junior football clubs have finally made it into the national media for purely footballing reasons. This followed a decision taken by the SFA to permit four junior clubs - the winners of the three regional Super Leagues and the Scottish Junior Cup - to take part in the Scottish Cup<sup>3</sup>. This was a significant decision because, historically, one of the distinctions between senior (professional) football and junior football has been that the respective clubs do not play against each other in competitive matches. It was a decision that was not taken lightly by the SFA, but eleven years have elapsed since the proposal was first put forward by the SJFA to SFA. While junior clubs have not been permitted to take part in the competition, senior clubs from the leagues below the SFL (the Highland, the East of Scotland and the West of Scotland Leagues) have regularly participated.

Three junior clubs, Culter, Linlithgow Rose and Pollock, took their place in the first round of the 2007/08 Scottish Cup having negotiated their way through the new SFA Challenge Cup. All three gave a good account of themselves: Culter knocked out non-league clubs Hawick Royal Albert and Vale of Leithen before losing to Division 3 Huntly in the Third Round; Pollock defeated the non-league club St Cuthbert Wanderers in the First Round, before succumbing in the second round to Division 3 side Montrose after a replay; while Linlithgow Rose knocked out three non-league clubs, Newton Stewart, Spartans and Dalbeattie Star, before losing 4-0 to First Division Queen of the South in the fourth round.

One consequence of the decision to allow junior clubs to take part has been the re-awakening of interest in the question of whether or not there is a need for some form of pyramid system in Scottish football. A pyramid system exists in England and in many European countries and involves a series of leagues which are





connected by promotion and relegation arrangements. In England the existence of a pyramid system allows a club to start in a local league and progress all the way to the FA Premier League (at least in theory). At the present time, the Scottish Football League (SFL) is a closed system at the bottom end, in that the club that finishes in tenth position in the Third Division suffers no relegation or demotion penalty. There is, however, promotion and relegation between the Scottish Premier League (SPL) and the SFL Division One.

Back in 2003 a review of the structure and development of Scottish football was carried out on behalf of the SFA, the Scottish Executive and sportscotland by the consultants PMP. One part of this process was an online questionnaire. At that time 76.2% of those who responded (125 respondents) indicated that they saw a pyramid structure as the best way forward for the governance of football in Scotland (PMP, 2003). By 2006 the SFA's then Chief Executive, David Taylor, had detected an 'appetite for change' in terms of the introduction of a pyramid system (Fisher, 2007). However, a major stumbling block then - and now - is matching the bottom of the national league structure (SFL League division 3) with the regional league structure which exists below it. This matching is particularly important as normally a pyramid system operates on the basis that the lower down a club is, the more local is its league, and the lower is its travel costs.

Some in both the senior and junior ranks remain to be convinced. A key concern identified by the SJFA is the need to protect the identity of junior football. Other concerns centre on preserving the community significance of clubs as well as financial issues. Not least among the latter would be the financial implications associated with more stringent requirements for stadia as well as things like the

absence of a transfer window in junior football. Clubs at the lower end of the existing professional structure may find it difficult to consider the introduction of a pyramidal system objectively, given the likely risk to their footballing and financial security.

The appointment of Gordon Smith as the new Chief Executive at the SFA may well act as a catalyst to keep the pyramid debate going beyond this year's pilot in the Scottish Cup. One hopes, however, that the debate will rise above the types of comments attributed to Queen of the South's veteran midfielder, Stevie Tosh, who apparently was appalled when his side were drawn to play Junior side Linlithgow Rose in the fourth round. He said:

'If I'm being perfectly honest, I think it's a disgrace that they are in the cup. It's a gimmick from the SFA and it's just ridiculous. Without being disrespectful to the junior clubs, I can't see them winning the cup, so why are they in it?'

Of course, if Scottish football were to adopt the Tosh test, the Scottish Cup would look a little different next year. Since it was first played for in season 1873-1874, only twenty-four clubs have actually won the trophy, and Queen of the South is not one of these illustrious previous winners. Still who knows, perhaps all Tosh was simply trying to do was live up to his club's biblical reference:

'The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and shall condemn them' (Luke 11: 31).

#### Notes

1. While there is no definitive explanation as to why so many junior clubs have flowers in their names, the most likely explanation is that the mining communities, in which many of these clubs are based, opted for flower names because of their stark contrast with conditions in which they had to work. ([http://www.footballcentral.org/sfa/associations/scottish-junior-football-association/scottish-junior-cup/scottish-junior-cup\\_home.cfm](http://www.footballcentral.org/sfa/associations/scottish-junior-football-association/scottish-junior-cup/scottish-junior-cup_home.cfm)).
2. The club was also runner up in the competition in 1968, a mere 4 years after it was formed.
3. In fact only three clubs took part since Linlithgow Rose qualified both as winners of the Scottish Junior Cup and the East of Scotland Super League Champions.

#### References

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# Swimming against the tide: An Interview with Neil Watson

Interview conducted by Gavin Mellor

## Introduction

Various described by peers as a 'guru' and 'the Martin Peters of community football' (this being a reference to Sir Alf Ramsey's famous description of the West Ham and England player as being 'ten years ahead of his time'), Neil Watson is widely considered to be one of the most important contemporary influences on community football across the professional game in England. He first came to prominence as Director of Leyton Orient Community Sports Programme (LOCSP) where he worked between 1989 and 2002. He later became Director of the Home Office Positive Futures Programme,<sup>1</sup> a national sport- and activity-based social inclusion initiative. He was responsible for its strategic development until 2006. Between 2006 and 2007 he was an Assistant Director at the Government's Respect Task Force, leading on young people's issues. He now works with Substance, a social research company specialising in issues surrounding sport, youth inclusion and community regeneration. In the following interview I ask him to reflect upon the development of his career and how he views the key historical and current debates in community football in the professional game.

**GM:** How did you first get involved in community football?

**NW:** I was a PE teacher in West London and there were a couple of football clubs in London who were starting to take football and community work seriously – notably Brentford, Millwall and a couple of others. I was just a PE teacher working in one of the Boroughs where Brentford were operating and I started working for them: running their disability project and their football for the unemployed scheme. It was just casual work, because I had nothing to do in the school holidays and wanted to get involved. A couple of years later, I saw a job advertised at Leyton Orient and I applied. I remember being excited on the first day – walking into a football club even though it was only Leyton Orient – and having the opportunity to start working with the different communities in the east end of London. The most interesting thing for me was that

Leyton Orient has never really tried to do this work before. I remember being told by Frank Clark – the manager at the time – that this was the case and he basically handed me a blank piece of paper and said 'there you go son'.

**GM:** Were the people who were in charge of community schemes at football clubs at the time mainly ex-professional players?

**NW:** That was the case in the North West of England where the formal Football in the Community programme started, but I guess that London was a bit more switched on. It was different there because Sport England – the Sports Council at the time – along with the London Boroughs went to football clubs with funding to get the work started and football clubs weren't being asked to put anything in directly. So the Boroughs said, 'we've got the money for you and we want to employ the member of staff – we just want you, the football club, to host all this and do the work which we've been traditionally interested in, i.e., target group stuff. So I ended up working three years for the council really – with an office at the council and an office at the football club – working with five target groups: black and minority ethnic groups; women; people with disabilities; young people and old people. I guess we were just looking to work with those people who hadn't engaged with football before.

**GM:** Were you given much of a brief beyond engaging with these target groups in the context of football?

**NW:** Not really, although some of the stuff we were doing did go beyond that. The stuff with older people wasn't really about engaging them in football; it was about bingo clubs and trips to the seaside and any work where we felt we could make a contribution. I suppose from the start though we were always interested in stretching the idea of the work and we soon started running two-hour coaching courses in the more deprived areas of Waltham Forest where the council had never previously thought it possible to get kids signed up. But looking back at it, the work we were doing then was incredibly safe stuff. It was sports development really, although it was sports development that was influenced by the Action Sport way of doing things from the 1980s.<sup>2</sup>



**GM:** So was Action Sport a blue print for the work in the early days?

**NW:** Yes, it was about non-traditional sport spaces and the target group approach, but it was also about doing more football specific things like getting people to use rooms in the club who wouldn't usually engage with it and using the pitch in the close season. The link with Action Sport is interesting because, even though we were doing stuff that had been done before, it got a much higher profile because we were linked to football. I think this held true for the first few years I was at Orient. The work wasn't particularly radical or challenging, it was just that it was a football club that was choosing to do it and football clubs hadn't previously done this stuff.

**GM:** After you got the scheme established, was there a point at which you asked yourself 'what are we really trying to achieve through this work'?

**NW:** There were two key moments within a year of each other. The first was related to our response to the 'Kick Racism out of Football' campaign. The fans had led this campaign and the typical response of the clubs was to provide badges and scarves. To be honest the clubs weren't that constructive. So we decided to do something a bit more innovative and commissioned a theatre company [ARC Theatre Ensemble] to write a play. Not that this was a necessarily edgy or radical thing to do, but what was key for us as an organisation was that we learned we could place ourselves at the centre of a projects, build multi-agency partnerships, bring in funding, stay in control of the issues and deliver something which had real impact. And crucially the roll out of the play was being evaluated by a researcher who could set down formally that we achieved; a £1m project which was launched at the House of Commons and delivered 650 performances to thousands of kids, teachers and other groups.

The second key moment was that after we achieved success with the play - and shortly afterwards we won Community Club of the Year - most of the funding associated with football club community schemes, like that from the Football Trust, starting to dry up. As a result, most clubs started to encourage their schemes to be self-funded and most went

ballistic on coaching course. They started running them everywhere. Off the back of this development turf wars broke out between clubs about who had the right to run courses in this or that part of town. We had Manchester United and Arsenal running courses in our locality and we said: 'Look, as a football club community scheme, how are we going to compete with that? Who's going to want to come to Leyton Orient?' So, at a business-planning day, somebody said to me: 'Why don't we do everything that nobody else wants to do?' And this was the stuff that Leyton Orient had begun to get good at over the previous couple of years. It started with money from the Drug Challenge Fund in 1995 and us working with treatment agencies and getting ex-users into services and sports projects. We then got some money to start a project on the Shadwell Estate. This was our first foray into estate-based work and for a year or two we did this kind of work under the radar. Then we got a bit of Single Regeneration Budget money to expand these activities. When we revealed our hand with this work two-or-three years later, we presented ourselves as an expert club that could do 'difficult' work. Everybody had a bit of a double-take moment where they said: 'Right, so that's what you've been doing'. I suppose at that stage we felt able to start talking very confidently about how to work with drug agencies, the issues around youth crime and working with kids on housing estates; groups that others weren't able to engage with. I remember someone at one of the council sports development departments saying: 'You work on such-and-such an estate don't you' and that seemed quite routine to us by that time because we'd been there for two years. Her response was: 'I wouldn't go anywhere near that place' and I thought 'get in - the council's not going to be bother us for the next five years as the regeneration money starts pouring in'. So I guess we just got very good at the work and at finding projects that would bring in funding; projects that would also enable us to make a real difference.

The interesting thing was how a kind of received wisdom grew up around us really quickly, so that everybody started saying: 'Oh Leyton Orient are good', but most people never really made the effort to understand the issues. In the period 1998 to 2000 we started getting visits from Government



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ministers and when the Queen turned up to open a new leisure centre they wanted us there, so we became quite high profile. Along with that profile, I suppose we became quite 'bolshie' with the people who tried to tell us what football in the community should be about and had previously supported us. We had turned into a charity – the first football club community department to do so in the country – and we fell out with the club because it didn't like us growing up and flexing our muscles. For example, we issued a press release criticising Barry Hearn - the owner of the club – and distancing ourselves from some remarks he'd made on Radio 5 that had been interpreted as racist. We put it out on the Press Association wires and everybody picked it up. This was us, saying to the club: 'We're working with the community across the road who are difficult enough to engage with because they're in a deprived neighbourhood without you telling everybody that people don't like what London's turning into'. They had to understand that we weren't the PR department of the club. The simple truth was we had to react to those types of things in the best way for our organisation. So we had a series of battles with the club and we later went to war with the national community programme across professional football because of the direction they were taking with more coaching courses and less interest in the issues we were dealing with. I guess the confidence we'd gained just gave us the ability to grow up and stand on our own two feet.

**GM:** Earlier, you mentioned the importance of monitoring and evaluating the success of the racism theatre project. Was this a recurrent theme at Leyton Orient?

**NW:** I suppose looking back, it was during the year when Tim Crabbe was doing the research on the play that I started to look at everything we were doing and thought: 'We're doing all this stuff on estates and with vulnerable adults and if we don't have a story to tell at the end of this we'll be in trouble'. So we then contracted Tim to evaluate the drug treatment programme. And I guess there was just a realisation that doing the work wasn't enough. We needed to be able to think about it, understand it and be in a position to tell other people about it.

**GM:** In addition to having a story to tell, was there a culture emerging within the organisation that accepted research and evaluation as an essential part of the work?

**NW:** Yes, it was really about us embedding a culture within the organisation where we didn't mind being challenged and wanted people to come in who could cast a critical eye over things and we wouldn't think: 'Oh, God they're coming in to pick holes in what we're doing and say we could do that better'. We wanted to know if we could do things better as an organisation. It was an exciting place to be at the time because there was a culture of everybody wanting to get better and there were lots of fiery moments, lots of arguments, lots of falling outs. The most fractious times were on our business-planning days when we used to take people away and everyone would get very possessive and, at the same time, prepared to challenge the work of others. And you just had to take it on the chin or defend your position.

**GM:** You mentioned that you established Leyton Orient's community scheme as a charity. Could you talk us through that process and why you took this decision?

**NW:** The guy that came into run the club for three months before Barry Hearn took over spent a lot of time in the community office and was really interested in the work we were doing. At the time we were getting a grant from the club of about fifteen thousand pounds. But when he came to do the budgets, he put a red line through the fifteen thousand pounds and said: 'You won't be getting that anymore. You will have to become self-sustaining'. And we said: 'Great, we don't want your money, but from now on we're going to be a very different type of organisation'. We took some legal advice and realised that going independent wasn't too big a step. At first, we set up a voluntary organisation and it ran for about a year. I rang the local MP and asked him if he would like to become a trustee. He agreed, and suggested a couple of other people who I also got on board. I then rang Business in the Community and they suggested a couple of people from the private sector. So, before we knew it, we had a board of eight trustees and I said to them: 'You're now in charge of the voluntary organisation, but we're



bidding for charitable status', and we achieved that status about six to nine months after the board of trustees was formed. And it was heaven, because soon we realised that the only people who were ever going to fight for the community department were the people who ran it and the people employed by it. It was never going to be the club.

We'd had a similar moment three years earlier with the council when it was trying to decide whether to push the community scheme forward at a time when we hadn't broken even because we'd spent money on various bits of work that didn't pay well. We were working with people with disabilities and had started a deaf section, we were starting to work with the probation service and it was costing us money. The council were saying: 'We don't want to fund this'. So we thought: 'Well, there probably are people who do want to fund this work, so we'll go and find them'. We employed somebody on a one-day-a-week contract to go and find money from the charitable sector and then built his hours up as the money came in, and when that money was spent we built relationships with regeneration agencies and after that we started talking to Government departments which is where Positive Futures and other funding came in.

**GM:** Was there any resistance from the club when you took the department independent?

**NW:** No, not at all. In fact Barry Hearn went the other way. He started saying: 'Great, so how much can I charge for office space?' I remember getting a bill for fifteen thousand pounds for our office and saying to him: 'We're not paying for this because there's an agreement between the national football in the community scheme and clubs that you'll provide office space for community work'. Also, I remember receiving the forty thousand pounds for winning Community Club of the Year and getting back to the office and him ringing and saying: 'So how much of the forty thousand pounds can we have then?' I thought he was joking, but he wasn't. So, at the start it was just about getting us off the books and it was only two or three years later when we came into a bit of money that things changed. I remember in meetings he used to talk about: 'My community scheme' and I'd say: 'It's not yours Barry', and he'd say: 'I know it's not, I know it's not' and I'd say: 'Just as long as you're clear it's not your community scheme anymore'. So we had a difficult relationship, but it was the only way it could be.

**GM:** Did you have much contact with other Football in the Community schemes after you had gone independent?

**NW:** Yes, we literally had community schemes from all over the country knocking on the door, asking: Where we did we get our money from? This was usually the first question. They also asked us about charitable status and the work we did. We did business-planning days at other clubs, we had two or three commercial managers come in and even the chief executive of one club came over wanting to talk about the work and the model we had created. We just had loads of interest, and then five years later there were thirty other community schemes across the country that had charitable status.

Interestingly, when we first wanted to go independent, I asked the management committee at the club and the council if we could become an Industrial and Provident Society – a workers' coop – because that was the model Greenwich Leisure had created. It was the model I really liked because it was just the workers running everything. However, they didn't like it because they wanted to be much more assured that the charity would be getting expert advice from outside.



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**GM:** When you came to leave, did you feel you had taken the organisation as far as possible or were you just really taken by the nature of the opportunity presented by the role with Positive Futures?

**NW:** A bit of both really. I'd been at Orient for thirteen years and this was probably long enough. I was getting disappointed at how Positive Futures was being spun. It was being developed as a programme in a way that I just didn't understand, especially as all the language was all around crime and drugs, and I just thought: 'We never go out and talk about our work in those kind of terms.' And the monitoring framework that we were being asked to comply with was just wrong. So when the job was advertised I thought I'd apply and I was appointed. When I turned up at the Home Office Drug Directorate it was like the first day at school. My first task was to secure the twenty million pounds required to grow the programme and I managed to achieve this as part of the spending review, and then I thought: 'Right, we now need to write a strategy. We need to get a monitoring framework together. We need to get a workforce development plan and we need to make this as good as it can possibly be'. We had two or three years of really good fun, just swimming against the tide of the way that everybody was talking about the work. And I guess one of the prevailing themes for me really is that I quite like doing that; rubbing people up the wrong way and thinking differently about stuff. I think we pioneered an approach – well maybe not pioneered because there were other people doing the work in the way it should be done – but in terms of a national programme there weren't many that were talking about young people in the way that we started talking about them. We learned from the mistakes of previous programmes. I mentioned Action Sport earlier. It failed because the organisers couldn't begin to explain to people what they'd achieved and we knew we had to be in a position to do that.

**GM:** From what you've said it sounds like you were involved in Positive Futures from the start and had become disillusioned with it before taking up the national manager's role?

**NW:** That's right. The way it started was that Mike Trace, who was then Deputy UK Anti-Drug Co-ordinator, rang Tim Crabbe and said: 'I've got half a

million pounds' worth of confiscated assets funding and so let's set up some projects.' And so Tim, Mike and me met up, found the projects and off it went. However, when the programme got underway, Sport England and the Drug Directorate informed Mike that he needed to go heavy on traditional approaches to the work. At Orient, we were running three Positive Futures projects locally while people seconded from Sport England and the Youth Justice Board to the Home Office were developing the programme in a way that seemed to bear no resemblance to the way that we would talk about the work or do it.

**GM:** So why do you think the programme was initially taken in that direction?

**NW:** I think it comes down to confidence amongst the people who were running the programme to think about things differently. I remember walking into the Home Office for the first time and people thinking: 'At last. We've been waiting three months for this guy. He's obviously an expert. Let him get on with it'. This was in much the same way that Frank Clark said to me when I joined Leyton Orient: 'Here's a blank piece of paper, off you go'. When you've got that type of mandate it, gives you confidence to say: 'All of that old work, is yesterday's stuff. Now let's do it like this because this is what works and this is what's going to get us brownie points'. And I was given a lot of latitude for the first two-or-three years in the Home Office. It was at a time when there were lots of new initiatives and lots of new money coming in to do this type of work and I had as much leeway as I needed. That two-or-three year period allowed us to shape the programme, play to the strengths of projects and bring in the support that we thought we needed. And we got away with it. I don't know if you'd get away with it now because the way these types of initiatives are run has changed so much. Basically, we had a window that allowed us to do that and ultimately that helped us move the debate forward.

**GM:** How easy was it to move the debate on? For instance, were you constantly coming up against deeply engrained ideas about how community sport work should be done?

**NW:** Interestingly, we would have our rows with the national support organisations. For example, we had a big row with Sport England when we changed the

monitoring for the programme and another row with the Youth Justice Board when they wanted the programme to be targeted at the 'top 50 at risk of offending' kids in each area. But the more interesting rows were between the local projects with their youth offending services. The latter were constantly chipping away at the work and we had to go in and give people support and build their confidence. Ultimately, those battles were much more critical than the debates we were having at national level because the national battles weren't going to stop us doing the work we wanted to do. I remember going to Sunderland once, and the project manager was pretty down and she said: 'We're not getting the support we want locally' and I remember saying: 'Have you read the strategy? Go and read the strategy and then go back to your local partners and tell me what's in it'. And she came back and said it had really helped. So it was just great to be out there giving people the confidence and language to articulate the approaches which we felt would work. But crucially, the most important thing that helped us change the debate was that we were from the Home Office. People were just frightened of it. They didn't want to get on the wrong side of it and they thought if the Home Office has said something it must be true. So everybody just fell into line. But let's not forget that those debates and those rows are still going on locally. People still aren't sure if they're doing the right thing and there are still dinosaurs out there.

**GM:** You've said that your time with Positive Futures helped move the debate on community sport forward nationally. Do you think that shift of emphasis has been reflected in the work of football clubs' community schemes?

**NW:** It has in the sense that much of the work we were doing that was radical at Leyton Orient has become relatively routine and people at football clubs are now much more confident about it. There aren't that many people out there who talk about the work in a way that makes you shudder. But a lot of the community schemes are now bigger and flashier than they were five-or-six years ago. If I go to the Premier League to talk to the community scheme people, literally everybody is sat there in suits and ties. The problem is that the reason we achieved what we did at Leyton Orient was because there was a real

hunger and edge and a real connection with the communities we were trying to work with. There was a fear of failure which drove individuals in the organisation to do as well as they could. This meant long hours and I just worry that if it gets to the stage where the work becomes too routine we're never going to get that sort of hunger again to move the work forward. I'm sure there are still people around who are keen on being that sort of person and I'm genuinely pleased that clubs have got themselves in positions where they are seen as viable options around which to build partnerships. But that means that clubs must think about and do the work in ways that continue to make traditional approaches feel uncomfortable. If they don't do that, then the work will go backwards, somebody else will come in and do it and the focus will switch to them.

To me the major problem is that everybody's looking for the next issue - whether its travellers or kids on estates. But, for me, that's looking in completely the wrong direction. I think the focus should be much more on looking at processes and how community schemes are going to organise themselves. This means looking at everything from how they are going to work in neighbourhoods and really allow front line staff to take risks to do things differently as well as how they are going to engage with some of the bigger themes central government are interested in like Talent and Enterprise<sup>3</sup> and how young people are going to really influence how money for services is spent. I just think it's a different set of problems now and they are not going to be solved by finding the next target group who schemes can go and work with. I suppose what Leyton Orient did ten years ago was organise themselves in a way which meant they could respond to the work and I think that's what football clubs should be doing now. I'm not yet sure that the Community Foundations<sup>4</sup> - which are springing up at most Premier League clubs - and big community schemes are necessarily going to be the answer to that. The most productive days at Leyton Orient were when we had nine-or-ten staff. Now I think that if you've got an organisation of fifty you're in danger of replicating the kind of bureaucracies that we were pointing the finger at five-or-ten years ago and arguing that they were kinds of organisations that couldn't do the work properly. And



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so community schemes have got to think about how they organise themselves and how they empower small groups of people to take responsibility and raise money to go and do the bits of work that they think are interesting, exciting and worthwhile. What we can't have is Foundations of fifty people processing charitable requests because that isn't what the essence of Football in the Community was all about. It's not what football clubs should be about.

Worryingly, the move to Foundations might be mirroring the way that football is going more generally. And I guess it's incumbent upon football community schemes to be the opposite of how football clubs are developing and to keep a focus on community issues. Thirty-or-forty years ago top class footballers were probably drinking in the same pubs as the community, travelling on the same buses and doing stuff that would make them relevant to supporters. Maybe that's what football community staff now need to be for kids and for communities and they've got to think that through and make sure that in a few years time they're not as distant from communities as the footballers are.

*Interview conducted on 22nd April 2008.*



#### Notes

1. Positive Futures is a sport and activity-based intervention programme targeted at young people in some of the most deprived areas of England. The programme is funded by the Home Office and currently managed by Crime Concern.
2. Action Sport was a Sports Council funded programme that began in 1982. Run in conjunction with local authorities, it sought to increase sports participation amongst people in inner cities. The specific target groups for the programme were unemployed people, disabled people, minority ethnic groups, women and the over fifties.
3. In 2007, as part of the Government's strategy for developing young people's potential, a Cabinet Sub-Committee on Talent and Enterprise was constituted 'To consider policies relating to encouraging and developing innovation amongst talented young entrepreneurs, scientists, engineers and others'. For more see: <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/Sites/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/secretariats/committees/cte.aspx>
4. Since the demise of the national Football in the Community programme in 2007, a number of Premier League Clubs have re-presented their FITC departments as Community Foundations. A number of these have charitable status and are independent from their parent clubs.

# 'Traditional' media versus 'New' media: Is there still a place for the local evening newspaper in modern day football coverage?

Jamie Cleland

## Introduction

This article considers the changing media environment in modern football and whether 'new' media have become more important to football supporters in their consumption of club-related news than 'traditional' media. In order to examine the extent of these changes, this article draws on eight hundred and twenty-seven questionnaires that were collected at four case study football clubs during the 2002/03 season - Aston Villa, Birmingham City, Coventry City and Northampton Town. The aim was to analyse fan consumption of media texts. The article concludes that there is still a place for some 'traditional' sources such as the local evening newspaper. At the same time, 'new' media forms, such as official and unofficial club websites, are increasingly being viewed as important sources of information by supporters.

## The Changing Media Environment

Historically football fans received club news from the local evening newspaper and the match day programme. However, since the 1980s, the relationship between the media and football fans has become more complex and diverse due to the development of 'new' media sources. Not only has this development resulted in a growth of media sources external to football club, such as unofficial websites and satellite television, it also led to an increase in internal sources provided by clubs. These take such forms as an official club website, mobile phone texting and, at some clubs, digital radio stations. These developments have provided fans with a growing range of sources from which to gather news and information on their club. As a consequence, the development of 'new' media sources and their interest and involvement in football has made the communications environment highly competitive and has forced many 'older' sources to adjust and change. For instance, most local evening newspapers and local radio stations now have websites to support their main distribution platforms. These sites have become important, especially to those supporters who live out of the local area.

The successful bid by BSkyB in 1992 to gain the live broadcasting rights for the newly formed Premier League had immediate repercussions for the historic relationship between football fans and the media. For those fans that could afford the costs of subscription, regular football all over the world became available from the comfort of their armchairs (Wenner 1998; Williams 1999, 2006). Currently, sports fans in England who can afford or choose to subscribe to satellite or cable television have numerous sports channels to select from, with one of the channels available, *Sky Sports News*, providing news and information about sport twenty-four hours a day.<sup>1</sup> In this sense it is clear that BSkyB have revolutionised the British media in a short space of time by giving viewers the option of accessing a large number of channels compared to the five channels that are currently available on terrestrial television. As a result, instead of attending a game over the weekend, some fans now have the option of watching live football throughout the whole week and the recent introduction of 'Football First' on Saturday evenings and pay-per-view (both on BSkyB) further increases the coverage given to the game by satellite television.<sup>2</sup>

These developments have clearly resulted in a change in power relationships. BSkyB now has so much influence over English football that games are constantly being moved away from the traditional three o'clock kick-off on a Saturday afternoon to Sundays and Mondays to satisfy television schedules. However, the political implications of allowing 'new' and 'old' media sources the exclusive rights to certain sporting events, including English football, is very serious as they are only available to those who have the capacity to pay. Thus, the political economy of the mass media has led to significant changes within football and its relationship with fans, the most notable of which is the lessening reliance 'on a direct, monetary exchange between the spectator and the 'exhibitor'' (Rowe 2004: 21).

It is not just the relationship between television and supporters that has altered. Other media sources have been forced to change as the industry became more competitive during the 1990s. For instance, at



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a time of decreasing sales for many newspapers the coverage that they devote to football has increased dramatically in order to try to boost readership numbers. However, it would be wrong to assume that this fall in newspaper sales is a 'circulation crisis', as newspapers now compete with and in many different media outlets in providing news and information to society. In order to remain competitive, therefore, it is not surprising that national newspapers now dedicate whole sections to football with nearly every national tabloid newspaper providing a pull-out football section on a Sunday and Monday, and the main broadsheet papers publish separate sport sections that focus mainly on football throughout the week. This change in strategy by most main newspapers has been helped by the fact that football is now played at different times and on different days of the week.

The change in strategy by newspaper editors is also supported by research carried out by Gunther *et al.* (1994) who found that seventy per cent of the public received information about world news through television and twenty per cent through newspapers. In contrast, however, when researching local news, they found that forty per cent of the public received local news through newspapers compared to thirty-five per cent through television. Thus, even though they did not cover football specifically, these results still provide an interesting insight into the continued importance of the local press in a mass media world. As part of this study they also compared the different geographical areas which local newspapers supply and discovered that they have more of a local focus than most local BBC or Independent radio and television stations.

In similar research, O'Sullivan *et al.* (2003) found that in the late 1990s, seventy per cent of the population named television as their principal source of world news, whilst sources of local news were gathered first through newspapers, then television followed by radio. One possible reason for this could be that the local newspaper can reach over eighty per cent of most 'local' households, possibly being kept in the household for several days, thus making it the single most important source of news and information within the surrounding area (Franklin and Murphy 1991).

A further development that has aided the relationship between the media and supporters' has been the increasing live commentary of matches on local and national radio. Not only has this widened the opportunity for fans of all clubs to listen to matches, but the majority of these stations also provide an opportunity for fans to call in and discuss the result of the game or the build-up to it or both. Whilst Radio Five Live mainly broadcasts and concentrates discussion on Premier League matches, local radio stations have provided an important link between clubs and supporters, especially those in the lower leagues.

One study, conducted by the University of Liverpool's Football Research Unit (1999), on Liverpool and Everton supporters, found that local radio was the second most popular source of information for supporters, behind local newspapers. Supporters who did not attend any or attended very few games were more likely to listen to local radio as an information provider than were regular match attendees. One of the main conclusions drawn from this research were that the popularity of local radio on Merseyside in a 'visual age' was a significant factor and offered the opportunity of developing the club/fan relationship to the benefit of all. They also found that supporters who have regular access to well-informed, high quality radio commentary, interviews and analysis, subsequently feel as if they are in closer touch with their team. What this suggests is that although there have been advances in the relationship between 'new' media and football, many football fans still prefer to gather news and information from traditional sources, such as local evening newspapers and local radio, rather than niche media.

Whilst traditional sources and especially local ones remain vital in modern football, one of the more obvious reasons behind the rapidly changing relationship between the media and fans is a result of the development of 'new' media sources such as the internet. The internet has quickly become an important form of media in modern times, with the Premier League 2004-05 survey finding that eighty-seven per cent of supporters had access to it, with ninety-three per cent of these accessing it within the last month for football-related news. This has clearly



changed the environment of communication because it provides a channel where sports organisations can adopt a more direct approach to community relations, by-passing media organisations and communicating directly with its fans (Spielger 1996; Beech *et al.* 2000).<sup>3</sup> Not surprisingly, all football clubs now utilise the internet as a direct channel for accessing their fans and supplying them with information. This process allows fans with on-line facilities to access up-to-date information via the official club website, with Turner (1999) suggesting that this can only aid the relationship between a club and its supporters.

In this sense, the internet has increased a club's internal power of communication, especially with those supporters living out of the area. At the same time, it has reduced clubs' dependence on external media sources, such as the local media to provide supporters with valuable news and information (Gunther 1996). For instance, some clubs now communicate with supporters on-line by regularly distributing newsletters by e-mail to subscribers, whilst others offer commentary on first-team matches to anyone who has the facility to look and listen. In addition, fans are now able to purchase licensed merchandise and match tickets on-line, thus further developing the relationship between the club and its supporters.

Recent work supports this view as it is predicted that Internet broadcasting will play a key role in the future set of relationships between football clubs, football supporters and broadcasting companies (Dobson and Goddard 2001). Such developments could be encouraged by the advent of real-time audio and video over the internet as the football fan begins to rely more heavily on this for news and coverage of games.<sup>4</sup> Part of this is through the relationship most professional clubs have with the digital media company Perform (previously called Premium TV) to develop their club websites.<sup>5</sup> As part of this contract, Premium TV provide a range of commercial services that aim to generate revenue for clubs, one of which is a subscription cost to a package specific to each club called 'World'. For those supporters who want to pay a small monthly fee, they receive a more in-depth focus on the club, such as exclusive interviews, match highlights and an archive of the club's matches.

#### The Case Study Results

Using survey research collected at Aston Villa, Birmingham City, Coventry City and Northampton Town, the remaining part of this article analyses whether 'new' media have in fact replaced 'traditional' media (especially the local evening newspaper) with regards to the consumption of club-related news. The dramatic rise in internal media sources within football is particularly apparent at Aston Villa. It has its own digital radio station 'The Villan' and a club magazine called 'Claret and Blue', as well as having an official website, a match day programme, mobile phone texting and the regular distribution of newsletters - as did the other three case studies. As well as internal sources, all of the clubs had a similar range of external media, both national and local, but not surprisingly, the bigger clubs received more exposure than the smaller ones.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of determining the balance between internal and external sources used by the fans at each of the four clubs to gather news and information, the questionnaire asked respondents to list all of the sources they accessed. Starting with the external media, not surprisingly Aston Villa was found to have more of a national profile than Northampton Town.



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For instance, sixty-seven per cent of Aston Villa supporters used the local evening newspaper (the *Birmingham Evening Mail*) and Teletext/Ceefax, with sixty-six per cent accessing national newspapers. As for external media utilisation, at Birmingham City it was clear that they had more of a local focus with seventy-seven per cent accessing the *Birmingham Evening Mail*, fifty-seven per cent accessing Teletext/Ceefax and fifty-three per cent national newspapers.

Surprisingly, Coventry City was found to have a mix of local and national media utilisation, possibly as a result of its recent relegation from the Premier League in May 2001 and the fact that this coincided with the beginning of the research process. For instance, the most popular local sources were the local evening newspaper (the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*) with seventy-five per cent, the local radio

station (BBC Coventry and Warwickshire) with fifty-six per cent and national newspapers with sixty-nine per cent. Finally, at Northampton Town, local sources were found to be more popular than national ones. For instance, seventy-nine per cent of respondents were more reliant on the local newspaper (the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*) and fifty-five per cent on BBC Radio Northampton, whilst sixty-six per cent accessed Teletext/Ceefax. The utilisation of other national sources was found to be limited.

Internally, the official club website was clearly the most important source for supporters at all four clubs, with its utilisation ranging from sixty-nine per cent at Aston Villa, Coventry City and Northampton Town to seventy-five per cent at Birmingham City.<sup>7</sup> *Table 1* highlights the top five most accessed sources – internal and external – at each club.

**Table 1: Top Five most accessed sources for news and information at each club**

	<b>Aston Villa</b>	<b>Birmingham City</b>	<b>Coventry City</b>	<b>Northampton Town</b>
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Most Accessed Source</b>	Official Club website	<i>Birmingham Evening Mail</i> Newspaper	<i>Coventry Evening Telegraph</i> Newspaper	<i>Chronicle and Echo</i> Newspaper
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Most Accessed Source</b>	<i>Birmingham Evening Mail</i> Newspaper	Official Club Website	Official Club Website and National Newspapers	Official Club Website
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Most Accessed Source</b>	Teletext and/or Ceefax	Teletext and/or Ceefax	BBC Coventry and Warwickshire Radio	Teletext and/or Ceefax
<b>4<sup>th</sup> Most Accessed Source</b>	National Newspapers	National Newspapers	Teletext and/or Ceefax	BBC Radio Northampton
<b>5<sup>th</sup> Most Accessed Source</b>	Satellite Television	Capital Gold/BRMB Radio and the <i>Sports Argus</i> newspaper <sup>8</sup>	<i>Saturday Pink</i> Newspaper	Match Day Programme

These results clearly support some of the findings outlined so far. There is an importance placed on more national sources to support the club's national profile at Aston Villa as compared to Northampton Town, where, as expected, greater importance is attached to more local and internal club sources. Promotion to the Premier League, just prior to the research beginning in May 2002, could be one possible explanation for the shifting balance in the way Birmingham City supporters utilise national and

local sources. The fans of Coventry City also tend to gather news and information on the club from a mixture of both national and local sources.

Notwithstanding the changes that have occurred, it is still noticeable how important both 'new' and 'old' sources of news and information remain to the modern football supporter. For instance, at each of the four clubs, the oldest source (the local evening newspaper) and one of the 'new' sources (the official website) are both in the top two most accessed sources, followed

mainly by Teletext and/or Ceefax and national newspapers. Therefore, the 'traditional' local evening newspaper continues to be a vital connection between a football club and its supporters, even in a rapidly developing mass media world (as is suggested by O'Sullivan *et al.* 2003; Franklin and Murphy 1991).

Whilst the top five ranked sources for news and information at each of the four case studies has been highlighted in *Table 1*, the questionnaire survey also

asked each supporter to name his/her single most important source for news and information. Indeed, while research by Spielger (1996) found that clubs could by-pass external media and communicate with supporters themselves, the results suggest that this is not the case. *Table 2* demonstrates that supporters of three out of the four clubs surveyed regard the local evening newspaper as their number one source for news and information.

**Table 2: Top three most important sources for news and information at each club**

	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Most Important Source</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Most Important Source</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Most Important Source</b>
<b>Aston Villa</b>	<i>Birmingham Evening Mail</i> Newspaper	Official Club website	Satellite Television (BSkyB)
<b>Birmingham City</b>	<i>Birmingham Evening Mail</i> Newspaper	Official Club website	Unofficial websites
<b>Coventry City</b>	<i>Coventry Evening Telegraph</i> Newspaper	Official Club Website	Unofficial websites
<b>Northampton Town</b>	Official Club website	<i>Chronicle and Echo</i> Evening Newspaper	Match Day Programme

Despite the fact that Aston Villa have the largest number of internal sources available to its supporters, only the official website is ranked in the top three of main sources for news and information, with the club's national profile supported by the perceived importance of satellite television (BSkyB). Similarly, only one internal source is deemed important to both Birmingham City and Coventry City supporters, with unofficial websites ranked as the third most important source, possibly indicative of an uneasy relationship between the supporters and each club at the time of the survey. Perhaps the interesting aspect of the findings at Aston Villa, Coventry City and Birmingham City is that the local newspaper is still clearly seen as the most important local media source, even though the local radio stations are recognised by a majority of supporters as effective platforms for getting their opinion across in both pre- and post-match programmes. Therefore, despite some club personnel dismissing any form of dependence on the external press when they were interviewed, the findings suggest otherwise. All of the

clubs involved in this research were found to rely heavily on the local press to communicate with a large majority of their supporters.

The only difference with the first most important source was at Northampton Town. One of the reasons for this is that they have to compete with Northampton Saints, a rugby union team, for back page news on a daily basis and with the Saints in the top division of the national league, they command most of the back page headlines and content. Therefore, due to a lack of back page coverage, it is perhaps not surprising that Northampton Town supporters see the official club website as being their most important source. In fact, it is the only source to provide unique coverage of the club. Indeed, the other main internal source for communicating with a large majority of supporters, the match day programme, was also found to play an important part. This makes Northampton Town the only club in this case study to have two internal sources ranked in the top three of the most important media sources by their supporters.



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## Conclusion

To summarise the results of the research carried out, it is clear from *Table 1* that the modern proliferation of 'new' media sources, both internal and external, has taken away some of the historic dependence of clubs on the 'traditional' local press. However, what this table also highlights is the fact that fans still consume news and information on clubs from a wide variety of 'new' and 'old' sources. Indeed, the continued significance of the local evening newspaper apparent from the data presented in *Table 2* with it being the single most important source for supporters at three out of the four clubs. As suggested earlier, one reason why it is not the most important source at Northampton Town is likely to be a consequence of the coverage granted to Northampton Saints and the fact that they have a higher profile and a higher number of regular supporters. On the other hand, 'new' media sources, such as official club websites and some of the unofficial websites, were also found to be popular sources with supporters, thereby suggesting that there is a place for both forms of media in modern day football.

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## Notes

1. This has led BSkyB to be the major satellite provider to households with over eight million subscribers (Tryhorn 2007).
2. As part of 'Football First', supporters of teams in the Premier League can watch fifty minutes of extended highlights every Saturday evening.
3. This was an important step for football clubs to take, due to the fact that all the other media organisations were also developing websites.
4. In August 2000 Celtic broadcast a live UEFA Cup match on its internet site and thirty-three thousand requests were made for pictures of the match ([www.celticfc.co.uk](http://www.celticfc.co.uk) 23rd August 2000).
5. Perform was formed by the merger of Premium TV and the Inform Group in 2007 and as part of its service it provides the platform and tools that enable clubs to write, manage and develop revenue through its official website.
6. This was also noticeable when reviewing the local press. Firstly, the *Birmingham Evening Mail* sold between one hundred and thirty thousand and one hundred and forty thousand copies per evening, the *Coventry Evening Telegraph* sold over sixty thousand copies per evening and the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* sold just over twenty-five thousand copies per evening. Secondly, in terms of the commentary deals between local radio and each of the four clubs, Aston Villa, Birmingham City and Coventry City each had exclusive deals that covered all home and away matches over the course of the season, whilst the competition between Northampton Town Football Club and Northampton Saints Rugby Club and the popularity of rugby meant that they took preference on radio coverage on a Saturday afternoon.
7. At all four clubs over seventy-nine per cent of supporters had internet access.
8. Where two sources appear together they received exactly the same percentage.



