THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE ENGLISH FOOTBALL LEAGUE

EFL MAGAZINE

ISSUE SIX // SUMMER 2022

EFL

INSIDE



MARK HUGHES
Taking the reins in Sky Bet League Two

ADEBAYO AKINFENWA

Unapologetically himself



[EFL COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR]

WELCOME...

...to the latest edition of the EFL Magazine.

Welcome to the Summer 2022 edition of the EFL Magazine, which brings the curtain down on another memorable season for the League and its 72 Clubs, a highlight of which has of course been the full return of supporters to stadiums across England and Wales.

After dealing with uncertainty in the opening months of the season around ongoing Covid protocols and fixture postponements through the winter, fans have continued to show up to support their Clubs, with almost 20 million supporters making their way through the turnstiles of EFL competitions during the 2021/22 season, proving the appetite for live football is as great as it has ever been.

Our latest edition of the EFL Magazine includes in-depth content and features that are not available elsewhere and cover a range of topics from inclusion and safeguarding in the game to a number of individual player and Club stories which make the EFL the unique and special League it is proud to be.

Inside, you will find a feature-length interview with EFL legend Adebayo Akinfenwa who, after 22 years and almost 800 appearances in professional football, has brought the curtain down on a career that blossomed against the odds. The 40-year-old discusses his outstanding EFL career and life after football.

Former Premier League and European Cup winner Mark Hughes discusses his return to management after a three-year hiatus and taking the reins at League Two Club Bradford City. We also speak to Hull City's rising stars, Jacob Greaves and Keane Lewis-Potter who, having graduated from the Tigers Academy, became the first homegrown pair to feature in all 46 League games for Hull since the 1965/66 season.



Off the pitch features, we focus on the growing concern of disorder at EFL matches, our work with charities Mind and new partner the British Red Cross, as well meeting the League's new Chief Operating Officer, Nick Craig.

Finally, we look at the success of the Kickstart scheme, how the EFL and its Clubs are tackling environmental sustainability through our streaming operation and we hear from EFL Chair Rick Parry on the importance of a financial reset for the English game.

Please enjoy the stories that we have captured here.

MARK ROWAN
EFL Communications Director

Nottingham Forest celebrate beating Huddersfield Town in the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final at Wembley Stadium to end their 23-year absence from the top flight.

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EFL House
10-12 West Cliff
Preston
PR1 8HU

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EFL Publications Manager
Jack Wylie

EFL Communications Manager - Content
Abi Rodwell

Programme Design
Zahra Ginieres Ridge

Photography
Shutterstock, Adam Gee, Harry McGuire, Accrington Stanley, Stockport County

Contributors
Billie Marshall, Chris Osborne, Holly Hunt, Jonny Williams, Michelle Robbins, Nick Roberts, Paul Holliday, Stephen Taylor

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DAVID PRUTTON

A view from the sidelines...



WHAT A SEASON IT'S BEEN. WE'VE SEEN SO MANY GREAT MOMENTS AND IT HASN'T DISAPPOINTED.

It's important to reference where we were this time last year, when we played the entire season with reduced crowds and, even at the Play-Off Finals, there was reduced capacity and still quite a lot of uncertainty around.

This season, it's been great to see people back in their huge numbers. We didn't ever need a reminder of what football meant to people, but I feel that this season really has brought it back home that it's the best game on the planet. It feels like football has returned to the game we all know and love and it's been wonderful.

The standard in League One and League Two is just getting better and better every year. I speak to a lot of coaches and managers in those divisions and there is a clear emphasis on how they want to play their football and I think it's completely broken the stereotype of long balls and not playing through the lines that used to be there when talking about third and fourth tier football.

The EFL continues to deliver a level of drama that I don't think any other League does. When you look at the last day of League One and Two in particular, it really showed the strength of these divisions.

The narrative involved in all of that drama was incredible and I think that just shows the ever-improving strength of the Clubs playing in them. If ever we needed a reminder of what the pyramid is about and what it creates, League One and League Two has done exactly that this season.

A special mention from me must go to Sutton United. I think what they've done in their debut EFL season has been magnificent. The EFL needs competition and it has exactly that. There are some huge Clubs in League One and even in League Two and I think that's great, because it shows you everything that the EFL is about.

The Championship continues to be one of the best divisions in the world; its competitiveness, its unpredictability



and the sheer excitement it provides is unparalleled. In the end, Fulham were the best team with the best squad, but it definitely wasn't that simple.

I've been in good dressing rooms and bad dressing rooms and sometimes you can have great players, but the dynamic just doesn't work, so I have to credit what Marco Silva has done at Fulham and the team he has built to enable them to bounce back at the first attempt.

Elsewhere, Nottingham Forest were bottom when Steve Cooper took over in September, yet now they're back in the Premier League for the first time in 23 years. The transformation of Huddersfield Town given where they were last season shows great evolvement and they have surprised a few people this year. But for me, the story of the season probably has to be Luton Town and the job Nathan Jones has done there. I don't think anyone at the Club would begrudge me saying they were a surprise package for the Play-Offs this year.

It's incredible to think they were playing in League Two just a few seasons ago, but Nathan is an incredibly competitive manager, Luton is a Club that really suits him and they have a great sense of individuality and uniqueness. They've proved that well-coached teams who don't necessarily have a lot of money to spend can mix it with the very best in the division.

Additionally, the EFL continues to be a great breeding ground for young players to develop and take the next step in their career. There is a cliché about young players getting proper minutes and playing first-team football that actually means something, but it's true.

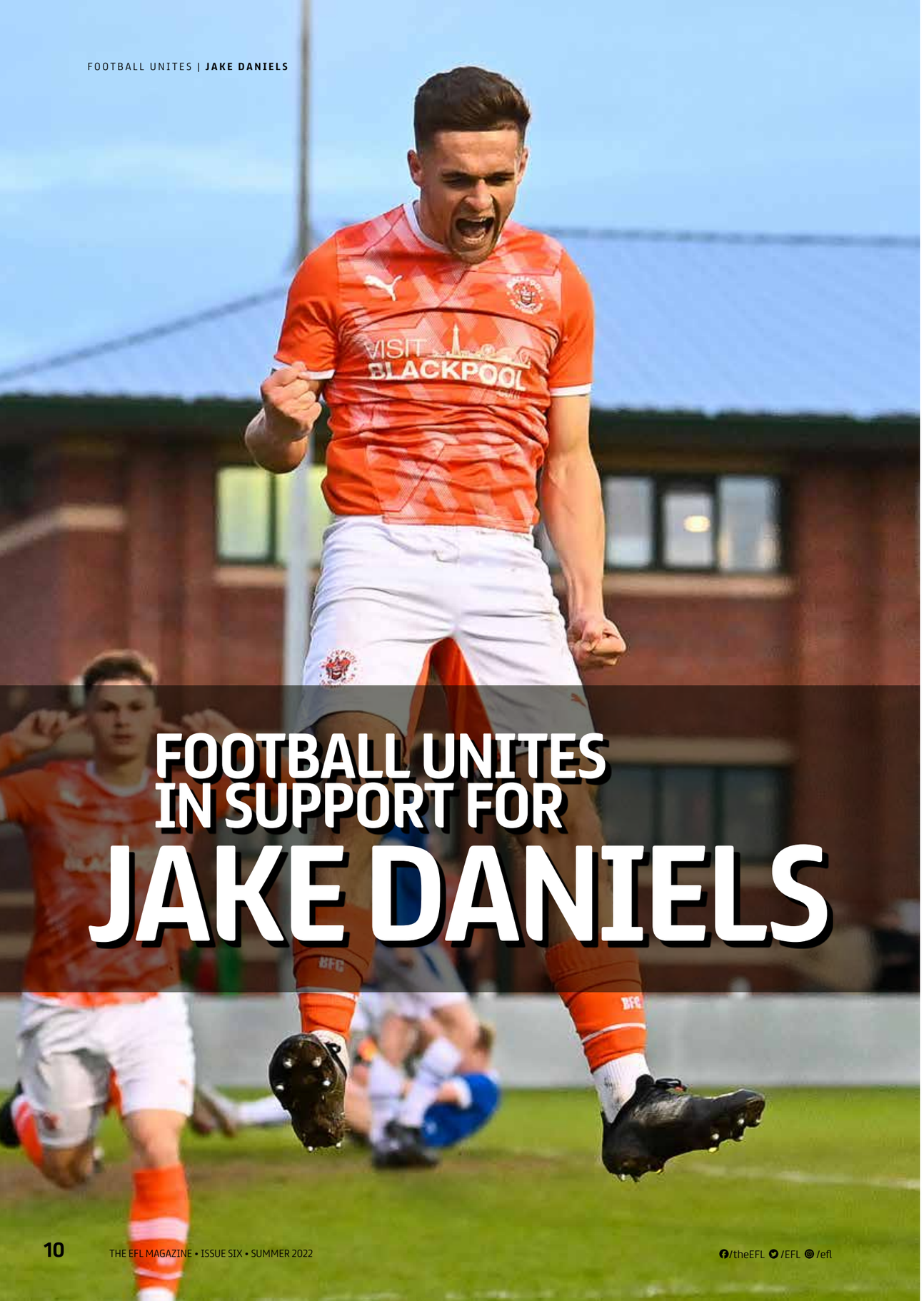
First-team football at this level is unforgiving and I love it. EFL Clubs take young Premier League players on loan and there's a bit of 'go on then, show us what you can do'. More importantly, players want to come and play in the EFL, they want to experience that environment, they want to play football at EFL Clubs and make a name for themselves. That's something we should be proud of.

When you look at the England squad and the progress of the England national team in recent years, the EFL has had a big part to play in that. Look at what the pyramid did for Harry Kane with his loan spells or Harry Maguire and Kyle Walker, who came through EFL Academies. What they've gone on to achieve has been wonderful.

Then you look at the latest England squad and you've got Jude Bellingham, Conor Gallagher, Jarrod Bowen and James Justin included – all of whom have played in the EFL as recently as three seasons ago, which just shows what a great breeding ground it is. The EFL teaches young players what it is to be a footballer, as well as keeping them balanced and grounded along the way.

I might be biased, but I think English football is one of the best and most passionate footballing foundations and fanbases you're ever going to come across. It's really special that we have a pyramid so unique and one to be truly proud of.

It's been great to watch yet another season unfold and I'm proud to have been a part of it.



FOOTBALL UNITES IN SUPPORT FOR JAKE DANIELS

In May, Blackpool's Jake Daniels made the decision to publicly come out as gay, making him the first professional in UK men's football for more than 30 years to come out while still playing.

The Prime Minister, the Duke of Cambridge, England captain Harry Kane and Olympic diving champion Tom Daley were among those to express their support for the 17-year-old, alongside Clubs, organisations and charities from across the country and world.

Throughout, Daniels has been at the centre of telling his own story, in the way he wants to tell it, with the help of his Club, the EFL, League Football Education, the Professional Footballers' Association, broadcasters and charities.

"I've hated lying my whole life and feeling the need to change to fit in," he said. "I want to be a role model myself by doing this.

"There are people out there in the same space as me that may not feel comfortable revealing their sexuality. I just want to tell them that you don't have to change who you are, or how you should be, just to fit in.

"You being you, and being happy, is what matters most."

Here are some of the voices of support for Jake, from across and beyond football...



"I think he will be massively accepted. Not just in his own dressing room but players he plays against. I think, overall, dressing rooms wouldn't think about it. They will consider if you're a good footballer or not. That's all that matters."
GARY LINEKER
FORMER ENGLAND STRIKER

"It will go down in history. It is a big, big moment for football players. It is of massive importance, this."
GARY NEVILLE
FORMER ENGLAND AND MANCHESTER UNITED DEFENDER AND SALFORD CITY OWNER

"Massive credit to you Jake Daniels and the way your friends, family, Club and captain have supported you. Football should be welcoming for everyone."
HARRY KANE
ENGLAND CAPTAIN

"Massive respect for this brave decision. Let's all help create a safe and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ people in football and beyond."
RIO FERDINAND
FORMER ENGLAND DEFENDER

"Coming out publicly in professional football will have taken great courage and I have huge admiration for Jake Daniels' decision to do so. Jake's actions will no doubt serve as an inspiration to people everywhere. The League is proud that he is part of the EFL family and has our full support."
TREVOR BIRCH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE EFL

"Well done, Jake Daniels. Have a wonderful career! Great to see the support of Blackpool and Stonewall to make this possible!"
THOMAS HITZLSPERGER
FORMER GERMANY MIDFIELDER, WHO CAME OUT AS GAY AFTER RETIRING

"What Jake has done takes courage and will hopefully help break down barriers that have no place in our society. I hope his decision to speak openly gives others the confidence to do the same."
PRINCE WILLIAM
DUKE OF CAMBRIDGE

"Thank you for your bravery, Jake. It would have taken huge courage to come out and you will be an inspiration to many, both on and off the pitch."
BORIS JOHNSON
UK PRIME MINISTER

"This shows real courage and bravery and will serve as an inspiration to many young people across the country."
SIR KEIR STARMER
LEADER OF THE LABOUR PARTY

"The football family has got behind him. It feels like a watershed moment because of the bravery it takes to do it and how well he has handled himself."
JOHN MOUSINHO
PFA CHAIRMAN

"My main advice to him is to embrace who you are, and just enjoy it. Mate, you've opened a new chapter, this is your new life, so go out there and live it. I'm very excited for the both of us. We're only at the start of our career."
JOSH CAVALLO
ADELAIDE UNITED MIDFIELDER, WHO LAST YEAR BECAME THE ONLY CURRENT TOP-FLIGHT MALE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER IN THE WORLD TO COME OUT AS GAY

"Fantastic that he feels brave enough to do that. At 17 years old, it is exceptional. When I saw him talking, I couldn't believe he was 17. He's obviously a very mature boy."
JÜRGEN KLOPP
LIVERPOOL MANAGER

"The fact that Jake came out is a really powerful message to send. It's so incredibly brave and it might encourage more people to come out, able to be themselves. There is such power in visibility and in telling or sharing your personal story."
TOM DALEY
OLYMPIC DIVING CHAMPION

"At 17, Jake Daniels represents a generation that rejects old-fashioned homophobia in football and elsewhere: those who haven't yet grown up as he has. He sets an example. No wonder so many of us, gay and everyone else, admire and treasure him as a hero. What a goal he's scored!"
SIR IAN MCKELLAN
ACTOR

"It's a landmark day in British LGBT history. Brilliant, brave Jake Daniels a professional Championship footballer with Blackpool has come out. Huge respect to you, Jake, and to your Club and team-mates for supporting you."
MATT LUCAS
ACTOR, COMEDIAN AND WRITER

"Amazing courage and bravery, Jake."
DAVID DE GEA
MANCHESTER UNITED GOALKEEPER

FINANCIAL REDISTRIBUTION AND ENHANCED REGULATION

THE CHANGE WE NEED

EFL Chair Rick Parry has been leading the call for a fundamental reset of professional football's financial model, alongside enhanced regulation, in order to deliver financially sustainable Clubs at all levels of the football pyramid.

At the conclusion of an action-packed 2021/22 season on the field, Rick offered insight into one of the League's most pressing priorities off the field for 2022/23 and beyond.

"We have to care about the pyramid, we want Clubs to be able to go from bottom to top and maybe down again, but it's becoming increasingly difficult and now is the time to have a rethink."

To really understand the relationship between England's top divisions today, the EFL's Chair Rick Parry believes that you need to look right back to the inception of the Premier League in 1992.

He says: "A couple of weeks ago, I dug out the 1993 accounts for the Premier League and the EFL – the first year of the Premier League, the turnover was £45 million and the turnover of the EFL was £35 million, so almost the same and we didn't have this enormous gap.

"What's happened in the intervening 30 years is the Premier League turnover has gone up 68 times, whereas the EFL turnover has only gone up five and a half times – it's been left way behind.

"When we formed the Premier League, the idea wasn't to kill off the EFL, the idea was to make the Premier League a success, which it has undoubtedly been, but I think what no one has done is thought, 'hang on where is all of this going?' Because in England, surely the pyramid matters."

When asked what he thinks the solution to the game's financial imbalance could be, Rick pointed to the consistent answer he has been articulating since a House of Commons Select Committee appearance in 2020.

"Our remedy is incredibly simple," he explains. "It's simple to state but it's not very easy getting there of course. We think that we should pool our TV revenues with the Premier League and first of all, we should sell them collectively because that will be a way of making the pie a little bit bigger.

"We would then split them on a 75/25 basis. That's not a figure plucked out of the air, that's a figure that very deliberately does a number of things. It eliminates a number of the losses that most of our Clubs are making, obviates the need for owner funding – owner funding into the EFL is £400 million a year across the three divisions – that really isn't sustainable and we'd be able to eliminate that.

"What we'd also be able to do is eliminate parachute payments to halve the gap between the bottom of the Premier League and the top of the Championship, so that the transition is easier on the way up and on the way down.

"The point we've made about parachute payments is that what they demonstrate is that the Premier League knows there is a problem. They know there is huge financial gulf, but you don't need a parachute to fall off a step, you need a parachute because it's a cliff edge.

"To have a limited number of Clubs in the Championship funded by the Premier League is pretty bizarre when you think about it. We have Clubs who are receiving £44 million from the Premier League and others who are receiving less than £5 million. It's just wholly anti-competitive."



FAN-LED REVIEW – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE

The reason that this is all so significant now is that for the first time, the Government has also realised that the English game's growing financial disparity is causing fundamental issues for the national game.

Following several instances of financial issues at Clubs and the failed attempt to create a European Super League, Tracey Crouch CBE undertook the Fan-Led Review of Football Governance so that the Government could consider issues affecting football in England and Wales, with a particular focus on the sustainability of Football Clubs.

The Government recently responded to Crouch's report and accepted or supported all 10 of the strategic recommendations in her report. These included the introduction of independent statutory regulation and the need for increased financial distributions from the Premier league to the rest of the pyramid.

The process has now moved into a formal Parliamentary phase with a White Paper expected to be published later in the summer, which Rick believes could be the best lever for change we've had for a generation.

He adds: "We think the Fan-Led Review and the establishment of the Regulator, whatever form that is going to take, is the once in a lifetime opportunity. We need to have a rethink and a reset and make the whole game healthier.

"We don't fear better regulation, we are really in favour for better regulation – that's a good thing for the game. The point we have made is that our purpose is making Clubs sustainable, and to make them sustainable you need two things. First of all, you need better distribution to make them solvent and then you need better regulation to make sure they don't waste the money. So, you need that better regulation for the long-term sustainability, but if you have one without the other, it will fail.

"We've seen the gap widening, it hasn't been sorted, so we think it needs that outside influence to sort it out."

When asked about opposition to his proposals for a reset that claim redistribution and regulation would "kill the golden goose" of Premier League success, the EFL Chair dismisses them.

"If you can't thrive in a regulated environment and proper environment, you are probably doing something wrong. Why would you be afraid of regulation?" asks Parry.

"The bottom line is we (the EFL) are looking for about £280 million from the Premier League out of the £3 billion they distribute, so they would still distribute more money to their Member Clubs than any other League in world football by a long way. I really don't see that as killing a golden goose and at the end of the day, surely what the Premier League needs is teams like Nottingham Forest, Brentford and Leeds United – teams that are going to come up and stay.

"How are yo-yo teams coming backwards and forwards – picking up the parachute payments by getting out of the EFL and coming back down again – strengthening the Premier League? How is that adding to the product?

"We think in terms of the media values of the Premier League, having better teams coming upwards and providing more variety at the bottom is a really good thing.

"The point we're making is let's not fiddle around with this, let's do it properly and make some meaningful change that's actually going to create a better pyramid for the next 30 years.

"This is absolutely not the EFL putting its hand in the Premier League's pockets, we're not anti-Premier League and it's not one League against another. This is about looking at the 100 or so Clubs, because we are looking at the National League as well. This is about those 100 or so Clubs who can prize the pyramid and say we have something special and unique in the pyramid. Let's do what we can to ensure that all of our Clubs are sustainable for the future."

FIGHT TO THE FINN-ISH

Back in January, following an impressive first half of the campaign, Newport County midfielder Finn Azaz decided to set himself a new target.

He had his mind made up – he wanted nothing less than to win Sky Bet League Two's Young Player of the Season. WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Indeed, the Aston Villa loanee, who was well on the way to achieving his goal at the time, foretold his own fate upon scooping the EFL's Young Player of the Month accolade at the beginning of the calendar year.

The Exiles picked up 13 points from a possible 18 during the month of January and Azaz more than played his part in boosting their points tally, but, even at the time, he had his mind set on the bigger picture.

"Once I achieve one thing, which I didn't even know I was working towards in truth, then I just move onto the next target," he said at the start of February, having received his monthly award. "My mindset now is that I want to win Young Player of the Season."

And he did just that, with the 21-year-old collecting the League Two prize at the EFL Awards 2022 to cap off a successful loan stint in South Wales.

"It's a great thing for my CV and a milestone for my journey," he explains. "It's been an enjoyable season and when you enjoy your football, you play your best stuff."

The promising youngster already boasts an impressive résumé, which includes a League Two promotion – as champions – with Cheltenham Town.

Azaz joined the Robins on loan from West Bromwich Albion and went on to help Cheltenham reach Sky Bet League One before making the permanent switch to Villa Park last summer.

"I'd say at Cheltenham, I had quite a main role – I started 29 games and made 37 appearances when we won the league," he notes. "This year, I've had a bit more freedom, and it's been nice to have that freedom to express myself a bit more. I should've got better stats last season, but it just so happens I've got them this season.





"I've played in League Two for two seasons now and I know how hard it is. When you're playing in a team that's playing well and winning games, it becomes easier to thrive individually, and that's what's happened for me. I rely a lot on my team-mates' service to get the ball into me in the areas that I want, so the other lads have played a major role in me winning the award."

The hot prospect didn't become an established starter in the team until James Rowberry's appointment as Manager in October, but eventually clocked seven goals in 42 league outings and was named in the League Two Team of the Season after helping Newport achieve an 11th-place finish.

"It's been very good to play under different Managers, experience different styles and play alongside different players," he explains. "It's been really good for my development.

"I had to work on my out-of-possession game at Cheltenham, and maybe at times that took away from my in-possession output. This season, I haven't had to think about what I'm doing out of possession because that's drilled into me now, and I can really focus on getting on the ball and affecting the game in that way.

"I'm someone who likes to have the ball a lot and in certain games in League Two, that can be difficult. I feel like I'm most effective further forward in a team that can give me good service."

Off the pitch, Azaz lived in a house with a number of his Exiles team-mates, including prolific striker Dom Telford and the vastly experienced 43-year-old Kevin Ellison, who acted as a mentor to the Westminster-born talent.

"Kev and I had a really good relationship," Azaz says. "Especially when I first came into the house, I was asking him a lot of questions and trying to take little bits of information about how he's managed to maintain himself physically throughout his career.

"He's a top pro who does all the right things before and after sessions. He does yoga and he's got me doing a lot more swimming, because he does that a lot. It's very interesting looking into the specifics of how he's kept his body in such good shape over the years, especially being an attacker.

"The key is to try and be consistent with your performances, and I've tried hard this season to work on that and be at my best for 90 minutes week after week."

Azaz, who claims to speak French and Spanish 'pretty well', admits he's open to whatever comes next upon his return to Villa, having seen youngsters like Jacob Ramsey and Carney Chukwuemeka receive playing opportunities under Steven Gerrard, while highly-rated striker Cameron Archer took the Championship loan route, impressing at Preston North End.

"Two years ago, I probably would've said I was ready to go and play in the Premier League, but until you go and play men's football in different systems and different games, you realise that you're not ready," he confesses. "All I can do is try and overcome the next challenge. I feel like I'm ready but until I get that chance to test myself, I'll never know.



"Coming into League Two, you realise very quickly how difficult it is to get to the Premier League, but I'm confident in my ability and know where I want to get to and where I believe I can get to.

"I look at the opportunities that are being given to the younger players and it gives me hope that I can be given that chance, too. I've played regularly and developed my game and that should prepare me for opportunities higher up the leagues."

Whatever comes next for Azaz, it's clear that he's on the fast track for success.

A GAME-CHANGING PARTNERSHIP

After four years of successful collaboration, the EFL's official charity partnership with Mind has come to its conclusion following the 2021/22 season.

The game-changing 'On Your Side' partnership helped to raise awareness of mental health amongst football fans, improved the approach to mental health within the EFL and raised vital funds for Mind's life-saving services.



"We're tremendously proud of all that we have achieved together with the EFL over the past four seasons," says Mind Chief Executive Paul Farmer.

"We know the power that football has to create change, not least around mental health. For many people, the On Your Side partnership has not only been life-changing, but life-saving.

Since 2018, the partnership has seen many highlights, from the logo featuring on the back of EFL shirts at over 7,000 matches – reaching more than 18 million people each year – to raising funds and awareness at 93 dedicated matchdays, including 20 EFL Wembley Finals.

Elsewhere, over 2,600 staff at EFL Clubs have been trained in mental health awareness and more than 5,800 people took part in the 'Get Set To Go' programme, which encouraged those with mental health problems to get physically active.

All that and more was celebrated in May and June via a unique exhibition at the National Football Museum in Manchester, which was unveiled at the start of Mental Health Awareness Week to showcase the key moments from four years of collaboration.

Speaking at the launch of the exhibition, EFL Chair Rick Parry said: "Over the past four seasons, our partnership with Mind has been instrumental in creating a significant cultural change towards mental health within football. It is proof of the progress made that we are now able to have this special exhibition dedicated to mental health in England's national football museum.

"With the support of our 72 Clubs and Club Community Organisations, the partnership has provided players, staff and fans across the football community with an important platform to raise awareness, but also positively impact people's lives. I hope many people are able to enjoy this exhibition over the coming weeks."

Farmer adds: "Seeing highlights of this truly game-changing partnership take pride of place in the National Football Museum is fantastic.

"It all started with the squiggle on the back of every Club's shirts and that has been such an icon for helping raise awareness and having conversations about mental health.

"We hope that as many fans as possible get a chance to see the exhibition and that it serves as a reminder that, whoever you support, Mind will always be here to support you."











Despite the partnership formally coming to a close, its impact will continue to be felt for years to come.

"Our connection with the League will never end," states Farmer. "We know that across the country, many of our local Minds are working with Clubs already and we want to sustain that.

"As a result, we've launched a legacy fund, where we're going to be investing money into local Minds to work with Clubs and make these partnerships long-lasting because mental health doesn't go away, even though our partnership has come to its conclusion."

Both the EFL and Mind would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support to the partnership over the last four seasons.

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BritishRedCross

Tackling loneliness together

The EFL welcomes the humanitarian charity, **British Red Cross**, as its new official charity partner, with both organisations joining forces to reduce isolation in communities across England and Wales.

Chronic loneliness can have a serious impact on wellbeing and currently, the British Red Cross works with over 100,000 people experiencing loneliness per year through dedicated services across the UK. This ranges from helping isolated elderly people to supporting refugees who arrive with nothing.

Meanwhile, the EFL and its network of 72 Clubs supported tens of thousands of people during the pandemic who were experiencing loneliness, with an award-winning Tackling Loneliness Together programme and innovative Extra Time Hubs.

By pooling resources through this partnership, the aim will be to offer more support to those in need using the popularity of the national game and power of Club badges to bring people closer together.

"Club allegiances and a love of the game offer a sense of belonging to millions in this country and we believe that partnering with the British Red Cross will help us bring more people together through the medium of football," said Trevor Birch, EFL Chief Executive.

"The EFL and its Clubs already deliver life-changing work through its community network and with eight in 10 people in the UK living within 15 miles of an EFL Club, collaborating with an internationally renowned organisation such as British Red Cross will help elevate the services that organisations offer to people up and down the country."

British Red Cross Executive Director Zoe Abrams declared: "Mind are an amazing charity that do brilliant work and it's such an honour to follow on from them. I think we can really build on their legacy.

"It makes total sense that Mind has been working on mental health and that British Red Cross has a focus on loneliness and reconnecting people. They're two sides of the same coin and really complementary.

"We believe that connected communities are more resilient communities and what could be more at the heart of the community than its Football Club? We think there's huge potential to touch the lives of people who are socially isolated.

"Just seeing the new shirt is so exciting and knowing that the players are going to be running around with our British Red Cross logo on there, that'll do loads to raise awareness of what we're doing."

Paul Amadi, Chief Supporter Officer, British Red Cross added: "We all know football has the power to bring people together and we can't wait to join forces with the English Football League to tackle the issue of loneliness together.



"The pandemic has exacerbated loneliness and has left people feeling more isolated than ever before. Lockdown only amplified this deep-rooted problem, with millions of people left feeling cut from the world they once knew. Together, we can help bring an end to the stigma of loneliness and connect people who are left feeling alone."

[MAIN FEATURE]

ADEBAYO AKINFENWA:

Unapologetically himself

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

"From the beginning to the end, I wouldn't change a thing. I did it my way and it went how I wanted it to go."

After 22 years in professional football, Adebayo Akinfenwa has brought the curtain down on a career that blossomed against the odds.



MAIN INTERVIEW | **ADEBAYO AKINFENWA**



The 17-stone striker might not look like the typical footballer, but he has certainly made his mark on the game, with three promotions, 221 goals and 755 appearances across all three EFL divisions.

And having been 'unapologetically himself', Akinfenwa has used a combination of the EFL's platform and his unique character to transcend the sport, with over 2.5 million followers across social media platforms Twitter, Instagram and TikTok.

"I never set out to be different, I just set out to be myself and I will never apologise for being who I am," he reveals. "I always say that energy is contagious. Whatever energy you give out, I'd like to think is what you get back.

"Life is stressful at the best of times, so you've got to set aside some time to entertain. If I've got the time, I will give it and that's something I've always done.

"The attention I get, I think it's mind-boggling. I get contacted by people all over the world, from places I've never been. I'll be with people who I've looked up to in the game, who have played at the very top, and they try to get a photo with me.

"The love and appreciation I've had has been humbling – I'm honoured."

Akinfenwa's gregarious and charismatic personality has turned him into a cult hero with fans young and old across the globe.

Wycombe Wanderers' Mascot Coordinator, Elaine Cooper, noted: "Every kid always says their favourite player is Bayo. He spends time with them and he makes their year. They're the future of the Club and that's why he was important to this Club."

Akinfenwa admits that those connections are what he will treasure the most from his playing days.



CAREER STATS

2003
BOSTON UNITED
4 appearances
1 goal

2003-04
LEYTON ORIENT
2 appearances
0 goals

2004
DONCASTER ROVERS
9 appearances
4 goals

2004-05
TORQUAY UNITED
41 appearances
16 goals

2005-07
SWANSEA CITY
75 appearances
21 goals

2007-08
MILLWALL
9 appearances
0 goals

2008-10 & 2011-13
NORTHAMPTON TOWN
188 appearances
74 goals

2010-11 & 2013-14
GILLINGHAM
83 appearances
21 goals

2014-16
AFC WIMBLEDON
94 appearances
23 goals

2016-22
WYCOMBE WANDERERS
250 appearances
61 goals

TOTAL:
755
APPEARANCES
221
GOALS

/theEFL /EFL /efl

MAIN INTERVIEW | **ADEBAYO AKINFENWA**



"The connections that I've made and the energy that I've felt, nobody can take that away, no matter what opinion somebody has," he declares. "I've made memories that can last a lifetime and you can't beat that.

"Don't get it twisted, I wanted to win every game and, of course, it's nice to get accolades for what you've done, but there's nothing more powerful than connections."

While playing for 19 seasons in the EFL, the self-proclaimed 'Beast' was able to build a worldwide brand, developing a successful clothing label, creating YouTube content to an audience of nearly 300,000 subscribers and releasing his own autobiography.

The 40-year-old explains: "We are a changing society. Back in the day, a lot of players just wanted to play golf or chill out, but now, players have more opportunities to pursue.

"I've been very lucky to be able to experience other elements alongside football. It's such an easy thing to say, 'just concentrate on football', but you need to have a balanced mind and it's good to be able to switch off at times because you can get stuck in your own head.

"I've never let anything prevent me from giving my very best on a matchday and that's all that matters. Now, at the end of my career, I've got some presenting work and there's some acting and mentoring stuff in the pipeline, so there's a few things out there that I'm looking forward to trying my hand at."

Another interest that Akinfenwa has made no secret of is his love for the gym.

Capable of bench pressing 200kg, the larger-than-life personality has been vocal about his desire to be known as the strongest man in football.

And he received that validation via the videogame series FIFA, being crowned as the strongest player in every edition of the game since FIFA 12.

"I didn't realise how big the FIFA community was," he admits. "It coincided with the boom for social media and YouTubers and things just went viral around the world.

"I spoke to EA Sports about how much these stats mean to players. Recognition is not the be all and end all, because as long as you're comfortable with yourself, that's all that matters, but I enjoy the gym and when you receive acknowledgement for something that you put time and work into, it's a nice feeling.

"I wasn't sugar-coating it; nobody outworks me in the gym. If somebody did, that would push me even more. I was proud of being number one and nobody could take me off my throne."

As one of the FIFA franchise's most beloved players, EA Sports rewarded Akinfenwa with a special 'End of an Era' card on FIFA 22's Ultimate Team game mode – something normally reserved for superstars playing at the elite level.

It marks a fitting end to an incredible story for a man once described as 'too big for football'.

"They were generous on a few of the stats, but it was an honour," he jokes. "This game is global, it's worldwide and not every player gets a special card – generally, it only goes to the best of the best.

"I've played in the EFL my whole career, so I'm humbled because I know the people that have got one in the past and they're the crème de la crème."

Such is the ever-popular Akinfenwa's appeal, every step of his final season has been captured by TV cameras for an upcoming Amazon documentary.

And he came ever so close to delivering the blockbuster ending, with his final outing coming at Wembley Stadium for the Sky Bet League One Play-Off Final.

“THANK YOU FOR TAKING ME ON THIS JOURNEY”



CLUB HONOURS

2005/06
EFL Trophy
Swansea City
2015/16
League Two Play-Offs
AFC Wimbledon
2017/18
League Two Third-place Promotion
Wycombe Wanderers
2019/20
League One Play-Offs
Wycombe Wanderers

Despite a lively cameo off the bench, the veteran target man was unable to inspire Wycombe to glory, with Sunderland securing a 2-0 win.

"It's every boy's dream to play at Wembley, especially growing up in London," says Akinfenwa. "Wembley is the pinnacle – it's the National Stadium.

"For that to be my last game, I couldn't have scripted it. Obviously, if I had've scripted it, we would've won! But my last kick of a ball was at Wembley, so I'm blessed."

The disappointment of that defeat won't overshadow his extraordinary journey with the Chairboys.

Back in May 2016, a 34-year-old Akinfenwa was 'technically unemployed' after scoring a penalty under the famous arch to send AFC Wimbledon to Sky Bet League One via the Play-Offs, and famously pleaded in his post-match interview for Managers to 'hit me up on WhatsApp'.

Very few could've predicted the path that would follow, including the man himself.

"I never would've expected the journey I've been on at Wycombe," he admits. "I remember saying to the gaffer when I signed, I thought I'd play two more years. I didn't think I'd be playing at 40!





"I was very driven at that time – not to prove anybody else wrong, but to prove myself right. I still felt like I had something to give, so when I came to Wycombe, I was determined to show that I could still do it.

"To think that six years on, we've had two promotions and were so close to a third, I wouldn't have expected that in my peak, let alone at the twilight of my career."

Having previously played for 10 EFL Clubs in 13 years, Akinfenwa described himself and Wycombe as a 'match made in heaven', leading to a six-year stint at Adams Park – the longest he has spent at any team in a career spanning more than two decades.

In that time, he developed a close bond with long-serving boss Gareth Ainsworth.



Akinfenwa says: "If you were to look at my frame, you probably wouldn't think I'm a footballer. When you look at the gaffer – with his cowboy boots, his leather jacket and his shirt open in the winter – people may say he doesn't fit that typical look of a manager. We just clicked.

"He's authentic and doesn't pretend to be anything he's not. He created a no blame culture and he's the first to say that if something doesn't work, it's on him, and if it does work, it's on us.

"The team embodies the way that he is, promoting uniqueness and togetherness. He said it and I'll repeat it, 'football brought us together, but life will keep us together'. The Club is built in his image, so with that in mind, it's been a match made in heaven."

The vastly experienced frontman has certainly come a long way from humble beginnings.

After failing to make the grade as a teenager in England, Akinfenwa looked abroad for opportunities, winning trophies in Lithuania and Wales before finally earning his chance in the EFL with Boston United in 2003.

"Everybody's got a story," he adds. "I wasn't getting a look in over here, so I had to go elsewhere, which is when I went to Lithuania. It mentally strengthened me over there.

"It took a while to feel like I could hold my own in the Football League. I had a month at Boston, a month at Leyton Orient, three months at Rushden & Diamonds... it was like I was constantly starting again.



INDIVIDUAL HONOURS

2004/05
Torquay United
Player of the Year
2009/10
Northampton Town
Player of the Year
2014/15
AFC Wimbledon
Player of the Year
2016/17 & 2017/18
Wycombe Wanderers
Player of the Season
2017/18
EFL Team of the Season
Wycombe Wanderers
Record EFL Goalscorer

I REMEMBER SAYING TO THE GAFFER WHEN I SIGNED, I THOUGHT I'D PLAY TWO MORE YEARS. I DIDN'T THINK I'D BE PLAYING AT 40!

"Finally, I got the break at Doncaster. They were going for promotion and I replaced the striker that had played there all season, so that was a moment that gave me real impetus. Then I went on to Torquay for my first full season and the rest is history."

After scoring 16 goals in 41 matches in all competitions during a breakout campaign, Akinfenwa made the switch to Swansea City, where he gained his first taste of silverware in the EFL.

He recalls: "Swansea was my first experience of a massive Club – it was my education and the point where I was just trying to be a sponge and learn as much as I could.

"My strike partner was Lee Trundle, and I watched how he dealt with defenders, how he dealt with expectation, how he dealt with the other fans and how he played with an enjoyment and a smile.

"Kevin Austin, rest in peace, was my castle. I wanted to be like him – the way he got respect, the way he found the balance between being a senior player and then being able to hang with the younger boys.

"Our team was full of ballers. I played in the LDV Vans Trophy Final against Carlisle at the Millennium Stadium and I scored the winner. It was amazing; when we picked up the trophy and I heard the noise of the crowd, I was like, 'this is it, this is football'.

"A few weeks later, we were back again for the Play-Off Final. We were one game away from the Championship and it suddenly felt like everything was easy. But then I missed a penalty in the shoot-out, we lost the game and the next chance I got to get to the Championship was 15 years later when I was 38 – that's football!"

It may have taken longer than he thought, but a season in the second tier finally came during the 2020/21 campaign with Wycombe.

"On a personal note, it was a landmark achievement for me," he says. "It was bittersweet because there were no fans in stadiums and I don't think I got to attack it in the way that I wanted because I was hurting, but I was just happy to be there.

"After a while, I was thinking I was going to go the whole season without scoring, which has never happened to me before. To score on the final day, in the final minute, and the fact it got us a win, that was incredible.

"That's one of my favourite moments because of how happy everybody was for me. That will stay with me forever."

Alongside that stoppage-time penalty against Bristol City, Akinfenwa lists his one and only professional hat-trick – for Northampton Town against Accrington Stanley in November 2012 – as another highlight moment, as well as his FA Cup outing against his beloved Liverpool and scoring at Wembley Stadium.

But one accomplishment stands out above the rest for the evergreen striker.

"My greatest achievement was becoming a professional footballer," he states. "At the age of six or seven, I told my parents and my brother that I want to be, and I'm going to be, a professional footballer. To actually do it, that is the greatest achievement and everything else has been a bonus."

Having experienced so much over the years, Akinfenwa has made it a priority of his to pass on the insight he has gained to younger players.

"The young players are the next generation, so I think it's imperative to guide them," he confesses. "We've got some talented youngsters in the game, so I try to pass on messages that I wish I'd had.

"I try to say to just be comfortable with who you are. When you're young, you go into a dressing room feeling like you have to impress everybody. When you get older, that shifts to just trying to do your best. If you're going in to do your best in anything you're attempting, you can look at yourself in the mirror and be satisfied with that. That's the power of experience."

Although his playing career is now over, it's inevitable that we've not seen the last of Adebayo Akinfenwa, whether it's in a sporting capacity, on the big screen or anything else he decides to pursue.

One thing is for sure, he has shown that there are no limitations to what a player in the EFL can achieve.

He concludes: "It's a beautiful feeling to have this connection with everybody that's supported me and shown me love. From the bottom of my heart, thank you."



WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

Safeguarding explained...

An area where the EFL and its Clubs continue to make huge strides, the EFL is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk, and expects all staff and volunteers to share this commitment.

The latest development in the approach to safeguarding came in November, when the FA's new Play Safe campaign was launched during National Safeguarding Weekend. The initiative was another step towards ensuring everyone has a consistently positive experience in safeguarding.

Building on the EFL's 'Stronger Together' strategy, the launch of the new safeguarding strategy in 2022 demonstrates the EFL's commitment to evolve its safeguarding standards and practices as the world changes, as well as be leaders in the field.

Delivered through the enhancement of skills and regular training of staff at all levels, education remains the most important aspect of delivery, highlighting the importance of Clubs having the appropriate level of information and knowledge to enable to them to identify threats and protect people, whatever the circumstances moving forward. Above all, the EFL aims to create an environment in which all participants can feel safe and supported.

The EFL currently engages a number of external agencies and safeguarding advisors to help deliver the relevant education to Clubs.



Paul Stewart

FORMER PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER AND SEXUAL ABUSE SURVIVOR

Former Liverpool, Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur midfielder Paul Stewart publicly revealed the trauma he faced as a child in 2016.

Determined to help make a difference, Stewart now provides safeguarding awareness training to Academy footballers via the EFL's education partner, League Football Education (LFE), as well as delivering training to Safeguarding Officers and Senior Safeguarding Managers at Clubs.

He also appears at the EFL's two new online courses; Board of Directors Mandatory Safeguarding and Introduction to Safeguarding for all Club staff and volunteers.

The 1991 FA Cup winner continues to support players at several Clubs across the country since joining LFE's collection of speakers on the Life Skills programme, which covers a wide range of identified subjects, with his workshops also extending to parents, carers and Club staff.

"The comments from Clubs and players show that what I'm doing is making a difference," he says. "And that makes me feel okay, so it helps me as much as it helps them, in a healing way. I genuinely believe that the EFL are at the head of promoting the importance of safeguarding. They've made it a priority, getting people to listen about the topic and delivering training to every Club."

Fortalice

GILL SMALLWOOD

A Bolton-based charity, Fortalice provides frontline services for people who are, or have been, affected by domestic abuse and violence.

The charity runs a women's refuge and supports victims and families affected by domestic violence. It also provides individual and group work for adults and young people and healthy relationships courses.

Chief Executive Gill Smallwood has run a number of domestic violence sessions at EFL Clubs, educating those in attendance on what healthy relationships look like.

Ashley Rolfe

KIDSCAPE

Kidscape is an anti-bullying charity which supports children, families and professionals dealing with bullying issues.

Head of Programmes, Training and Volunteering, Ashley Rolfe, runs a number of training sessions for Clubs on dealing with bullying and has also developed bespoke resources to help EFL Clubs support children and parents who report bullying issues.

Kevin Murphy

NATIONAL WORKING GROUP (NWG)

A national charity based in Derby, the National Working Group works to inform, educate and prevent child exploitation and trafficking within the United Kingdom.

Safeguarding Sport Lead of the NWG, Kevin Murphy, delivers a number of sessions to EFL Clubs, educating them on child exploitation in all forms, particularly focusing on how children are exploited in sport; including sexual exploitation, gambling, trafficking and selling drugs. Having recently received funding from Sport England to help raise awareness of such child exploitation, sessions are delivered at all EFL Clubs to advise and educate from Academy level upwards.

Murphy says: "The main focus of our work is to help raise awareness of how children can be exploited through sport and therefore how to spot it. We know sport is a really good way of engaging with children, but that makes them vulnerable.

"Thousands of children go into Football Clubs every day either through the Academy or through their community schemes, so it's really important Clubs have the relevant information on how perpetrators work and how young players, coaches and even parents might be groomed."

Last season, a number of three-hour sessions were delivered at EFL Clubs looking at the various exploitation models, before using real-life examples to educate those taking part.

"We're really pleased that the EFL engaged with us to educate Clubs and communities about this area," Murphy adds. "We want to train people and educate them so that they have the confidence to spot incidents themselves and then find the local solutions. The world of safeguarding is so fluid and there are always new ways to exploit children, so it's so important that we're constantly evolving, and even more important that that evolvement is reflected in the education we deliver."

Helen Munn

NSPCC

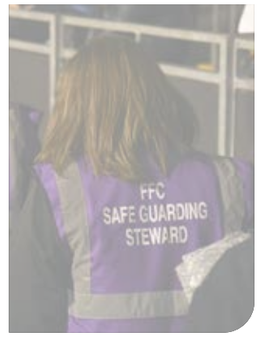
As the UK's leading children's charity, the NSPCC was engaged by the EFL to help deliver a new e-learning course for Club Board Directors. The course, based around the EFL's safeguarding standards, was developed to help Club Board Directors work more effectively with Club safeguarding teams to understand their role and educate everyone in their responsibility to help protect children.

Member of the NSPCC Learning team, Helen Munn, has been instrumental in helping deliver the Board of Directors course alongside the EFL's Head of Safeguarding, Alex Richards.

Helen explains: "The EFL Board of Directors course is a short e-learning course that is based around the EFL's safeguarding standards. We worked with a consultant in our Child Protection in Sport Unit alongside key people at the EFL to gather the information to understand the needs of Club Boards around safeguarding in order to make sure everyone from the top of the Club to the bottom works together to protect children.

"The course involves written content and a series of short films. The e-learning course is not the single answer to safeguarding in football, but it's one piece of the bigger piece of work that the EFL is doing to make sure everyone is trained to understand their responsibility.

"The NSPCC plays a big role in safeguarding children and young people, but we can't do it alone. We need everyone to work together and that's why this project in particular was important for us because it's working in partnership to reach people who would probably never normally come to the NSPCC for information. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and we all have to work together to be effective."



SAFEGUARDING AT THE EFL: 2022-2025

LEADERSHIP, GOVERNANCE AND CULTURE

Safeguarding is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Everyone takes responsibility for safeguarding.

PREVENTION, POLICIES, PROCEDURE AND PRACTICE

These are effective safeguarding related policies, procedures and practices in place. They are consistently implemented, regularly reviewed and necessary reviewed.

EDUCATING AND EMPOWERING

Children and adults at risk are informed about their rights and everyone is equipped with safeguarding knowledge and skills.

PROTECTION

Concerns and complaints are taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately.

WORKING TOGETHER

There is a clear commitment to working together to promote and protect the safety and welfare of children and adults at risk.

LISTENING CULTURE

There is a culture that promotes listening and respecting views and wishes.

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Carabao Cup 2021/22

This season's Carabao Cup Final saw the highest in-home peak and average viewing figures on record for a League Cup Final on Sky Sports.

The match averaged 3.16 million viewers and peaked at over 4m, with fans from across the globe watching on as Liverpool beat Chelsea on penalties to claim a record ninth League Cup triumph.

Across Sky Sports' social and digital platforms, there were a total of 11.8m views throughout the day, with the introduction of new cameras bringing supporters even closer to the action.

History was also made before kick-off when British Sign Language interpreter Ben Bridger translated the national anthem, marking a first for English football.

85,512

Over 85,000 supporters turned out for this year's Final between Chelsea and Liverpool.



Liverpool captain **Jordan Henderson** is the only player in the current squad that remains from the side that last lifted the trophy in 2012.

9

The number of times Liverpool have **lifted the League Cup**

30

penalty shoot-outs were required to decide results in this season's competition, including the Final at Wembley Stadium.



5

Brentford's **Marcus Forss** and Arsenal's **Eddie Nketiah** are this season's Carabao Cup top scorers with five goals each



16

Doncaster Rovers' **Ethan Harrison** is the youngest player to have featured in this season's Carabao Cup, at **16 years and 3 months**

256

A total of 256 **goals** were scored in this season's Carabao Cup



16

Arsenal are the **top scorers** in this season's Carabao Cup, netting 16 goals before losing to Liverpool in the Semi-Finals



8

The highest number of **goals scored** in a single game by a team this season, when Southampton beat Newport County 8-0 at Rodney Parade

1,872

The number of days since **Manchester City** had last been knocked out in the Carabao Cup prior to their Round Four exit

MANAGER INTERVIEW | **MARK HUGHES**

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Two Premier Leagues, four FA Cups, three League Cups and a trio of European trophies. Bradford City boss Mark Hughes' CV is something to behold.

Taking the reins

The former Wales Manager has taken charge of over 450 top-flight games – the seventh-highest total of Premier League fixtures in history – but it was time to hit pause on his career.

It therefore came as a surprise when he attracted the attention of the Bantams midway through the term.

"A lot of people said at the time, 'what are you doing that for?'" Hughes explains. "That was probably people's opening line. Even some Managers after games at times, but it's what I do – it's what I've always done as a player or a Manager. It's been my life, so people shouldn't be too surprised that I want to still be involved."

Hughes – who managed at the highest level with the likes of Blackburn Rovers, Manchester City, Queens Park Rangers and Stoke City – took a hiatus from the hotseat in 2018 after leaving his post at Southampton.

But it took Sky Bet League Two to whet the appetite to dust off his suit and tie and take to the dugout once more.

He continues: "There is a question in your mind of whether you still have the energy or enthusiasm for the game to do the job to the level that I've always done it and I had nearly a three-year break, but I always felt that once I got back in, I'd know very quickly whether or not I still had the enthusiasm for it.

"I look back on my time in football and there have been very few times over the last 40 years when I've taken a step back. It's a long time. I've loved being back and we're all very excited by what's ahead of us, so that question has very much been cleared from my mind."

For all of his experience and silverware, Hughes was not immune to the fear of rejection, and faced a number of setbacks when he decided it was time to make his long-awaited comeback, after admitting to falling out of love with the game for a time.

"I started having conversations with people about coming back into the game, but actually, in truth, I didn't get as many conversations as I would have liked or expected, which disappointed me," he concedes. "I was getting a lot of feedback from Clubs that I've been out of the game a while or I haven't managed at this level, so I'm not the right fit.



"I still view myself as young enough to do this job at 58 years of age. I think sometimes experience is not acknowledged as much as it should be. It can sometimes be seen as a negative thing, that you've been around too long and on the managerial carrousel, but actually experience helps you so much in this job, it really does."

In dipping his toe into uncharted waters, he, by his own admission, risked his reputation, but there was something intriguing about a new challenge.

"When my boy who represents me came to me and chatted about Bradford City, he said to me, 'hear me out, there's an opportunity that's a little bit left field than what we've been looking at'," Hughes says. "He asked me what I thought, and I had never thought about Bradford, in truth, but once I looked at the Club and looked at the opportunity and the fact that they wanted a conversation with me made me want more information from them."

His appointment turned heads after inking a deal which keeps him at Valley Parade until 2024, shining a spotlight on the platform that League Two can provide, but Hughes insisted the focus is entirely on the task in hand at Bradford.

"There was a part of me that was thinking this was a challenge and wanting to prove people wrong, but it's certainly become less about me now I'm here and more about the challenge of really getting this Club going," he explains.

"People from the outside will be looking at how we finished the season and see that we're in a good place at the moment and a good option for players. I think it's obvious that we're going to have a real good go next year.

"There'll be a lot of big Clubs who will have something to say about that. It will by no means be easy but that's the challenge and we'll make sure we're up to it."

For a man who knew so little about the nature of the division, he's learnt so much in a short period of time.

Perhaps one of the biggest takeaways for Hughes was how much results matter for both the fans and the players, who pull on the jersey for their livelihoods on a weekly basis.

"I think the biggest difference at this level is, sometimes at the top level you make decisions that change players' lives and release them for example, but as a Manager you don't always get to speak to those players that your decisions impact the most – that's not the case at this level," he acknowledges.

"I don't mind that though, it's better and it's healthier because you have that one-to-one relationship with the player, and you can give them the advice to walk out and go and be a better player for it."

The West Yorkshire side finished the 2021/22 season in 14th – the same position the Bantams found themselves in when Hughes was appointed as the Club's new Manager.

But despite sitting 19 points adrift of the Play-Off places when the curtain came down on the campaign, he was buoyed by what he saw, particularly in Bradford's final run-in. The Bantams ended the term on a high, registering three successive wins against Scunthorpe United, Sutton United and Carlisle United.

"Coming in with 13 games to go gave me an opportunity to have a real snapshot of the Club and understand what was needed going into the summer," he states.

"In the 13 games I had as Manager, we pretty much played everyone above us in the table, so I feel it's given me a pretty good understanding of the division as well, so I know what to expect. I'm really encouraged by what the team showed me in those final few games."

Hughes took some time to get his bearings after succumbing to a 2-0 defeat at home to Mansfield Town in his first game in charge of the Club, but he's ready and raring to go for what's to come.

"The season just gone doesn't really illustrate what we're about or what I want us to be about – next year we have to be successful," he adds. "That will be the expectation and there'll be a huge expectation of success and focus on that, too.

"I wouldn't be surprised if some people want me to fail – I've had that a lot through my career! But there will be a lot of other people who want me to succeed and that's something as a Manager that you have to deal with."

European success and claiming every domestic honour on offer have made Hughes – who adopted the nickname of 'Sparky' during his playing days – somewhat used to the taste of victory during his career and he has no intention of leaving Bradford City empty-handed.

Nevertheless, he knows his latest role could pose his greatest challenge yet.

"Is this my biggest challenge in management? I'll find out," he answers. "Until I get right stuck into a full season, I can't say whether it'll be my biggest challenge, but a very different one, yes.



"THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT WAS THINKING THIS WAS A CHALLENGE AND WANTING TO PROVE PEOPLE WRONG, BUT IT'S CERTAINLY BECOME LESS ABOUT ME NOW I'M HERE AND MORE ABOUT THE CHALLENGE OF REALLY GETTING THIS CLUB GOING"

"There is a big difference between this level and the Premier League and what you're playing for. I'm conscious of that, that's something different I perhaps haven't experienced before and therefore players need managing differently."

Despite all the uncertainty about his return to football management last season, one thing was crystal clear to the former Manchester United forward – he will make it his mission to get Bradford, a Club who were plying their trade in the top flight just over 20 years ago, back on the right path.

The Bantams extended their three-season stay in League Two after posting a mid-table finish last season, but this marks a new era for the Club now that they've landed their man in Hughes.

"I know a lot of Managers like to play down the expectation of their group just so they can overachieve if they do well, but I've never done that," he asserts. "I've always tried to raise expectation. I think expectation is important; important to the players so you can challenge them, but also for the fans. Fans want to hear that we want to get out of this division and that is our intention.

"We want to go straight up next season; the intention is to be right in the mix next year as the bare minimum requirement. I'm not going to beat about the bush in terms of that. For me, it was quite clear that the Club has huge potential, it's got a huge fanbase and it's underachieving.

"The excitement is there and I want the new season to start now. I'm ready and want to take this Club forward."

Only time will tell how his latest managerial move will pan out, but if anyone can steer Bradford back on track, Hughes has the know-how to pull it off.

EFL | PAPA JOHNS
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PAPA JOHNS TROPHY | EFL

Sutton United were the feel-good story of this season's Papa Johns Trophy, with the U's making it all the way to Wembley in their first-ever campaign as an EFL Club.

Facing Rotherham United in the Final, the game began with comedians Paul Chuckle and Tim Vine delivering the match ball and trophy on mopeds, wearing the jerseys of their respective teams.

And the South Londoners were just moments away from completing the fairytale ending, with goals from Donovan Wilson and Craig Eastmond giving them a 2-1 lead deep into second-half stoppage time.

But a very late equaliser from Jordi Osei-Tutu broke the hearts of Matt Gray's courageous side, while goals from Chiedozie Ogbene and Michael Ihiekwe in extra-time secured the silverware for the Millers, who set a new record for most goals scored in an EFL Trophy campaign in the process.

Elsewhere, the competition continues to aid the development of young players, with the likes of Cameron Archer (Aston Villa Under-21s), Mason Burstow (Charlton Athletic), Matty Daly (on loan at Hartlepool United) and Divin Baningime (Wigan Athletic) all making a big impact during this season's campaign.

Cameron Archer is the leading goalscorer in the 2021/22 competition, netting **six times** for Aston Villa Under-21s.



6

123

Sutton United reached the Final in their first-ever EFL Trophy campaign, having waited **123 years** of their existence to achieve League status.

15

Plymouth Argyle fielded three 15-year-old debutants during their Group Stage opener against Newport County – **Freddie Issaka** (15 years 34 days), **Carlo Garside** (15 years 183 days) and **Oscar Massey** (15 years 223 days).



Teenage goalkeeper **Rhys Byrne** recorded the **most clean sheets**, as Leyton Orient managed to avoid conceding in all four of their Papa Johns Trophy matches.

27

Rotherham United set a new record for the most goals scored in a single EFL Trophy campaign, finding the back of the net **27 times** in their eight matches.

404

The total number of **goals** scored in this season's EFL Trophy.



11

matches in the knock-out stages were decided by a **penalty shoot-out**, including both Semi-Final ties.

9

The **highest number of goals** scored in a Papa Johns Trophy fixture this season, when Mansfield Town beat Leeds United Under-21s 6-3 at the One Call Stadium.

33

of the 39 EFL Trophy winners have come from the third tier. The only triumphant fourth-tier teams are **Wolverhampton Wanderers** (1988), **Carlisle United** (1997), **Milton Keynes Dons** (2008), **Luton Town** (2009), **Lincoln City** (2018) and **Salford City** (2020).

MEET THE EFL'S CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER
AND ITS TEAMS

After 21 full seasons at the EFL, earlier this year former Governance and Legal Director **Nick Craig** was appointed as the League's Chief Operating Officer – a role unoccupied since the retirement of Andy Williamson OBE in 2016.

Nick joined as the League's in-house lawyer, progressing to Director of Legal Affairs, before becoming Governance and Legal Director. He has been a member of the Executive for a number of years and has completed 21 seasons at the EFL, having joined in 2001. Just as within Clubs, the EFL has a number of different functions, all of which are focused around the principle of football operations.

An important appointment at a critical time for the League, the re-introduction of the Chief Operating Officer role will allow a closer working relationship between Clubs and the EFL, to not only help build positive relationships, but to effectively run the operations of the EFL, while supporting the League's strategy to ensure that Clubs' voices are heard in key, strategic decisions across the organisation.

Chief Operating Officer, Nick Craig, said: "The aim is to serve Clubs based on their requirements while still maintaining the strength of the League and its 72 Clubs, as well as continuing to support the operations of the EFL."

The role will oversee a number of operational functions at the EFL, including the management of the Football Services Department, Player Administration, Governance, Legal, Youth Development and the implementation of the League's Safeguarding strategy.

INTRODUCING THE CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER AND ITS FUNCTION:

FOOTBALL SERVICES

- The management of the compilation of all EFL fixtures (including the Carabao Cup and Papa Johns Trophy);
- The organisation of all cup competitions;
- TV selections and rearrangements of fixtures that come with the organisation of all EFL competitions (including those disrupted by the 2022 World Cup in Qatar);
- The running of the Community Education Football Alliance League (CEFA) – a competition that provides a valuable link between education at Club Community Organisations (CCOs) and the desire of participants within those CCOs to play football at an organised level that is not professional;
- The organisation of all EFL showpiece Finals and events, including; the Carabao Cup Final, Papa Johns Trophy Final, Play-Off Finals, EFL Awards and Summer Conference;
- Club Relationships – providing significant ongoing support to Clubs in terms of the competing demands that are put on them by the League to ensure the EFL is a successful, vibrant and professional competition. Such support and guidance includes the delivery of all sponsorship initiatives and programmes, as well as support around compliance and regulations that hold everyone to the most appropriate standards.

PLAYER ADMINISTRATION

- The management of the registration of every single player aged nine and above to their respective Club;
- The registration of all player transfers throughout both the January and Summer Transfer Window.



CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER | **NICK CRAIG**

GOVERNANCE

- The Governance Department has a complete oversight of all changes of control at Clubs in compliance with the EFL Regulations;
- It is also responsible for effectively implementing the Owners' and Directors' Test as per the EFL Regulations with each change of control.

LEGAL

- The management of all legal resource for commercial programmes;
- Provides advice on the drafting and application of EFL Regulations;
- Provides legal support to the business as a whole;
- The EFL's partnership with LawInSport, which has been launched to provide Clubs with access to online resources, course materials and a wide network of legal professionals to help advise and assist.

SYSTEMS & ANALYSIS

- Supporting all of the football systems which underpin the work of the EFL, including the Football Administration System (FAS) and associates Club applications via the Club Portal;
- Providing data and analysis across those sectors in support of the EFL's wider strategies.

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Provides ongoing help, guidance and assistance to players and parents, as well as works closely with other organisations, particularly the Premier League and Football Association to further the Youth Development system;
- Provides direct support to Clubs via a team of Regional Managers;
- Management of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) within the Club Academy system;
- Management of the Youth Development and Central League;
- Player to Coach Pathway;
- Club Developed Players;
- Integrated Coaching Strategy.

SAFEGUARDING

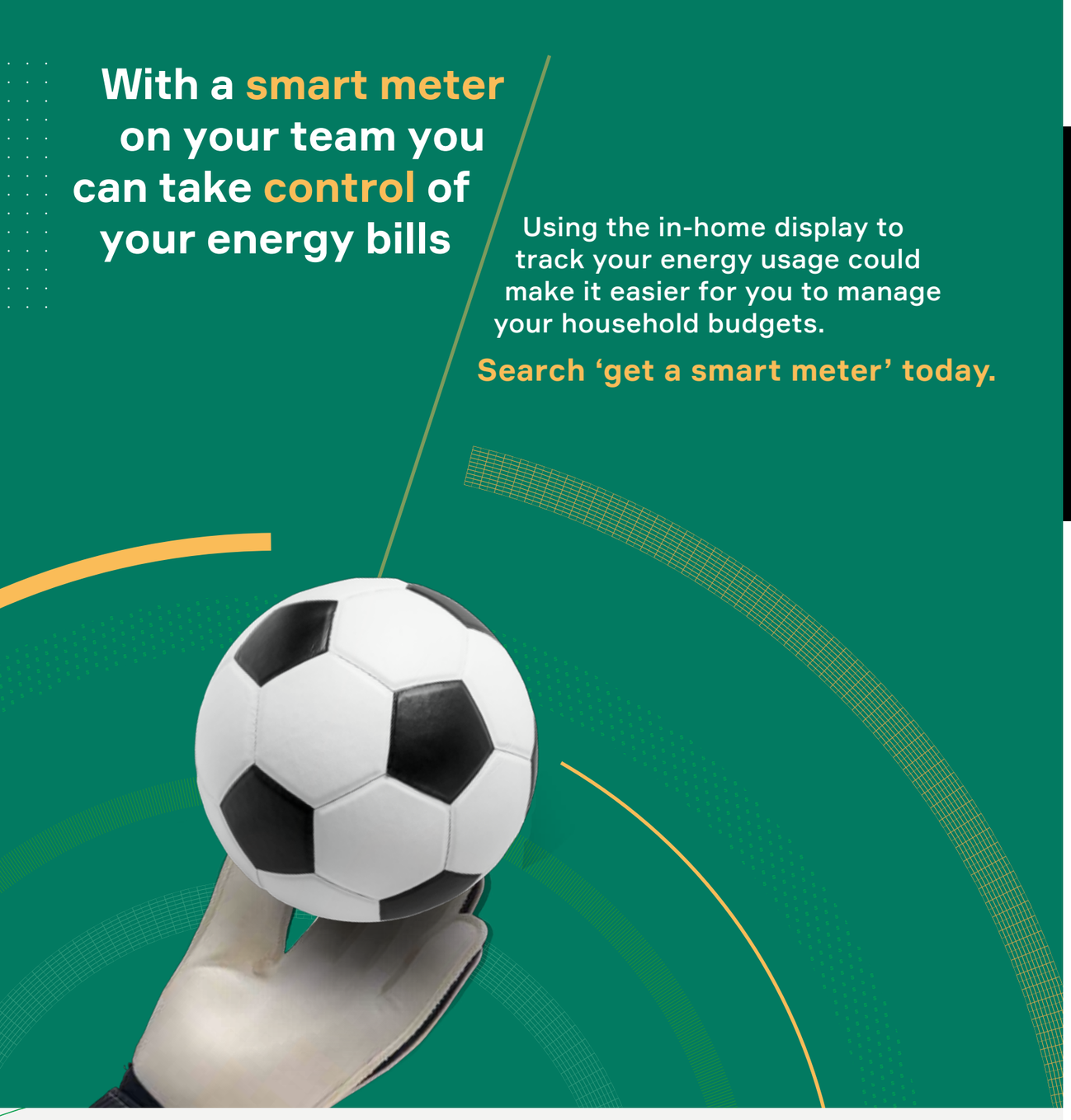
- Delivering the EFL's new three-year safeguarding strategy as part of the League's commitment to promote the welfare of children, young people and adults at risk;
- Ensuring the EFL's safeguarding standards are implemented at all EFL Clubs, including safeguarding children, safeguarding adults at risk and player welfare.
- For more information on Safeguarding at the EFL, please visit page 28.

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WORDS // **DAVID MCARDLE** EFL'S HEAD OF EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

TACKLING EDI TOGETHER



The beautiful game is something to be enjoyed by everyone, together.

But for some, that might not be straightforward.

What if you don't feel welcomed because the language used in the stands states your sexual orientation is a negative?

What if you miss part of the action as your sight lines are affected because you require the use of a wheelchair?

Or what if there is a glass ceiling due to your gender or a lack of visible role models off the pitch which represents your ethnicity and background?

In the past, the EFL and its Clubs have made tremendous strides in establishing our position within the changing environment.

Our ground-breaking partnership with charity partner Mind has not only brought the conversation of mental health and wellbeing within football to a new level, both in the stands and changing rooms, but has also altered how charity partnerships across sport can be used to make real social change.

The establishment of regulation 125 – the Minority Coaches rule – five years ago has moved forward how football in the UK can challenge under-representation of coaches across EFL Clubs and, since its inception, appointments of black, Asian and mixed heritage coaches are above 15% of total hires each year.

As part of the rule, Clubs must include at least one suitably qualified black, Asian and mixed heritage candidate (where an application has been received) on the interview shortlist for a coaching position.

And the development of the EFL Code of Practice has allowed Clubs to understand their requirements and set out criteria to ensure Clubs can begin their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion journey and be protected, ensuring key aspects are in place to support the understanding of challenges which they face.

Through our previous work, we would like to think there are no barriers, however, the under-representation statistics and anecdotal evidence show these barriers exist and the perception across the public suggests we require change.

Change requires the game to continue to go on a journey and Clubs will be part of further action next season to continue the progress.

The EFL, through our new strategy called Together, has set a path which allows our Clubs to understand how they can make an impact and be supported by the EFL, who take the lead to reach our mission:

The EFL establishes a best-in-class provision, ensuring inclusive opportunities within the EFL environment through sustainable and effective change.

Working towards this mission will lead to the advancement towards our vision:

The EFL and its Clubs are reflective and representative of the communities in which they serve at all levels of the game.

The strategy has been established through the pillars of support, educate, communicate, embed and listen, with tactics used across these pillars to make the changes required and allow the EFL and its Clubs to continue forward on our journey together.

Throughout the next five years, the Together strategy will make several advancements which will allow the EFL and its Clubs to achieve the mission and continue towards our overall vision.

The EFL will launch I-Recruit, a blind recruitment tool which will allow Clubs to continue supporting Regulation 125, as well as progress the advancement of the hiring of under-represented coaches across the game.

In addition, I-Recruit, over time, will allow Clubs to use the system for all vacancies throughout the Club, including foundations, once again challenging under-representation across football.

The existing Code of Practice has been redeveloped to offer a greater level of support for the Clubs. The Code will administer across three separate levels – Gold, Silver and Bronze – allowing Clubs to continue on their journey providing opportunities to celebrate their achievements and develop structures across the Club.

The EFL will advance the opportunity for Clubs to be educated across various EDI topics. The education provision will provide webinars, covering areas such as discussing elements of Club structures and challenging topical EDI subjects.

The EFL will develop E-Learning opportunities for Clubs, allowing simple and easy access to key information. Added to this, the EFL will produce support documents and guides, allowing Clubs the opportunity to understand good practice and give them the ability to implement it.

The Strategy will allow the EFL and its Clubs to be at the forefront of EDI conversations across football and society, working in partnership with equality stakeholders to ensure the EFL has a voice, as well as vocal leadership, to make meaningful and effective change.

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

Creating an inclusive culture

The EFL is committed to promoting diversity and providing equal opportunities for all, with the aim of creating a more inclusive environment.

To further develop processes and procedures, as well as continuing the spread of awareness, a new partnership with Muslim Chaplains in Sport (MCS) has been established ahead of the 2022/23 season.

Clubs will have the opportunity to invite a chaplain to visit for free and discuss any issues in a safe space, while a range of additional educational services will also be made available.

The EFL's Head of EDI, David McArdle, says: "It's vital that we ensure our Clubs are educated and have an understanding of how best to support their players and staff, so that they can provide a suitable and correct environment for everyone within the Club.

"Working with Muslim Chaplains in Sport will allow the EFL to ensure our Clubs have access to expert knowledge and experience, who can advise in potential changes to the environment, as well as offer support to players.

"The exciting partnership is one of a number of new education provisions and partnerships that the EFL will provide to our Clubs to ensure the EFL and our Clubs can be reflective and representative of the communities which they serve."

MCS have provided informative workshops to EFL Clubs, particularly at Academy level, since 2018 via the Life Skills programme that is delivered by the EFL's education partner, League Football Education (LFE).

Ismail Bhamji, MCS Managing Director, adds: "This partnership is huge for professional football as this is the first of its kind and has never been introduced before.

"This goes to show the impact we've already jointly been able to make via the education programmes at Clubs. I believe it is the acceptance and success of our workshops which has encouraged and supported the idea of establishing chaplaincy at every EFL Club from the 2022/23 season.

"Now that this is available, I am confident more and more Muslim players and staff will be happy to discuss any issues or ideas with us and the Club in confidence."

The work of MCS in football so far has fallen into two categories – education, player care and welfare, and chaplaincy.











Topics covered in their Life Skills sessions include an introduction to Islam, Islamic cultural awareness, prayer guidance, halal dietary requirements, Ramadan awareness, guidance for host families and British cultural awareness for new incoming players.

Meanwhile, the chaplaincy work offers Muslim players and staff a support mechanism, which deals with confidential support and pastoral care that can only be dealt with by professional, qualified and expert people.

Bhamji continues: "Our aim is to make football accessible and a safe place for Muslim athletes to participate in, and also for potential aspiring Muslim athletes to consider sports as a career in which they can flourish.

"In addition, we want to make the non-Muslim audience aware of the rituals and practices within the Muslim faith, as this acceptance and awareness will help them in understanding what to expect from their Muslim colleagues and result in a welcoming, warm and friendly environment for all.

"Our approach is to be as warm and open as possible during our workshops, which naturally allows the players and staff to open up and ask any questions they may have. We want to ensure they leave with something they did not know before.

"Until recently, there has been a culture in football where players will not open up on their religious affiliation and beliefs, but we are seeing a change in this and believe this will lead to an increase in Muslim participation in football, as well as acceptance, too."

The insight and guidance provided by MCS has impacted the delivery of various projects by Clubs, with their workshops opening discussions about offering prayer spaces at Club facilities, ensuring halal food is available, holding consultations on Ramadan and its effects on Muslim athletes and much more.

Huddersfield Town's Head of Education, Mike Mawson, explains: "Ismail speaks with great authority and with a passion for his subject, which puts all workshop participants at ease, creating a mood of respect and encouraging a desire for a deeper understanding among those who take part.

"His workshop covered the Five Pillars of Islam, and was very thorough in describing how one of these Five Pillars, Ramadan, is observed in principle and practice. He explained the purpose of Ramadan, the method of calculating the key dates, the disciplines followed by Muslims during Ramadan and the potential effects on the body and other implications for elite athletes.

"The workshop was very detailed and was one of those training events that you remember lots about. Our players that took part were really interested and asked lots of questions at the end of the workshop. It was a real highlight of our Player Care programme for the season."

Having engaged with a vast range of the football community, from players aged eight to first-team professionals, from Club staff to parents and guardians, Muslim Chaplains in Sport continues to make positive change in the acceptance and knowledge of the Muslim faith.

Bhamji adds: "Due to the length of time that we have offered support within football, we have visited players when they were very young and then have had the pleasure of working with the same player again in a higher age group.

"The level of knowledge, particularly in those players, and willingness to accept others of different faiths has been evident and this is what's needed in establishing an inclusive and knowledgeable culture for those who are hoping to come through the ranks and break though into first team and professional football.

"With our continued and joint efforts, I am confident in saying that the culture will only improve in football and a representation of various minority groups will increase."



WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

On the RIGHT TRACK

For the first time in his career, **Jack Whatmough** was ever-present in the league throughout the 2021/22 campaign.

And that coincided with Wigan Athletic securing the Sky Bet League One title, with the 25-year-old being named in the division's Team of the Season, as well as winning the Latics' Player of the Year award.

PLAYER INTERVIEW | **JACK WHATMOUGH**

/theEFL /EFL /efl

Having decided to leave Portsmouth after 12 years at the Club last summer, Whatmough couldn't have wished for a better debut season at the DW Stadium.

"It's the best group of lads I've ever played with," he says. "There was a really good spirit and everyone was looking forward to the task of getting the Club back in the Championship.

"There were a lot of good teams and a lot of Clubs that have been in the Premier League in the last 10 or so years, but we had belief from day one that we could get promoted and for us to win that league showed how well we've done.

"Collectively, it was a really good season and individually, to be recognised at the end showed that all the hard work was worth it. I enjoyed every second of it and when you enjoy your football, you play your best football.

"Considering my career has been a little bit stop and start, playing a full season was something I wanted to tick off. I remember starting the final game against Shrewsbury and in my head thinking, 'I've played in every game now'. That was a good feeling."



Featuring in all 46 matches is an accomplishment that has been a long time coming for the Gosport-born defender.

Three severe knee injuries restricted Whatmough to fewer than 100 outings in seven seasons after making his first-team debut as a 17-year-old in November 2013.

The first setback came at the tender age of 18, when the promising centre-back ruptured his ACL and suffered a shin fracture in the same incident.

"At that time, I was young and naïve to the length of time that I was going to be out – I thought it was going to be a breeze," he recalls. "But I didn't play again for Portsmouth for 17 months after doing that, so it was tough to overcome.

"Then I had two more significant injuries quite close together and I probably rushed coming back from the first one as I was just eager to play football. The last one, I had the proper surgery that I should've had, took my time and listened to my body and the advice of the physio."

Since returning from that third long-term stint in the medical room – repairing a torn articular cartilage – Whatmough has remained injury free, amassing 88 appearances in just two seasons.



But while his career now appears to be on an upward trajectory, Whatmough's journey wasn't without its fair share of trials and tribulations, particularly from a mental health standpoint.

"I think that's one thing that doesn't get spoken about enough within football," he affirms. "It's tough enough when you're playing and things might not be going perfectly on the pitch, but to be injured and have to go through that feeling of not being able to help the team, it can become mentally tough and that's something I did find.

"My girlfriend at the time, who I've just recently married, was incredible when I had to go through that. We rearranged the house so that I could avoid having to go up and down the stairs for two months and she helped me shower and everything.

"In those first couple of months, you really are just stuck in a room all day, every day, which can be really difficult. You look for a buzz that isn't football and I turned to alcohol and gambling, which obviously wasn't the best thing."

During his darkest moments, Whatmough admits that he would drink between four and eight cans of lager a day, while the occasional flutter on horseracing via betting apps escalated into visits to casinos and betting shops.

That was until he finally plucked up the courage to speak about his emotional plight, which would ultimately lead him on the road to recovery, with support from the Sporting Chance Clinic.

"Like a lot of blokes, I was a bit too proud to ask for that help at first, but as soon as I spoke about how I was feeling, it was a weight off my shoulders," Whatmough confesses.

"I went to Sporting Chance and spoke to a guy called Barry for a few weeks – the level of support you can receive as a footballer is incredible. It was really good to sit down and speak to someone who didn't know me, so it was a different voice and a different opinion, rather than my family or the Club. That really worked well for me.

"Portsmouth were incredible as well. Kenny Jackett was the Manager at the time and I spoke to him on the phone for 10 or 15 minutes – he was very supportive. Clubs don't look down on you when you're struggling; they try to help.

"Speaking out is definitely a lot healthier than bottling things up. It was stupid what I was trying to do, but that's way behind me now and I'm really enjoying my life again."

Now in a good place mentally and physically, Whatmough is making the most of it, enjoying a summer of fun before attention switches to his first season as a Sky Bet Championship player.

"This summer has probably been the busiest I've ever had!" he states. "First of all, to be able to celebrate with the fans after becoming champions was amazing – it was nice to see smiles on the faces of everyone.



"Shortly after the season had ended, I went to Vegas, then I had my stag do and I also flew out to Spain for my mate's wedding. I came back to get married myself and then flew out for my honeymoon, so it's been a busy one!

"I've got two young kids and they're my switch off away from football, so I'm spending a lot of time with them as well, while trying to fit in some training around that."

Although he is very much focused on what's to come, the former England youth international hasn't forgotten about his upbringing at Fratton Park.

Whatmough explains: "It was tough to make that decision to leave, but at some point, in any job you do, sometimes you just get to that stage where you need something new and I felt I was at that point.

"I'll always be grateful to Portsmouth for giving me that opportunity in football. There were a lot of good people in the Club who wanted to help.

"Andy Awford gave me my debut at 17 in his first game as Caretaker Manager against Southend. I remember him telling me to bring all my family down because I'd be making my debut. Originally, I said I needed three tickets, but Andy called my mum and it ended up being about 13 people coming along.



"He was incredible – he just knew when to give you a compliment and when to bring you back down to earth.

"Then there was Jon Slater (Head of Education). As a second-year scholar, I was travelling a lot with the first team and would miss a lot of education sessions on a Wednesday. He would take the time to sit with me on a Thursday afternoon after training to help me stay on track. He also spoke to us a lot about life after football, which kept us all level-headed."

Whatmough's only regret? Not achieving promotion from League One with the Club he joined as a 13-year-old.

"Being a local lad, I took a lot of personal responsibility for the inability to get promoted when we had such a good opportunity to do so," he notes.

"Three and a half years ago, Portsmouth were clear at the top in January and then slid into the Play-Offs. That year ended in disappointment and then we had another Play-Off defeat the following year. We just missed out on the Play-Offs the season after.

"I was desperate to help them get promoted, but it wasn't meant to be. Now, I'm just looking forward to testing myself in the Championship for the first time with Wigan."

Having overcome so much adversity already in his career, Whatmough is more than deserving of the opportunity to compete at the next level.

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WORDS // **BILLIE MARSHALL**

THE FANS ARE BACK!

As Jock Stein famously once said, "football without fans is nothing."

After an 18-month hiatus for many due to the pandemic, supporters once again flocked back to stadia across the EFL to follow their teams in action.

Twenty million supporters made their way through the turnstiles of EFL competitions during the 2021/22 season, including almost 18m for matches across the Sky Bet Championship, League One and League Two.

An impressive number, given the vast challenges facing society in general over the recent period.

Of that figure, 9.3m came via the Championship, with Nottingham Forest, buoyed by the arrival of Steve Cooper earlier in the season, recording the highest average attendance at just over 27,000.

Perhaps the most impressive statistic from the season came via League One. The divisional aggregate of over 5.6m (including Play-Off fixtures) was the best third-tier aggregate since 1959/60 in the old Division Three (5.7m).

A big part of that number was Sunderland AFC who, after their four-year stay in the division, confirmed their place in the Championship for 2022/23 after defeating Wycombe Wanderers in the Play-Off Final at Wembley in May.

Alex Neil's side gained success both on and off the pitch, with the 38,395 in attendance at the Stadium of Light against Doncaster Rovers being the highest during the regular season across all three divisions.



10,090

Peterborough United's average attendance of 10,090 was their highest average attendance of the 21st century (previous high: 9,111 – Championship 2011/12).

And it wasn't just in League One that supporters were eager to return to their matchday seats, with League Two also welcoming on average an attendance of almost 5,000 at each fixture – the second highest EFL tier-four average attendance this century.

The culmination of the regular season in League Two was one of the more dramatic occasions in recent memory, but it was at the Utilita Energy Stadium where a divisional-high attendance for the season was being set, as Bradford City hosted 18,283 supporters for their final fixture of the 2021/22 campaign against Carlisle United.

Away from the League, the Cup competitions continued to provide drama and excitement,

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20m

A total of 20 million fans attended fixtures in EFL competition this season; 9.4m in the Championship, 5.6m in League One, 2.8m in League Two, 1.4m in the Carabao Cup and 257k in the Papa Johns Trophy.

5,524,204

The best tier three aggregate since 5,714,961 in the old Division Three of 1959/60.

1,426,707

The cumulative attendance for the Carabao Cup for the 2021/22 season.

17,605,726

The cumulative attendance for all three EFL divisions in 2021/22.

2,703,428

The highest fourth tier aggregate since 2,707,012 in League Two of 2015/16.

15,508

The average Carabao Cup attendance for the 2021/22 campaign.

2,028

The average attendance for the Papa Johns Trophy in 2021/22 (a 25% increase from 2019/20)



18,283

The highest League Two attendance of the 2021/22 season as Bradford City faced Carlisle United on the final day (7 May 2022).



32,211

Derby County v Birmingham City drew in the highest attendance in the Sky Bet Championship in 2021/22.



38,395

Sunderland AFC v Doncaster Rovers – the highest EFL league attendance post-pandemic. This game marked Jermain Defoe's second debut for the Black Cats.

with Liverpool going on to lift the Carabao Cup, while Rotherham United won the Papa Johns Trophy in a thrilling tie against EFL newcomers Sutton United.

The 2021/22 cumulative attendance in the Carabao Cup was over 1.4m, 7% higher than in 2019/20 and 12% higher than in 2018/19, whereas the Papa Johns Trophy welcomed over 2,000 supporters on average at each fixture, an increase from the 2019/20 campaign.

The past season has simply highlighted that the appetite for live sport hasn't gone away, with action in the EFL continuing to engage millions of supporters across the country.

‘Kickstarting’ young people’s careers

Over the past 18 months, our network of Club Community Organisations (CCOs) have provided over 700 life-changing experiences for young people through the DWP’s Kickstart Programme.





THE KICKSTART PROGRAMME WAS INTRODUCED DURING THE PANDEMIC TO PROVIDE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN WORK EXPERIENCE, VALUABLE SKILLS AND TO PROVIDE A PLATFORM TO PROPEL THEM INTO THEIR WORKING CAREER.

The opportunities were vital, as young people were finding it increasingly more difficult to secure employment after finishing school or university. Kickstart provided the bridge needed between young people and full-time employment.

Kickstart opportunities at EFL Clubs and their Community Organisations were vast, with a broad range of roles available, including: business administration, sports coaches, marketing, ground staff, finance, youth work, graphic design, film and photography, HR and data administration.

Of the 714 young people that gained employment through Kickstart, 86% have gone on to full or part-time employment, apprenticeships or further training.

Mike Evans, Chief Executive at the EFL Trust, said: “We’re immensely proud at the EFL Trust of the impact our network has had through the Kickstart programme and changing the lives of over 700 young people.

“Nationwide, the EFL Clubs and Community Organisations have undertaken a collective endeavour to help bridge the gap for young people out of work, to get them into the workplace.

“Young people have been one of the groups hardest hit by the pandemic and have struggled to find job opportunities. Kickstart has allowed the power of the Club badge to once again be a force for good and an opportunity for young people, like Maddi at AFC Wimbledon, Hamda at QPR and Henry at Harrogate Town, to raise their aspirations and achieve great things.”

Success Stories



Hamda’s Story:

After losing her job, the Kickstart programme gave Hamda a new role supporting the NCS programme with Queens Park Rangers, which she herself had benefitted from. Hamda searched for full-time employment and came across an NCS Admin Support Officer vacancy at QPR – her local Club.

Five years previously, Hamda had taken part in NCS, a programme that helps build the confidence of young people. Knowing how NCS had benefited her, she knew this was the job for her. Hamda secured the role after impressing with her enthusiastic approach to social action.

This role has ignited a passion in Hamda and she now has turned her passion into a career, as she gained a full-time role at QPR, and will continue working with young people in her local community. The Kickstart programme provided a huge stepping stone for Hamda’s future and she now has a wealth of hands-on knowledge and experience to pass on to others.

Hamda said: “In 2015, I took part in the NCS programme, and it was honestly one of the best experiences of my life, so to be working full-time in this role is an amazing opportunity.”

Henry’s Story:

Eighteen months after starting his initial Kickstart placement, Henry Whitaker has thrived in his full-time role at Harrogate Town Community Foundation as the Club’s Media Assistant.



With a First-Class Honours degree in Journalism, Henry joined the Foundation on a full-time basis after making an impression during his initial role at the North Yorkshire Club. Henry became the first ‘Kickstarter’ to complete his placement and move into full-time employment within the EFL Club and CCO network.

Henry’s hard endeavour and determination within his Kickstart placement became well acclaimed across the network, and he was invited to co-host the EFL Trust National Conference in October 2021 at St George’s Park.

Henry now has a full season under this belt and is working full-time for the Sulphurites.

He said: “My move into full-time employment with the Club was bolstered by the Kickstart Scheme and I’m so glad I went down that path, as it’s opened so many doors for me and helped me get the job I’d dreamt for.

“It’s been a very busy but enjoyable season working with Harrogate Town and the Harrogate Town Community Foundation. I’ve found myself doing a variety of different roles, including social media coverage and creating a host of digital content that’s been used across the Club’s website, social media platforms and matchday programme. I’ve loved every second of it and feel I’ve learned so many technical and personal skills over the past 12 months.”

Maddi’s Story:

Like thousands of young people, 22-year-old Maddi Sweetman found it extremely hard to find employment during the pandemic. Maddi had achieved 8 GCSE’s A* to B and had lots of voluntary experience as a coach, but Maddi just couldn’t find the opportunity she needed.



Maddi’s fortunes changed when a Kickstart position became available at her beloved AFC Wimbledon as an Assistant Community Coach.

Since her Kickstart role, Maddi has secured a full-time role with the Dons and more recently accepted the award for Your Move Community Club of the Season on behalf of AFC Wimbledon at the EFL Awards, where Maddi was on stage and spoke about her story in front of hundreds of people.

Maddi commented: “I have been helped so much by Kickstart. To be able to have an opportunity, not only at the Club I love, but just to get my foot in the door for a career in football, is so fantastic. I’m so excited to get involved around the community.

“Helping is my passion, and to know everything I am doing is for a good cause and also representing my Club, I just couldn’t have asked for anything better.”

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Open for Business

The 2021/22 season saw Accrington Stanley's new hospitality and conference venue throw open its doors for business in style.

Among more than 50 VIP guests, EFL Chair Rick Parry and former Minister for Sport Tracey Crouch CBE were on site to officially cut the ribbon as the state-of-the-art facility opened for business in March.

The facility was up and running for the visit of Charlton Athletic to Lancashire during the same month, marking its opening in style with a 2-1 win over the Addicks.

"I would like to congratulate Andy Holt, the Board and everybody at Accrington Stanley on the opening of their brand-new hospitality and conference venue at the Wham Stadium," says Parry, who attended the grand unveiling.

"This facility will not only provide opportunities for additional income on matchdays, but it will also be available throughout the year for the community of Accrington.

"This significant investment at this level of the football pyramid is a prime example of Clubs thinking creatively to enhance the matchday experience whilst looking to create a sustainable future.

"It's a great project because our purpose at the EFL is all about making Clubs sustainable and this is a great example of it. We're doing our bit, or we're trying to, in terms of how the big revenues are distributed, but Clubs have to help themselves as well and this is a really exciting example of that."

The venue comprises three areas which are open to the public and available to hire: Coley's, the 1968 Lounge and The Snug.

Stanley boss John Coleman lent his name to the main supporters' bar, which is open from Friday to Sunday, along with all matchdays, with the Club paying tribute to the long-serving Manager who celebrated two decades in the dugout across separate spells.

The bar serves a selection of beers, wines and spirits, as well as a traditional pie, peas and gravy dish, while fans can take in the latest live sports on wall mounted 85-inch televisions as they enjoy their stay.





The 1968 Lounge is a nod to the year Accrington reformed and is also in use on matchdays for hospitality, but can also be hired out for other events – both formal and informal – including weddings, family celebrations, parties, business meetings and conferences.

And, completing the £2.5 million facility, The Snug – or champagne bar – is a smaller venue which can be hired out at any time, with all needs catered for.

"Quite often, we just get completely obsessed with what's happening in the Premier League and yet it's Clubs like Accrington Stanley that help feed that success that we see across the world," adds Crouch.

"We've got one of the deepest football pyramids and that's because we've got Clubs like Accrington Stanley investing in itself, believing in itself and definitely growing for the future.

"It's quite clear that this is a community Club; it is here for the community and it needs to stay for the community going forward."

Located behind the HML Recycling Jack Barrett Main Stand, the venue offers panoramic views of Stanley's Wham Stadium.

"This is probably the premier venue for a good 30-mile radius and hopefully it can sustain the Club for years to come and give us a platform to prosper and grow as a Football Club," says Manager Coleman.

"We've got to try and get as many people in here as possible to experience what's on offer but the fact that you can come and eat, drink and watch a band is all good for the matchday experience."

And Accrington owner Andy Holt explained how the venue can give back to the wider community of Accrington, benefitting the local area.

"It's been two years in the making and we are really proud of this venue," he explains. "This is for the community of Accrington to use, it's for the Club to be able to support itself financially and it's another step forward for Accrington Stanley.

"I don't think there is a venue like this at any other Football Club. It's a fantastic facility, it's been done as well as we could and we've now got a really good venue that the local community can adopt and use it for its needs.

"It's important that people get to see what we're about and what we're trying to do. It's important to see what this can do for Accrington as a town and for Accrington as a Club."

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Crowd behaviour

In many ways, 2021/22 was a rollercoaster of a season, beginning with fans returning to the unknown after a season behind closed doors in August, then ending with jubilant scenes in May for winners of the Play-Offs at Wembley Stadium.

In the first half of the season, supporters had to deal with Covid protocols, Covid passes and Covid postponements through the winter, yet despite those challenges, almost 20 million fans returned to show up in huge numbers for Clubs once again.

While most fans returned in the spirit intended, unfortunately, through the season an increase in unwelcome crowd behaviour at matches led the EFL and Clubs to initiate the 'For Football's Sake' (FFS) campaign.

Launched in March, the FFS campaign calls on people not to spoil the match for others, while reminding the minority that there are consequences for criminal acts at football, including banning orders and criminal convictions.

On the final days of the season and some Play-Off Semi-Finals, sadly, a reckless few put football back in the national spotlight for the wrong reasons.

In response, EFL CEO Trevor Birch wrote an open letter to fans with the message that pitch incursions would not be tolerated, stating: "There can be no blurring of the lines or ambiguity with this matter. Simply put, the pitch is for participants and the stands for spectators."

Birch added that as part of ongoing work, "the EFL will be working with the various authorities on a series of measures during the close season to help reinforce that message and address the challenge that is being presented to the game."

Furthermore, discussions with Clubs will consider "what further measures could be introduced for the new season, including the potential use of capacity reductions, financial penalties or other similar mitigations."



"WHAT IS CLEAR IS THAT WE CANNOT ALLOW UNACCEPTABLE FAN BEHAVIOUR TO CONTINUE IN ITS CURRENT FORM."

It was an issue that EFL Chief Operating Officer Nick Craig stressed as a priority for the EFL and wider game for 2022/23 and beyond.

"The last season has shown that the return of fans after lockdown presents a key risk," Craig says. "Not only to players and match officials on the field of play, but also to fans and Club facilities, as well as the brand and reputation of the League and its Clubs."

With Premier League Clubs also experiencing a number of issues towards the end of the 2021/22 season, work will be done to drive improvements across several key areas, including a new stewarding training package that will come into effect in due course.

This will sit alongside liaising with the Sports Ground Safety Authority, data gathering to help improve the understanding and identification of offenders and, most importantly, education amongst players, managers and fan groups.

Craig adds: Craig adds: "By working with the Leagues, the FA, the Clubs and their safety officers, we can develop coordinated plans. There is a definite challenge in fans not wanting to listen to the Leagues or the Football Association, so we have to find a way to communicate with fans not only through the Clubs, but also fan groups.

"What is clear is that we cannot allow unacceptable fan behaviour to continue in its current form."



[BEHIND THE SCENES]

The Kitman

The EFL's 'Behind the Scenes' feature puts the spotlight on the role of a Kit Manager, with Bolton Wanderers' Ted Moulden providing an insight into the demands of the job...

WORDS // **JACK WYLIE**

Back in 2017, Ted Moulden's career aspirations were firmly focused on playing for Bolton Wanderers.

Having signed scholarship forms at the Club, the defender was a key member of the Under-18s side that reached the Professional Development League National Semi-Finals, following a second-place finish in the Northern section.

But injury brought his budding playing prospects to an abrupt end, with Moulden forced to retire at the conclusion of the 2017/18 season.

"It was tough," he admits. "Ask any kid in the Academy, all you dream about is becoming a professional player. You put every bit of your life into it.

"You go to sleep early, you eat well, you exercise and keep fit – even when you're on holiday – so for it to end like that was difficult, especially as a Bolton lad.

"I've got a condition with both of my ankles, where the bone hasn't grown properly. I saw at least 15 specialists and I was a case study in Hull hospital. Twelve surgeons came into a room and I was presented as a case and they looked at movements of the joints.

"I received plenty of help. Anthony Cato and Craig Skinner at LFE (League Football Education) supported me a lot and then Oshor Williams at The PFA has been brilliant and always kept in touch."

Wanderers were also on hand to support Moulden, with the Club aiding his transition into the next phase of his life by offering a part-time position with the kit staff, which has developed into a permanent 'Head Kitman' role.

"The Club has been brilliant; they helped me a lot and tried to keep me involved," he explains. "To be honest, I didn't really want to stay involved with football.

"My mum had seen a barbering course online, so I did an intensive course for 12 weeks and qualified as a barber. But I knew the two Club Kitmen, Paul Huddy and Michael Hawke, and Hawkey needed someone to be his assistant when Huddy left to go to Preston.

"About a month after I'd come back to the Club, Hawkey also went to Preston, so the gaffer (Ian Evatt) pulled me into his office and asked if I fancied doing it on my own! It's given me a routine and a purpose and that's got me through a difficult period in my life."

Now 21, Moulden is established in his new career. As he explains, there's a lot more involved than just folding up kit.

"Day-to-day, I get in at about 7am to lay all the kit out for training," he says. "On a matchday, I take the lads' boots, shin pads, sliders, t-shirts, jumpers, pants, socks, under-shorts, under-armers and obviously the match shirts.



"During the week, I'll do the printing for all the shirts, with the sponsor on the front, sleeve badges and then the name and number on the back. After games, I'll get back and put the kit in the wash – the laundrette, Alison, comes in and finishes them off.

"Then there's things like cleaning and stretching boots and changing studs, as well as having to learn what each lad needs in their match pack – Marlon Fossey, for example, always needs a headband in his pack and that's my job to make sure he has it.

"The only time I've messed up was at Oxford United away in February. I tried to change George Johnston's metal studs and one broke off. Luckily, I had his spare pair of studs on my van, so it all ended fine and we won the game as well!"

It would be fair to say the job isn't without its idiosyncrasies...

"Alex Baptiste loves getting his studs changed," Moulden reveals. "He must have asked me at least 15 times this season! He's a top fella, so I don't mind doing it for him.

"Matt Gilks, who is now our goalkeeping coach, used to have two t-shirts instead of an under-armer and two pairs of pants. Then there's other lads that wear certain socks or their own shin pads.

"The strangest thing I have ever been asked for as a Kitman is when someone in the crowd held a sign up asking for one of the player's underwear after the game! I get bombarded with requests for free gear all the time, but not many like that!"

Since taking on the role full-time, Moulden has played his part in Bolton's resurgence, finishing his first season with Sky Bet League Two promotion before a top-half finish in League One.

"It's been two good seasons on the pitch since I started," he adds. "Getting promoted from League Two was amazing and then ending up in ninth last season, considering we had a lot of injuries, is a great achievement.



"I WAKE UP ON A MONDAY MORNING AND I DON'T FEEL LIKE I'M GOING TO WORK"

"I've loved being in the environment of professional sport. The whole staff are one big team and you can always have a laugh with the players as well. I wake up on a Monday morning and I don't feel like I'm going to work!

"Every day is different and it's always enjoyable, so hopefully Bolton will continue to rise up the leagues and I can be part of the Club's journey along the way."

EFL AWARDS 2022

CELEBRATING SUCCESS

For the first time since 2019, the EFL Awards took place in person at the Grosvenor House Hotel, with more than 700 guests in attendance.

The highly anticipated event, hosted by Sky Sports presenters David Prutton and Bela Shah, celebrated and recognised the continued efforts and achievements of Clubs, players and individuals on and off the pitch.

THE WINNERS

Contribution to League Football
BEN ROBINSON MBE DL

Sir Tom Finney Award
JOBI MCANUFF

Sky Bet Championship Player of the Season
ALEKSANDAR MITROVIĆ
Fulham

Sky Bet League One Player of the Season
SCOTT TWINE
MK Dons

Sky Bet League Two Player of the Season
KANE WILSON
Forest Green Rovers

Championship Young Player of the Season
BRENNAN JOHNSON
Nottingham Forest

League One Young Player of the Season
PADDY LANE
Fleetwood Town

League Two Young Player of the Season
FINN AZAZ
Newport County

Goal of the Season
BARRY BANNAN
MK Dons v SHEFFIELD WEDNESDAY

Championship LFE Apprentice of the Season
RYAN HOWLEY
Coventry City

League One LFE Apprentice of the Season
AYODEJI ELEREWE
Charlton Athletic

League Two LFE Apprentice of the Season
JUNIOR TCHAMADEU
Colchester United

Your Move Community Club of the Season
AFC WIMBLEDON

EFL Project of the Season
BURTON ALBION VACCINATION CENTRE

PFA Player in the Community
RYAN INNIS
Charlton Athletic

EFL Supporter of the Season
CATH DYER
Swansea City

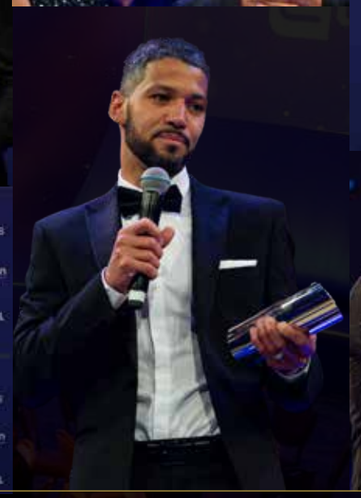
Kin + Carta Family Club of the Season
IPSWICH TOWN

EFL Sustainability Award
CAMBRIDGE UNITED

EFL Diversity Award
BLACKBURN ROVERS








FOOTBALL MANAGER CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM OF THE SEASON

Manager:
NATHAN JONES
Luton Town

GK: **LEE NICHOLLS**
Huddersfield Town
CB: **TOSIN ADARABIOYO**
Fulham
CB: **LLOYD KELLY**
AFC Bournemouth
CB: **JOE WORRALL**
Nottingham Forest
RWB: **DJED SPENCE**
Nottingham Forest
LWB: **ANTONEE ROBINSON**
Fulham
CM: **RYAN YATES**
Nottingham Forest
CM: **PHILIP BILLING**
AFC Bournemouth
AM: **HARRY WILSON**
Fulham
ST: **DOMINIC SOLANKE**
AFC Bournemouth
ST: **ALEKSANDAR MITROVIĆ**
Fulham

FOOTBALL MANAGER LEAGUE ONE TEAM OF THE SEASON

Manager:
LEAM RICHARDSON
Wigan Athletic

GK: **MICHAEL COOPER**
Plymouth Argyle
CB: **JACK WHATMOUGH**
Wigan Athletic
CB: **MICHAEL IHIEKWE**
Rotherham United
CB: **HARRY DARLING**
Milton Keynes Dons
RM: **WES BURNS**
Ipswich Town
LM: **JAMES MCCLEAN**
Wigan Athletic
CM: **DAN BARLASER**
Rotherham United
CM: **BARRY BANNAN**
Sheffield Wednesday
AM: **SCOTT TWINE**
Milton Keynes Dons
ST: **ROSS STEWART**
Sunderland AFC
ST: **MICHAEL SMITH**
Rotherham United

FOOTBALL MANAGER LEAGUE TWO TEAM OF THE SEASON

Manager:
ROB EDWARDS
Forest Green Rovers

GK: **JOJO WOLLACOTT**
Swindon Town
CB: **JON GUTHRIE**
Northampton Town
CB: **PETER CLARKE**
Tranmere Rovers
CB: **JORDAN TURNBULL**
Salford City
RWB: **KANE WILSON**
Forest Green Rovers
LWB: **NICKY CADDEN**
Forest Green Rovers
CM: **TIMOTHÉE DIENG**
Exeter City
CM: **FINN AZAZ**
Newport County
ST: **HARRY MCKIRDY**
Swindon Town
ST: **DOM TELFORD**
Newport County
ST: **MATTY STEVENS**
Forest Green Rovers

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**

Homegrown HEROES

It was over three decades before Hull City duo Keane Lewis-Potter and Jacob Greaves had even been born when the Club were last crowned champions.

But it was only fitting the ever-present Tigers Academy graduates were a part of the side that ended a 55-year wait for a league title after topping the 2020/21 Sky Bet League One table.



This season just gone, they became the first homegrown pair to feature in all 46 League games since Hull-born Chris Simpkin and Mick Milner in 1965/66 – the same year that the Tigers stormed Division Three to go up as champions.

Greaves and Lewis-Potter, both aged 21, were given the nod to take up their places in the line-up, with the former playing every minute of the Sky Bet Championship season.

"It's just the start for me," says Greaves, a former season ticket holder at Hull, who was raised in the quaint village of Cottingham. "I've got more gears to go and I want to push myself more. I'll be striving to do that next season. I want to build my way up to the top.

"When you're playing, you're still a fan and you love the Club, but that's your job now. It gives you that extra one per cent when you go onto the pitch, remembering who you're playing for. I love the Club and it's very close to my heart."

His team-mate, on the other hand, was moments away from matching that achievement. Lewis-Potter made way in the 93rd minute of the Tigers' opening day display against Preston North End.

"In the first game, I came off with a minute to go," Lewis-Potter, one of over 85,000 fans in the stands at Wembley Stadium as Hull edged Bristol City in the Championship Play-Off Final in 2008, explains. "It's an unbelievable achievement for both of us.

"I've been able to do it with one of my best pals. We started together when I joined at 13. To have him by my side is fantastic. When you put that shirt on and see the Hull badge on the front, it makes it even more special.

"Me and a few of the other lads used to be ball boys around the stadium. You watch on and think to yourself, 'I want to do that'. I've been there as a ball boy, a fan and now I'm playing on that pitch."



Both Greaves and Lewis-Potter ended the 2020/21 campaign with a winner's medal around their neck as Hull bounced back to the Championship at the first attempt, going up in style in top spot.

"I felt like a proper professional – someone that was respected around the training ground," Greaves continues. "It's been a whirlwind.

"The first five games, I didn't even see the bench – I was watching from home. We got beat 4-1 at Fleetwood, and the next week I played three games on the bounce, signed a new deal and ended up playing 40 games."

The son of ex-Tigers defender Mark Greaves – who went on to make over 150 appearances for the East Yorkshire outfit between 1996 and 2002 – Jacob Greaves has followed in his father's footsteps.

It's been a gradual process. At his tender age, the youngster has already played in all three EFL divisions. Following a successful season-long loan at Cheltenham Town in 2019/20, he returned to play his part in the Tigers' title-winning campaign.

And this season marked the first time Greaves has tested himself in the second tier.

"This season has been the toughest to date, with not winning games a lot of the time," he states. "I look at how nervous I was making the step up and the first game nerves I had. I'm a new boy to the League, but I think I've done well.

"My dad was telling me he's never really gone into a game feeling 100 per cent. I've felt leggy in a few games, but you get through it in the first 10 minutes. You always have little niggles and knocks and have to try and get through them, which I've done."

In fact, it was his father that informed him at the age of 16 that he would be offered terms with his boyhood Club.

"My dad got a call when we were in our old house and told me," he reminisces. "That was emotional because I'd just lost my grandad.

"I don't really see my dad as a person that used to play football. I get a few people saying, 'I remember watching your dad play', and I'm like, 'oh really? That's crazy'."

A matter of months earlier, Lewis-Potter put pen to paper on his first deal with Hull – the Club that almost missed him at the first take, but the Tigers weren't going to take no for an answer the second time around.

"I was just playing Sunday League football and I was aged about eight when Hull came and contacted me, so I went with one of my Sunday League friends to the Academy," Lewis-Potter recalls.

"At that time, we were both offered to sign but, in my mind, I was thinking I just wanted to enjoy it with my friends. I'm not saying you can't do that, but I just wanted to play football with my friends at that point. Luckily, when I turned 13, Hull came back around.

"Ever since signing, I always played a year or two higher than I should have, and it's stood me in good stead."

The Tigers' top scorer this season, with 13 strikes to his name, Lewis-Potter became the first Hull-born player to find the back of the net for his hometown team at the MKM Stadium in almost nine years, to replicate one of his cult heroes in December 2019 in a 3-0 victory over Birmingham City.

"The person before me was Nick Barmby," he smiles. "I still talk about players like him and what a great player he was. To follow in his footsteps was an unreal feeling. I was told afterwards but once you get told, you're speechless.

"I always say this but for me, the best feeling is scoring in front of fans. It's something I'd never experienced before because it's completely different scoring for the Academy. I came on when we were 2-0 up and got the third goal."

Earlier this season, the attacker received his first call up to the England Under-21s squad, making his debut as

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Lifebuoy
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handwash | original
10hr
anti-bac protection*
supports skin's defences
dermatologically tested
kills 99.9% bacteria
thyme & pine oil
BISH BASH BOSH
99.9% OF BACTERIA
Always read the label and product information.





"TO FOLLOW IN HIS [BARMBY] FOOTSTEPS WAS AN UNREAL FEELING. I WAS TOLD AFTERWARDS BUT ONCE YOU GET TOLD, YOU'RE SPEECHLESS"



a second-half substitute as the Three Lions ran out 3-0 winners against Albania.

Team-mate Greaves travelled down to Bournemouth days earlier to watch him in action.

"I had an idea that I was maybe getting called up for the England Under-20s squad, but that same day when I was meant to find out, I didn't hear anything," Lewis-Potter notes. "Then, I got a call off Lee Carsley telling me I'd been called up to the England Under-21s squad.

"It didn't really hit me until I joined up with the squad, seeing the players there who are playing for their Clubs week in, week out in the Premier League. You see them boys and you want to be in that position yourself. They set the standard of where I need to get to.

"Some people can look into age too much. You get players like Jude Bellingham, who is a teenager and he's playing in the England squad. You just have to look at that really. Age is just a number and if you're good enough, then you'll play.

"I read a stat about so many England players making their way through the EFL and you just have to look up to that. I'm seeing players like Jarrod [Bowen] that I've played with going to West Ham and getting an England call up himself."

The highly-rated forward made it a hat-trick of awards at the Club's end-of-season ceremony, scooping the Tigers' overall Player of the Year, Players' Player of the Year and Supporters' Player of the Year for the current campaign.

"After I got the first two, I thought, 'that's enough', then the third one came, and it was even bigger and heavier," he laughs.

He was denied a clean sweep by Greaves, who was named as the Club's Young Player of the Year for the second season running, but the defender paid tribute to his team-mates upon receiving the accolade.

"Keane got my player's vote," Greaves admits. "He's got the world at his feet. You look at the left side that we have with me, Keane and Brandon [Fleming]. We're just building a relationship. There's a lot of youth there and people that want to get better.

"I've seen a lot of good players come and go; we've had such a great success in the Academy and hopefully that can continue."

IT'S A COUNTY THING

WORDS // **HOLLY HUNT**





"I always said: 'This isn't like a speedboat we're turning around, it's a huge tanker."

That was the message of Stockport County's Club President, **Steve Bellis**, as he addressed the Hatters faithful nine years ago after the Club dropped into the sixth tier of English football.

Fast forward to the present day, the outlook is a very different one for the Club, who started to attract interest by doing things the County way after local businessman Mark Stott completed a takeover of his hometown team in January 2020.

"Our supporters sometimes have to pinch themselves that we have found an owner that is here for the right reasons," says Bellis. "People look at him like some kind of Demigod.

"He was a local guy who used to sell advertising in the Stockport Express Advertiser, but he wanted to put something back. If you walked in the room, you'd never know he was the owner. He makes me travel to the games because he says, 'I'm not putting a tie on, Bellis, that's your job'.

"He's bought it because of the fanbase and what we do in the community and he wants to do that with bells on and turbocharge it."

There were questions to be asked upon his arrival, including the most important one: 'What if we just become a Club that has some wealth behind it and lose who we are?'

Bellis continues: "There are times when we do things that we think are right in business, but they don't work if you understand the Club. As a great example, there was a meeting about having goal music, which our fans hate, because they have their own rendition when we score, so I dived in and said no.

"It's about preserving the DNA and heritage. If I thought we were going to change our morals and ethics, I would walk out the next day."

After stepping foot in Edgeley Park, the North West-born businessman immediately set his sights on the second tier, and, in the midst of a global pandemic, it would be no easy feat.

He laid out a plan to get the Club back into the Sky Bet Championship within seven years and two promotions in three seasons later, Stockport have taken a huge step forward.

"People scoffed, as they would, but now we find ourselves back in the EFL," Bellis smiles. "We've got a great nucleus of a squad that we don't have to add much to be competitive. We've got momentum and that counts for a lot.

"The training ground and facilities that we have are certainly Championship standard. The first thing Mark did was invest in the stadium. He said, 'let's take advantage of the fact there's nobody here, so when the fans come back, they're going to walk back in and go, 'wow'.



"We have a philosophy that no business has the right to operate unless it invests into the community from which it takes. I'm a great believer that if you do good things, good things come your way. We'll be doing a lot more work off the pitch to embed the Club into the area. Hopefully, we'll get more good karma."

Bellis' 32-year association stretches back to the 1989/90 campaign when then-Chairman Brendan Elwood enlisted his help in setting up a new membership scheme. He soon came to the conclusion that Stockport – who played their games on a Friday evening so as not to clash with neighbouring giants – were suffering from a 'dying audience'.

A pioneering community programme saw Bellis and County take first-team players into local primary schools to educate them before extending an invite to take in a game.

"We were ahead of the game – there was nobody doing anything of its kind at the time and we won awards for it," he explains.

"We went to four schools per week and delivered an hour-long presentation, using the players as role models, and they acted out a drama about the dangers of excess alcohol, smoking, bullying, racism and other key subjects. It was very interactive and non-authoritarian."

By 1996, Stockport boasted the youngest paying audience in professional football; more than 40% of County's paying crowd were children.

The Club – one of the first in the country not to need police on a matchday as the dynamic begun to evolve – reaped a ream of benefits in terms of new sponsorship.

As a result, Stockport won promotion to the First Division in 1997, having sat bottom of Division Four for the most part of the previous 20 years and Bellis can draw parallels in the current day, with the community programme still paying dividends in the here and now.

"We kept breaking our own records in National League North. We were attracting crowds that, quite frankly, we didn't deserve," he says. "That's testament to all that work we did in the 90s, because all those kids that we brought in were now bringing their own kids."

Stockport dropped out of the EFL for the first time in 2010/11, finishing rock bottom of League Two, seven points clear of safety.

But the Hatters found themselves in a 'serious predicament' in 2014. Following the departures of several senior figures, Bellis returned to Stockport – now a National League North Club.

"We played Colwyn Bay, which was somewhere that I'd gone on holiday as a kid," he recalls. "I was thinking, 'there can't be a football team in Colwyn Bay!' I said, 'at least we'll get three points' – they beat us 3-0. All those people we met remind us just how special it is to be able to say that we're a League Club again.

"We set about trying to get the place back on the upward trajectory and put back in place those things we'd done in the 90s. We became sustainable and got the Club stable. Everybody said it felt like County again."

They clawed their way out of the division in 2019 and, after last season's Play-Off heartbreak, re-joined the EFL after an 11-year absence.

County were crowned National League champions on the final day of the season, beating Halifax Town to clinch the title and ascend in style.

"If we're honest, we're used to disappointment on the pitch, so it didn't hurt us too much," admits Bellis. "This year, we had a change of management; Dave Challinor came in – the man who had knocked us out with Hartlepool. Sometimes you get someone that comes to a Club and it just clicks from day one.

"We're great believers that trophies don't belong in boardrooms – they're won for the fans. We visited 20 pubs on the Sunday and thousands of people got their hands on it. We also took it into the hospice to see a supporter who is on end-of-life care and his face lit up. The difference a piece of silverware can make is incredible.

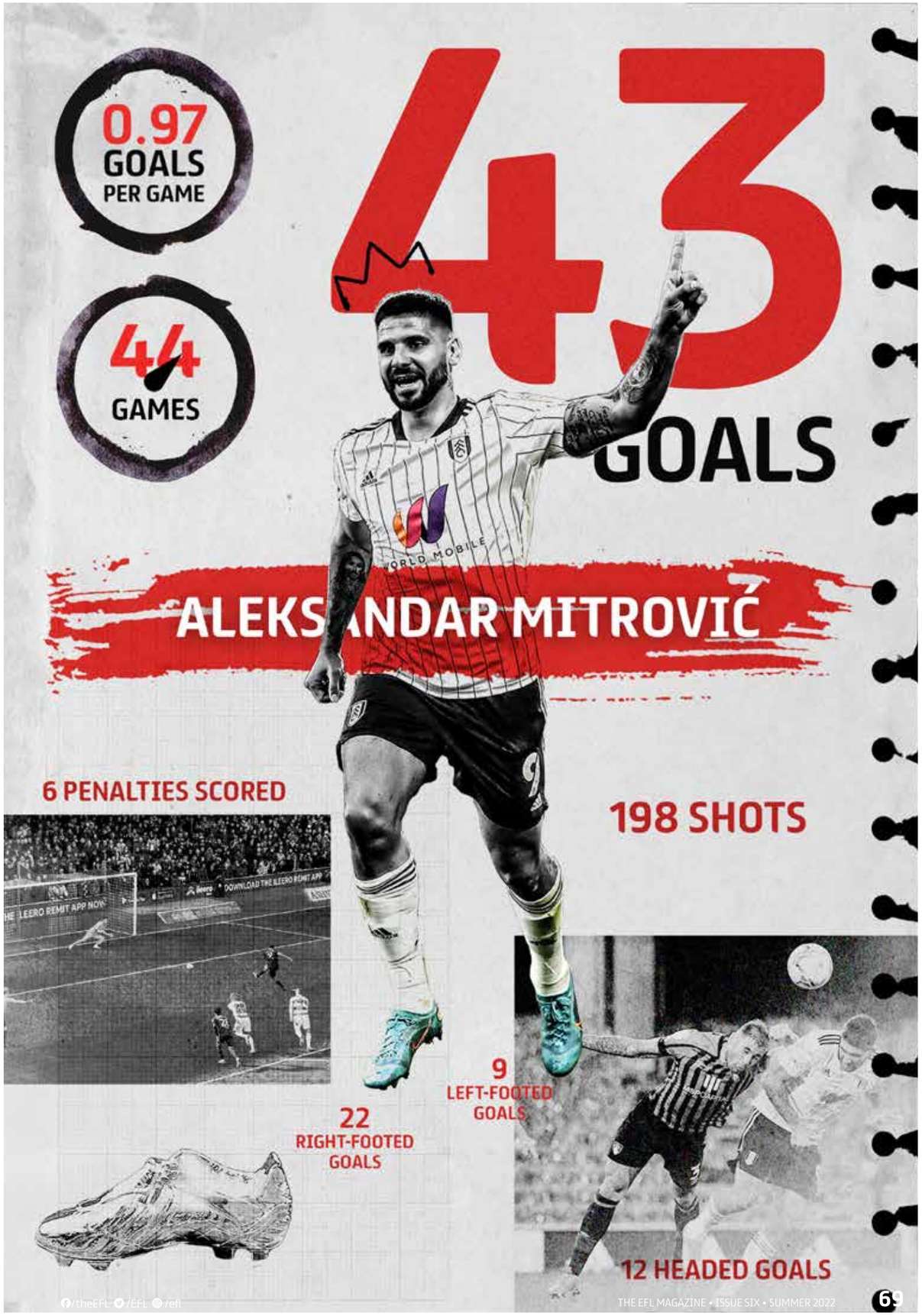
"I tell everybody that there are only 72 English Football League Clubs, and to be part of that is a massive honour. At the minute, we're just living it and loving it."

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END OF AN ERA



Not all legends are made on the football pitch, some are created away from the limelight and later this year, the EFL will say goodbye to one of its own.

In September, **Dave Cookson**, the EFL's Football Services Director, will 'hang up his boots' after 37 years of service to the League, leaving a lasting legacy.



WORDS // **ABI RODWELL**

Having joined the Football League as a fresh-faced 18-year-old in 1985 – two years before the introduction of the EFL Play-Offs – Dave went on to work at more than 200 Finals at Wembley Stadium, Cardiff's Millennium Stadium and Old Trafford, including EFL Cup Finals, EFL Trophy Finals, Play-Off Finals and Full Members Cup showpiece matches.

During his time, Dave was not only involved in the introduction of the EFL Play-Offs in 1987, but throughout his impressive tenure, he has quite literally seen and done it all at the EFL's showpiece Finals, whether it be managing the mascots, looking after ball boys and girls or even inflating 60 footballs by hand for matchday.

His first Wembley Final was the Football League Centenary Tournament, held in 1988 to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Football League. A Final in which he received a 'telling off' by the great Brian Clough, the winners were Nottingham Forest – an impressive side in their own right in the mid-1980s. So how fitting that his last Wembley Final – the 2022 Championship Play-Off Final – would see Nottingham Forest victorious at Wembley once again, winning promotion to the Premier League after a 23-year absence.

"THE IMPACT HE HAS HAD ON THE SHOWPIECE FINALS AND THE EFL OVERALL FOR THE LAST 37 YEARS WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN"

TREVOR BIRCH
EFL CHIEF EXECUTIVE











As the League, its Clubs and the game itself evolved through the years, so too did Dave's role at the organisation. During his time as Football Services Director, Dave continues to oversee the entirety of the EFL's football operation from top to bottom, including overseeing all events and showpiece Finals with ticket allocations and segregation splits, the League's cup competitions, the compilation of fixtures, TV selections, Club relationships, policing and security, the EFL's annual summer conference, as well as providing successful guidance and support to the EFL's 72 Member Clubs.

"Dave has played a huge part in creating a culture at the EFL to be proud of," EFL Chief Executive Trevor Birch said. "I would like to add my personal thanks to him for his commitment to the cause and all he has done over the years to make the EFL such a brilliant place to work. The impact he has had on the showpiece Finals and the EFL overall for the last 37 years will never be forgotten."

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News in brief



Robinson serves Staffordshire

It was an April to remember for long-serving Burton Albion Chairman Ben Robinson MBE DL, who was given the prestigious Contribution to League Football award at the EFL Awards.

Just a couple of weeks earlier, the 76-year-old made his declaration and was sworn in as High Sheriff of Staffordshire.

Robinson's responsibilities include lending support to the Lord-Lieutenant on royal visits, taking an active part in supporting and promoting voluntary organisations with the county and ensuring the welfare of visiting High Court Judges.

He said: "I consider it a great honour to be the High Sheriff of Staffordshire, the county where I was born and have lived all my life. It's an office I hold in the highest esteem, and I hope to use the next year to honour this historic role and to benefit the county of Staffordshire.

"In fact, making a positive impact on the lives of people has been something I have been passionate about all my life, having grown up in Burton and seen how challenging life can be for people through no fault of their own.

"I want to use my year in office to provide further support for the community and to promote and support the many county organisations who share these values."



CAROL'S NAMED A COMMUNITY HEROINE

Carol Shanahan OBE, Chair of Port Vale, was recognised at the Women of the Year Luncheon & Awards in April, being presented as Community Heroine of the Year.

The accolade celebrated an individual who has made a vital contribution to their community throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with the judges unanimously voting for Vale's co-owner for her pioneering work with the children's charity that she founded, the Hubb Foundation, and the Port Vale community hub.

Leading a team of her own staff and volunteers, local businesses and staff, as well as representatives from the Port Vale Foundation and Hubb Foundation charities, Shanahan enabled the delivery of more than 350,000 meals to homes and community venues across Stoke-on-Trent to help children and families in need.

Commenting on her win, she said: "I am incredibly proud to receive the Community Heroine Award.

"In reality, it is a reflection on the efforts of many staff and volunteers who came together to work with and for the Port



Vale community hub during the most unprecedented and challenging of times.

"I am so thankful for the way in which our organisations – Port Vale FC and sister company Synectics Solutions, the Hubb Foundation charity and the Port Vale Foundation charity – and many other individuals, organisations and local businesses came together to support local families in their time of need.

"The impact we have had has been truly humbling and the partnerships and relationships we have built during this period will be so important going forward."

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TERRIERS' CHARITY BIKE RIDE

Huddersfield Town Chief Executive Dean Hoyle, and his wife Janet, coordinated a 'Road to Wembley' bike ride down to the capital ahead of the Sky Bet Championship Play-Off Final.

The ride was dedicated to the memory of Town fan Daryl Hopson, who sadly passed away after a battle with cancer last month, with the ride raising funds to build a memorial garden at the John Smith's Stadium in his memory.

Any surplus funds will be distributed to four chosen charities: Town Foundation, Yorkshire Air Ambulance, The Kirkwood and Platform 1.

Mark Ronan was one of 11 riders to embark on the three-day 201-mile journey from the John Smith's Stadium.

"We're raising money for Daz, who was a big Huddersfield Town fan," he explained. "He died in April this year of cancer very sadly. Robyn Kennderdale



(Supporter Services Manager) at the Club came up with the idea of the memorial garden down at the stadium.

"Dean started the Pedal for Pounds with around 20 people riding to an away game down at Southend 12 years ago now. Since then, we've done it most years, and it's raised some good funds. It's been a good platform. On some of the rides, we've had up to 300 riders there. It's been well supported and a great success."



THE STEEL CITY UNITES

Players from local rivals Sheffield United and Sheffield Wednesday have joined forces in support of men's mental health.

The two teams have launched their own branch of the charity Talk Club, which provides opportunities for men to open up about their mental wellbeing.

The Sheffield football branches have been opened in conjunction with the Clubs' Community Foundations by journalist Mike McCarthy, who lost his son Ross to suicide last year.

The former TV news presenter and reporter worked with the Blades to set up the United Talk Club last September, while Wednesday's branch opened its doors at Hillsborough in June.

McCarthy said: "In Ross's memory, I am so proud that these two footballing goliaths have recognised the importance of burying their differences and working together for something that is more important even than football. I believe this sends out a powerful message about mental, as well as physical, health."

Meanwhile, co-founder of Talk Club, Neil Harrison, said: "It is testament to both Clubs in standing together and recognising that regardless of the badge on your shirt, a community of men can support each other by simply talking and listening about their mental fitness.

"In Sheffield and across the UK, we're seeing how the key to a real conversation about mental health begins with 'How are you? Out of 10?' We invite and welcome every man to join the community."





BROOKS GETS THE ALL-CLEAR

AFC Bournemouth midfielder David Brooks confirmed at the start of May that he is now cancer free, having successfully recovered from Stage 2 Hodgkin lymphoma.

The 24-year-old had been undergoing treatment, with support from Bournemouth's medical department, after being diagnosed with the form of cancer in October

In a statement on his Twitter account, the Wales international revealed: "It has been a few months since my last update and in that time, I have thankfully completed my cancer treatment.

"I would like to say a huge thank you to all of the incredible medical staff for their amazing work and support throughout the process.

"Last week, I met with my specialist having reviewed my final test results. I am delighted to say the treatment was successful and I can now say that I have been given the all-clear and am now cancer free.

"Those words feel incredible to say and I am so thankful for all your messages and good wishes; these really helped me through the tough times.

"I am so excited to start the journey back to full fitness and continuing my football career."



A greener way to watch

Streaming and broadcasting the EFL's action has never been greener.

For the 2021/22 season, the EFL's production partner IMG achieved Albert certification, which recognises green credentials within TV and film production.

It means the hundreds of games delivered to Clubs' iFollow, and the highlights programme, are produced with a reduced carbon footprint.

IMG's broadcast setup for EFL Productions is now heavily remote, reducing journeys and ultimately the carbon footprint.

Emma Finlan, IMG Production Manager, tells us how and why EFL broadcasts are now much greener.

WORDS // **CHRIS OSBORNE**



Tell us about why you wanted to take the EFL production completely remote?

Seeing the positive impact that the production is already having has been the main motivation behind the change. The EFL's Production Partnership is already IMG's largest remote production operation – and potentially the world's largest. With over 1,700 games being produced remotely, this saves over 3,000 vehicle journeys each season and although that may seem like a huge reduction, we don't think we should just stop there if there's capacity to bring in even more games remotely.

What did the old way of streaming look like?

Though single camera coverage was produced in much the same way, without replays, in the Sky Bet Championship, games were covered with a more traditional outside broadcast (OB) model which saw additional and larger scale trucks onsite to bring multi-camera coverage only to select mid-week games. That meant more people, more travel and more unsustainable fuels and materials being used – a solution that made multi-cam coverage across an entire season's worth of games financially, logistically and sustainably impractical.

So, what does it look like now – what's changed?

The IMG engineering team have devised an on-site technical solution that allows a smaller footprint at grounds whereby teams of camera operators can plug into permanently installed infrastructure. That solution reduces costs, numbers of people on site and, importantly, the carbon footprint to bring all cameras back to our remote production hub. Teams of directors and replay operators now bring enhanced coverage to all Championship games in a way never seen before. For our signature international six-camera OB, we now deploy a much smaller truck on-site, so less crew and travel. We have switched to greener fuel and we now send all six camera feeds via fibre, which is much more sustainable





than the traditional satellite truck being on-site. The Director and EVS Operators are now based back at Stockley Park, where renewable energy is used throughout the whole building and the in-house gallery used is now shared with the EFL highlights show to save energy and resources.

Has it become harder to cover the football in this way?

So far, it doesn't seem much different. There are definitely more challenges for the engineering team who are often remotely troubleshooting technical issues from as far and wide as Plymouth to Middlesbrough from the main engineering hub at Stockley Park! However, on an editorial side, it's made it easier to monitor and oversee with all of the camera feeds and galleries being under one roof!

What does it mean for IMG and iFollow's carbon footprint?

It will mean that the 2022/23 season Carbon Footprint calculation will see an impressive reduction in CO2 emissions.

What is Albert certification and what does it mean to achieve it?

Albert is an organisation that supports the global film and TV industry to reduce the environmental impacts of production and to create content that supports a vision for a sustainable future. In more recent years, you may have noticed a purple footprint appear on the end board for ITV News, or after an episode of Emmerdale! The purple footprint certifies completion and Albert approval of a production's carbon footprint and sustainability action plan. A lot of work and evidence has to be submitted to show what changes a production has made or is making to have a positive environmental impact. We are proud to say that since the beginning of 2022, this footprint now appears on the end boards of all EFL Productions produced by IMG.

Do you think more and more production and broadcast companies will move in this direction?

They already are. Sky recently produced the first carbon neutral football game and many companies are taking the step into these remote workflows because it's basically now or never, there isn't another planet we can just hop on over to with the time we have, so to not follow suit will eventually see reputations being damaged.

You've personally led on this project – how does it feel to look back at what you've achieved?

It's honestly been a great learning exercise for all involved and has certainly opened my eyes and influenced a change in everyday behaviours. EFL Productions were in fact the second production at IMG to achieve this award during 2021/22 season, so that is also something to be very proud of! It's also great to think we are paving the way for others and gaining recognition for the great work that we do!

What's next? Is there more that can be done?

Absolutely. With the EFL having led the way, IMG have now built a strong understanding and reputation for the delivery of these types of remote productions and we're constantly learning and working on ways to improve. There are all sorts currently in the mix, even the idea of robotic cameras! We even have people in the team that are now trained Green Wardens, to help educate the rest of the production and to think of new implementations – for example, reusable notepads or lamination of running orders to use with eco-friendly whiteboard pens, to reduce the amount of printing and much, much more!

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WORDS // HOLLY HUNT

35 YEARS OF THE EFL PLAY-OFFS

As the full-time whistle sounded on Sunday 29 May, it brought to a close another EFL Play-Off campaign for the 2021/22 season.

It's a competition that promises unrivalled thrills, unbridled joy, and at the end of it all, Play-Off glory for one victorious team.

It was 35 years ago that the Play-Offs were first introduced, with Swindon Town going on to become the first side to triumph in May 1987.

The third-placed Robins overcame fifth-placed Gillingham 2-0 in a replay at Selhurst Park following a two-legged Third Division Play-Off Final, which finished 2-2 across the home and away legs at the County Ground and Priestfield Stadium.

Swindon were joined by Charlton Athletic and Aldershot in becoming the first Clubs to experience Play-Off victory.

The Addicks preserved their First Division Status after finishing 19th in the top flight, beating Leeds United in a replay in the Second Division showdown. The two sides were stuck in deadlock after 180 minutes, forcing a tiebreaker at Birmingham City's St Andrew's, which saw Charlton run out 2-1 winners after extra-time in front of a combined crowd of 66,075.

Finally, Aldershot, who finished in sixth in the Fourth Division, saw off Wolverhampton Wanderers 3-0 on aggregate to ascend to the Third Division.

And although the Play-Offs were something of an outlandish concept when then they were debuted at the conclusion of the 1986/87 campaign three and a half decades ago, the competition is now the very pinnacle of the season for many EFL Clubs vying for that last sought-after promotion berth.

Over the years, the competition has been staged at various venues across the country, from Wembley Stadium to the Millennium Stadium and a brief stop-off at Old Trafford along the way.



Peter Shirtliff

The Play-Offs have also undergone a number of structural changes. In the first two terms, the competition was contested between the three teams who placed directly below the automatic promotion winners and the Club finishing above the relegation spots in the league above. And, most notably, in 1990, the two-legged Finals were reduced to a single showpiece to determine who would win promotion.

"I'm still remembered for taking Norwich up; I still meet Norwich fans and they say, 'the Play-Off Final was the best day of my life' or 'it was my kid's first game' and how much it meant to them," said Sunderland AFC boss Alex Neil after the Black Cats beat Wycombe Wanderers 2-0 in the Sky Bet League One Play-Off Final last month.



Alex Neil

Billed by many as the best way to achieve promotion, an entire season culminates in the Play-Off Final at the home of football, and what a way to cap off the campaign.



Sunderland AFC Head Coach Alex Neil lifts the Sky Bet League One Play-Off trophy after ending the Club's four-year wait for a return to the Championship



Darrell Clarke, Manager of Port Vale, is all smiles following his team's 3-0 victory over Mansfield Town in the Sky Bet League Two Play-Off Final

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