2026/27 EDITION

HANDBOOK

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WELCOME

FROM MARCIA LEWIS AND KATE IORPENDA



By Marcia Lewis *CEO and Founder of No1Fan.Club*

It's incredible to have reached this point with No1Fan.club. Like the parent experience in football, building this organisation has been quite a journey.

No1Fan.club was born from my experience as a mum supporting a son with a football dream, and from recognising how difficult this journey can be without the right information and support. Our aim has always been to create a trusted support system for every football family.

Everyone's experience in football is different, shaped by our backgrounds, cultures and perspectives. With so much to consider, knowing what is best for your child is not always easy.

We often say there is no handbook for navigating youth football – so we created one. I hope it gives you the confidence to ask questions, join the conversation and make informed decisions at every stage.

Supporting our children matters, but so does looking after ourselves. Remember to be your own No1Fan, too.

Thank you to our incredible community of parents, carers and industry friends for sharing your experiences, asking important questions and helping us grow. Your openness, encouragement and belief in No1Fan.club mean more than I can say.

Marcia is mum to Myles Lewis-Skelly, Professional Footballer, Arsenal

Kate Iorpenda *Director of Programme Development, No1Fan.Club*

I'm Kate, a football mum and part of the No1Fan family. I've lived the youth football journey with my two sons, from the excitement of academy football from the age of seven, through the much harder moments of leaving an academy at 16, finding new clubs and, more recently, supporting them as young professionals as they make their way in the game.

I know how easy it is as a parent to get caught up in the emotions and expectations of the journey, and how difficult it can be to manage the highs and lows along the way. My own experience has shown me just how important it is for parents to have honest conversations, access to the right information and, most importantly, support when they need it.

The No1Fan Parent Conference in Manchester is a great chance to bring parents together, share experiences and talk openly about the things we don't always get to talk about. It's also lovely to see the No1Fan community continuing to grow. For me, it's about helping parents enjoy the journey, support their children and make the most of the experience along the way.

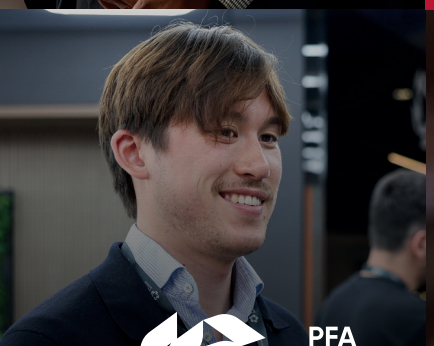
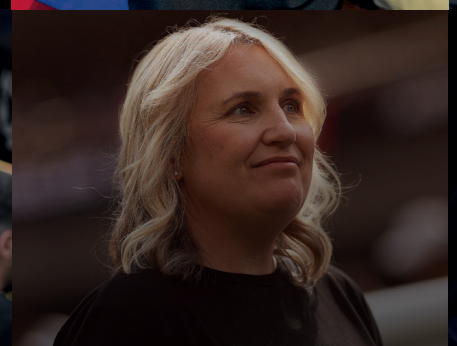
Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this handbook and shared their experiences, advice and knowledge. There's so much to take in as a football parent, and I hope some of the guidance in these pages makes things feel just that little bit easier.

Kate is mum to Tom Iorpenda, a Professional Footballer at Swansea City, and George (Under-21) at Huddersfield Town

FYI

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Youth football can bring big decisions, difficult moments and plenty of questions. Whether you need a listening ear, want to talk through a challenge, or would value guidance from someone who has experienced the journey themselves, our Parent Mentors are here to support you.

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See www.no1fan.club for membership details

MEMORIES MEAN MORE THAN TROPHIES

AT UNDER-6S, WE LOST OUR FIRST GAME 26–0. YES... 26-0! FOURTEEN YEARS LATER, AFTER TWO SEASONS AT UNDER-18S, THAT SAME GROUP PLAYED THEIR FINAL EVER GAME TOGETHER AT A FOOTBALL LEAGUE STADIUM, FOLLOWING A SPECIAL INVITATION TO CELEBRATE AN INCREDIBLE GRASSROOTS JOURNEY.

By Andy Smart *Former Grassroots Football Coach*

We lost that final game 3-1.

But nobody cared. Over 200 people watched us that evening, celebrating something far greater than a result: a group of kids who had stayed together from Under-6s to Under-18s.

After the final whistle, the opposition left the pitch, the floodlights dimmed and *He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother* played softly through the stadium speakers.

There we were, in the centre circle of a 5,000-seat stadium, arms around each other in one final huddle. Champagne spraying, celebrations, and more than a few tears.

Yes, we won cups and leagues.

But it was never really about winning.

It was about memories and friendships.

I'm incredibly proud to have managed the team throughout that journey, but it wouldn't have happened without our parents.

After that first 26-0 defeat, I brought them together and explained what I wanted to create. I wanted their children to have the best memories growing up playing the best sport on earth. I wanted them to become the best of friends, and I asked the parents to support me and hopefully still be together when their grassroots journey ended.

They were.

And we created some unbelievable memories. Open-top bus parades through town on carnival day. Hilarious camping trips. Litter picks. Charity walks. Parents doing skydives to raise funds. An educational visit to a local exotic reptile business. Trips to the National Football Museum. For the finals we did get to, it was the works... a pre-match meal, flags and banners made by the families, good luck messages from around the world.

Then there were tournament days, where we created an environment in which football was allowed to be fun. If our crazy goalkeeper Steven wanted to eat chips during a game he was playing in, that was fine! If the kids wanted ice creams before their next match, that was fine too.

It wasn't in any coaching manual.

But it worked.



Today, they're 22.

They holiday together, watch football together and go to music festivals together. And yes, they even have "Up The Andys" team tattoos on their ankles!

They learnt how to win and, sometimes, how to lose.

Most importantly, they learnt to look out for each other. They're friends for life.

Long-term friendships formed amongst the parents too. They stood together watching every game, win or lose – usually armed with a big bag of sweets for the squad afterwards.

Football should have a place for everyone: all genders and all abilities.

As coaches, it shouldn't simply be "You're good enough, join the team" or "You're not good enough anymore, you're out."

Sadly, that seems increasingly common.

A tiny percentage of children will become pro footballers. Yet many are pushed towards "making it", sometimes losing friendships and confidence when eventually told they haven't.

We didn't do it that way. We did it differently.

We wanted to create something that would still matter when the trophies were gathering dust. And 14 years after losing 26–0, I think we did.

"The reward of our group still being together now, going through life as the best of friends, is such a special feeling."

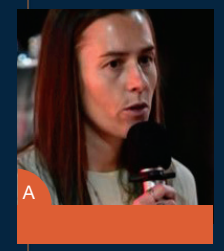
Those are their words, not mine. And that's the greatest trophy we ever won.

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No1 Fan

ELITE PLAYER PERFORMANCE PLAN (EPPP) RISKS

THE HIDDEN RISKS OF THE ELITE PLAYER PERFORMANCE PLAN COMPENSATION SYSTEM: WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW

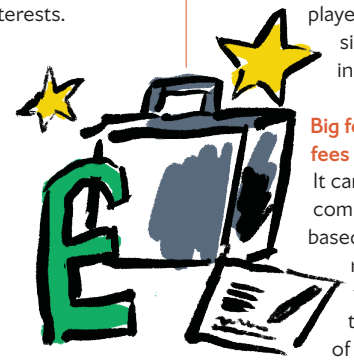


By Dan Chapman *Head of Sport at Leathes Prior Solicitors*

A dream pathway... with a hidden cost

For many young footballers and their families, joining an academy is a dream come true. The pathway offered by the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) has undoubtedly helped develop more home-grown talent, but parents should also understand that the compensation system sitting behind the academy structure can sometimes work against a young player's interests.

How the payment system between clubs works



Under the EPPP, when an academy player moves between clubs before the age of 17, the new club generally pays compensation to the player's former club. The amount is largely determined by a fixed formula linked to the player's age and the academy category of the club losing the player, rather than by an open-market valuation.

At first glance, this seems sensible. Clubs invest significant time and money in developing young players and should be rewarded when those players move elsewhere. However, the system can create (and does create) unintended consequences.

When money stops moves that could help your child

The most obvious issue is that compensation can become a barrier to opportunity. A player's development may have stalled at their current club, or another academy may offer a clearer pathway, better coaching or a more suitable environment. The parents may simply need to move to another part of the UK, for work or family reasons. Yet the compensation payable can sometimes discourage the new club from pursuing the move. In practice, a child can find that opportunities available to a young player in another sport are simply not available to them in football.

Big fees for young players, small fees for grown stars

It can also appear that the compensation payable (which is based on the value of potential rather than the realities of their chances of reaching the professional game) is out of kilter with the market value of a proven first-team player. It is possible for a 15-year-old player at a League One club to command a compensation value of £109,000, whereas the first team at that same club has not paid a transfer fee of more than £50,000 for a player in many seasons (largely signing only free agent players).

Clubs know the rules. Many parents don't

Another concern is the imbalance of bargaining power. Clubs understand the EPPP regulations and compensation mechanisms in detail. Parents often do not. This can leave families unaware of the factors influencing decisions about registration, retention, release and transfers between academies. It is important to ask questions and ensure any significant decisions are made with a full understanding of the consequences. I dealt with a case very recently where parents were persuaded to sign documentation that secured £75,000 compensation rights for the club, even when that club were fully planning to release the child only weeks later (when compensation rights would have lapsed entirely). The promise of letting the child attend a trial at another club was enough to secure the parents' signature, and in doing so they were inadvertently making their son's chances of finding a new club incalculably more difficult.

Dan has written extensively on this topic scan the QR code or visit; leathesprior.co.uk/news

When family hardship meets club rules

Even more concerningly, I have dealt with a case where a young child (for it is always worth remembering, that is what he is – a child) was prevented from playing academy football (because the compensation was too high for any local club to pay) when his father had to relocate to the other side of the UK following the sad passing of the mother. Situations such as this are of course as rare as they are shocking, and one would hope most clubs will always act with compassion – but many Academies will respond with the assertion that "at the end of the day, we're a business with a product to sell".

CLUBS KNOW EPPP REGULATIONS AND COMPENSATION WELL; FOR MANY PARENTS, THEY CAN BE COMPLEX. ASK QUESTIONS AND SEEK INFORMATION

Put your child first, not the club name

Perhaps the most important point for parents is to remember that your child's development and welfare should always come first. Decisions should not be driven solely by the prestige of a club badge or by discussions about compensation. The key questions are whether the player is enjoying football, receiving high-quality coaching, playing regularly, continuing their education and progressing as both a footballer and a young person.

Where appropriate, parents must take advice, whether that be from the PFA or a suitably qualified and experienced lawyer. If I could leave parents with only one piece of advice today it is this: whenever given a document to sign, whether that be on entry to or exit from an academy, pause and take some guidance before signing it.

What parents need to know before it's too late

The EPPP compensation system was designed to encourage investment in youth development, and, in many respects, it has achieved that objective. However, parents should understand that the compensation mechanisms can sometimes restrict movement and create obstacles that are not always aligned with the best interests of the player. An informed parent is therefore one of the most important safeguards a young academy footballer can have.

Top Tips for Parents

Put your child's welfare first.

Ask questions before you sign anything.

Get independent advice early.

LP LEATHES PRIOR



Dan Chapman, Partner and Head of Sport at Leathes Prior, acts for parents, footballers, agents and clubs in all matters relating to compensation within the academy system. **dchapman@leathesprior.co.uk or www.leathesprior.co.uk**

BOYS AND GIRLS IN GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES - WHAT PARENTS NEED TO KNOW





By James Hurrell *Grassroots Coach (girls and boys)*

Having coached boys in grassroots football and supported many boys and girls making the transition from grassroots into academy football and back again, I've seen how different those journeys can be.

I've pulled together some of my reflections on the key differences between boys' and girls' experiences of grassroots football, and what I think parents need to know as they help their child navigate the journey.

Grassroots football can give children a number of huge benefits: friendships, confidence, belonging, physical activity and, most importantly, the chance to enjoy playing the game they love. But the experience can vary considerably depending on where you live, the club you join and, still, whether your child is a boy or a girl.

While every child's experience is different, there are noticeable differences between the boys' and girls' grassroots game. Here are the ones most useful for parents to understand.

Finding the right team can be a different challenge

There are more opportunities to play than ever before, particularly for girls, but access isn't always straightforward.

For boys, there are more teams and leagues, but there is also greater competition for places. For girls, fewer local teams can mean less choice, wider differences in ability within a squad and more travelling to find the right level.

If you are considering a move, timing can help. Many clubs build their squads for the following season around May and June, so attending trials then can give your child more opportunity than approaching a team later, when places have already been filled and coaches may only be looking for someone who adds something they don't already have.

It's also worth knowing that District and County Schools football offers another opportunity for both boys and girls to play at a higher level, but routes in can vary locally. Ask your child's school or PE department about local representative football, how players are nominated and when trials take place.

Most importantly, don't assume the nearest or highest-level team must be the best. Is your child playing regularly? Do they enjoy training? Do they feel included? Are they developing? A good coach and a positive team culture can matter far more than the badge on the shirt.

Girls' football is growing... but provision is still catching up

The growth of the girls' game has been fantastic, but provision hasn't caught up everywhere. Fewer teams can mean more travelling and less choice, while access to good pitches and convenient training slots can also be more difficult; this can be very frustrating during the winter with waterlogged or hard pitches meaning cancelled matches.

Staying in the game

The early teenage years can be particularly important. Girls are more likely to drop out of football during adolescence, so enjoyment, friendships, feeling physically confident and having coaches who understand the changes of adolescence can make a real difference.

For boys, participation tends to be more established through these ages, although greater numbers can bring different pressures, including competition for places and playing time.

The pathway can look different too

Trials, scouts, academies and development centres can quickly make children's football feel very serious, but opportunities don't necessarily appear in the same way. The boys' pathway is larger and more established, with extensive scouting networks and many children identified through grassroots clubs. The girls' pathway is growing rapidly, but parents may need to be more proactive in finding out about trials and development opportunities.

Neither system is a perfect measure of future potential. Children develop at different rates, and football is a subjective game – so being selected or not selected is certainly not a definitive judgement on their ability.

Ultimately, while there are differences between the boys' and girls' grassroots game, there are plenty of similarities too. What I've seen time and again is that when a child feels happy, confident and valued in their environment, you often see it in the way they play too. So, try not to get too caught up in where they "should" be but find the place where they can enjoy their football and keep developing as a player and person.

And finally, if you're asked to run the line, don't be nervous – go for it! We coaches really do appreciate it... and please don't worry if you make a mistake or miss an offside – it happens in the Premier League, and they've got VAR!

02

PLAYER PATHWAYS



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THE MYTH OF THE 0.012%

WHAT'S PLAN B? IF YOU WANT TO BECOME A PILOT, A PLUMBER, BUSINESS OWNER, OR A LAWYER, THEN SCHOOL, COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY PROVIDES CAREER GUIDANCE. HOWEVER, A YOUNG PERSON WHO SAYS "I'M GOING TO BE A FOOTBALLER" GETS A RESPONSE OF "OK, AND WHAT IS YOUR PLAN B?" I WANT TO CHANGE THIS.





By Dr Chris Platts *Career Coach & Researcher*

One problem confronting young people and their families is where they get their information. If career guidance is not available, they are left with guidance from the clubs, agents, or hearsay. Take the wildly unhelpful claim made by Michael Calvin in 2017: "Only 180 of the 1.5 million boys who play organised youth football in England will become a Premier League pro. That's a success rate of 0.012 per cent." This sold many books, but as I often share in my workshops, this is far from good use of data. Why is only making it to the Premier League seen as success?

I work as a career coach for young players and their families, and have researched their careers for over 15 years. Based on my research, here are five things you need to know:

1. Making it

What does it mean to make it? If a player gets a pro contract at the age of 18, never plays a first-team game, and is then released at 20, did they "make it"? If someone has a career of four years, did they make it? How long do you have to be a professional player before you are considered to have "made it"? Most parents I work with have not had this conversation. Without knowing what we are aiming for, how can we take control of our career?

2. If you get a contract at 18, you are not part of the 1%

Many young players have been told that only 1% will "make it". But this is incorrect, especially if making it means getting your first contract. Of the 303 players in my study, 56% got a professional contract at the age of 18.

3. Beware the trap of under-21 football

In England, around 1,200 males and 450 females play U21 football. However, research shows the longer you play at that level, the further you move away from first-team football. It's a case of "the harder you try, the worse you get" – the law of reverse effort. This is exactly what U21 football is. You have a contract, but the longer you stay there, the worse your chances of getting another one at the club.

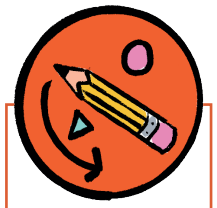
4. Think global

There are 211 members of FIFA all with leagues that pays males to play; 20 pay females, with another 40-50 offering hybrid arrangements. Focus on one place and you severely reduce your chances of being paid to play.

5. Clubs are businesses – your child is the product

If you do not take ownership of the journey, the clubs will dictate the loans you go on, the countries you go to, and the destination of your career. I work with parents every week who regret "trusting the process", those who regret conforming, and those who regret never asking why. Only 2% of players in my study stayed at the same club between the ages of 16 and 26. Own this process.

You can book a free, no-obligation 30-minute consultation with me; email me at info@chrisplatts.co.uk.



Top Tips for Parents

Define what **'making it'** means:
Set clear goals beyond the top league.
Own the journey
Ask questions and stay involved.
Think globally
Explore opportunities beyond England.

NON-LEAGUE GEMS

By Peter Chadwick *Founder and CEO of Non-League Gems*

At Non-League Gems, we challenge the perception of linear talent development, supporting instead the theory that elite human potential emerges from diverse and atypical pathways.

Our mission is to inspire young people, find their path of progression and unlock the full potential of non-traditional development pathways.

1. We will understand the essence of what makes you, you – by capturing your biographical, pathway and psychological data.
2. We will match your profile against previously successful pathway patterns and generate your personalised progression insights.
3. We will connect you to validated opportunities.

NLG has built a science-backed methodology and proprietary dataset that turns user-generated data into personalised progression insights aligned with the player's career goals that adapt with progress. We use AI to provide personalised pathway plans, career guidance and benchmarking to the 130 million young footballers with aspirations of progressing to a higher level.

We've already achieved significant real-world outcomes by helping hundreds of players progress up the leagues, including more than 60 into Premier League and Football League clubs. Most recently, we helped place a 21-year-old, who's never been in the system before, into Fulham in the Premier League.

NLG is contributing towards a positive change in development systems. No longer are the upper echelons of football reserved for players from elite academies. NLG's methodology will unlock the full potential of non-traditional development pathways, making opportunities accessible to all athletes regardless of their postcode or socioeconomic background.

Follow the many non-league stories on our Instagram **@nonleaguegems**





03

GIRLS FOOTBALL



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JPL FOR GIRLS... WORTH IT?

JUNIOR PREMIER LEAGUE FOR GIRLS... IS IT WORTH IT?



By Gianni Giorgiades *Parent of three girls*

I'm a dad of three girls. One loves netball, one loves drama and one, Farrah, loves football.

Farrah has been playing since she was eight and, over the years, we've experienced a bit of everything: grassroots, academy football, county leagues, JPL and now she is at West Ham United.

One of the questions I'm often asked by other parents is whether JPL is worth it?

- Is the standard really that much better?
- Is the travelling and financial commitment justified?
- And does it genuinely give girls better opportunities to progress?

Having spent two seasons in JPL, my answer probably isn't a straightforward yes or no. There have been some big challenges, but ultimately it played an important part in Farrah's journey. This is our experience and what I'd want another parent to know before making the decision.

Farrah first experienced academy life at U10 – and it was pretty awful. The coaching and training weren't great, but the biggest issue was that there didn't seem to be much understanding of how to communicate with nine and ten-year-old girls and get the best out of them. Farrah actually stopped enjoying football. She'd come home crying on a Friday night and then have to play again on the Saturday. At that point I thought, "What are we doing? She's nine years old and football is supposed to be something she loves."

So, we pulled her out. Looking back, it was one of the best decisions we made. We decided to forget about the badge and the academy and just find her a good grassroots club with a good coach who would develop her and, most importantly, let her enjoy playing football. She had two fantastic years there and absolutely flourished. The only problem was their league didn't have enough strong teams – so often results would be 10-0, which the girls enjoyed of course, but it wasn't challenging them as players. The following year however, they moved to a far more competitive league, and the year after, she moved to a club playing JPL and had two really good seasons.

At U13s, she was then asked again to train with her original academy football team, alongside her grassroots team. Unfortunately, we had a very similar experience and, again, in this environment, she wasn't progressing – although at club level she was flying. It was confusing!

On reflection, one thing I've noticed with the academy system for girls is that at the younger ages, there can be a tendency to favour those who are bigger, stronger and more physically developed. I'm not sure enough consideration is always given to what that 11 or 12-year-old might look like at 14, 15 or 16 – and it can also be disheartening for the girls given the vast differences in physical development during this period.

The JPL has its own challenges. As a parent you need to go into it with your eyes open because the commitment is huge. It's not just travelling at weekends. We live in north London, and had weekday games in Sudbury and Peterborough with 7pm kick-offs, which means leaving school, sitting in traffic for hours, playing a game and getting home late at night with school again the next morning. There's also a considerable financial cost attached to all of this and, in our experience, virtually no support for families.

In terms of the actual football, I personally haven't found the JPL to be massively better than the better teams we experienced in the second grass roots league, although of course, that may well depend on where you live and which JPL division you're in.

Having said all of that, I can't knock the opportunity the JPL eventually gave Farrah. She's 14 now and over the last year she's really started to develop physically. She's got taller, stronger and faster and suddenly you're seeing the player she was probably always going to become. A club like West Ham probably wouldn't have looked twice at her a couple of years ago, whereas this year they saw her, liked her and she's now playing for their U15s. The funny thing is, that probably wouldn't have happened without the JPL. Farrah played against West Ham for her club team, scored a hat-trick and got on their radar. So, for all the travelling, cost and frustrations, it ultimately gave her the platform to be seen.

Every girl's pathway is different. For Farrah, coming out of the academy system and going back into grassroots was probably the making of her. Grassroots gave her the confidence and love of the game, the JPL eventually gave her the exposure, and now at 14, she's ready for an opportunity with West Ham that she simply wasn't ready for at nine or ten.

Top Tips for Parents

If I could give another parent one piece of advice from our experience, it would be not to become obsessed with getting your daughter into an academy as young as possible. The badge really isn't everything. At nine, ten, eleven or twelve, I'd much rather have my daughter with a brilliant coach at a good grassroots club, playing regularly, enjoying herself and developing, than sitting inside an academy simply because of the name.

EVERY GIRL'S PATHWAY IS DIFFERENT. FOR FARRAH, COMING OUT OF THE ACADEMY SYSTEM AND GOING BACK INTO GRASSROOTS WAS PROBABLY THE MAKING OF HER.



GIRLS' ACADEMY JOURNEY

WHAT I WISH SOMEONE HAD TOLD ME

By Leanne Batt *Mum to Mia at Arsenal U21*

My daughter, Mia, successfully trialled into a football academy at the age of 11. At the time, the closest option for us in Kent meant 180-mile round trips, at a minimum of three times a week. I work remotely, which gave me flexibility to support the process, but I have learnt that flexibility is not the same as capacity.

Here's what I've learned that I would share with other parents on the academy pathway:

- **Education deserves equal consideration as football, and not just for the obvious reasons.**

Balancing school with training and travel finally became unmanageable entering Year 11, so we transitioned to online schooling. In hindsight, it was not the right decision. It cut her off from her school friendship group at exactly the wrong moment in her social development, and the isolation made studying harder, not easier.

Approach school and club for alternatives, flexible timetabling, hybrid attendance, before assuming remote learning is the fix. And for the social element; protect scheduled time for friendships that have nothing to do with football.

- **Education is not just important for the player!**

Understanding Mia as a female, rather than just as an athlete, has led me to pursue education on female athletes and the effect of the monthly hormonal profile on performance, personal trainer certification to understand body mechanics, and nutrition for appropriate fuelling. You don't need qualifications to support a female athlete, however, understanding how all these factors interact and can affect a female athlete, mentally, physically and emotionally really helps. The physiology of a female player is very different to a male, and I decided to educate myself specifically.

- **Trust your instincts.**

Initially, I trusted that every decision made for my daughter was the right decision for her, sometimes ignoring my intuition in fear of appearing "challenging" or "precious". There are a lot of components that will contribute to a child's pathway, and no one journey will look identical. Be empowered to ask questions when you have them, and no question is a silly question! You are your child's number one fan, so advocate from that space.

- **Dedicate protected time to siblings.**

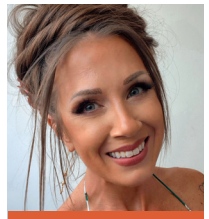
I often feel guilt about my son, as he has often been "left behind". As a result, I make an active effort in scheduling dedicated time to just being with him, whether its walking, the cinema, or even just sat on the sofa chatting. Siblings make sacrifices for this journey too. It's hard to find a balance, but my son and I prioritise time together as frequently as our schedule allows.

- **Take time for you, away from being taxi/chef/supporter/therapist/PT and all the other roles!**

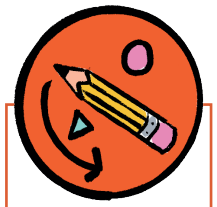
Whatever restores you, even 20 minutes, commit to it like you'd commit to getting your player to training! This process is demanding on a parent, and pouring from an empty cup helps no one.

- **What this journey has taught me so far...**

Whether she makes pro or not, my daughter has built skills she may not have developed if she had not pursued this pathway: independence, dedication, effective time management, confidence, commitment and the ability to prioritise under pressure. She's made friends for life and had experiences most people never get.







Top Tips for Parents

If there's one thing I'd tell myself at the beginning, it's to embrace every stage of the journey, don't try to rush to the destination. It goes by quicker than you realise, and you will, without a doubt, miss these moments with your player.

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MY HAPPY PLACE

MY ROLLERCOASTER RIDE TO FINDING MY HAPPY PLACE

By Kayleigh MacDonald *Professional Footballer and Player Care Liaison at Bolton Wonderers*

Hi, I'm Kayleigh MacDonald. I currently play for Bolton Wanderers and also work as a player care liaison.

My football journey started young, playing with the local boys' team before progressing through Liverpool Schoolgirls, Everton Centre of Excellence, and into the reserve team. Like many players, my relationship with the game has had its highs and lows. There were moments when I lost some of the love I once had, but football always found a way back into my life.

I spent nine years at Blackburn Rovers, where I experienced great success, winning leagues and cups, and helping the team gain promotion to what is now WSL2. But those later years also brought challenges: balancing a full-time job with the demands of semi-pro football, coping with mental health struggles, and feeling the strain of limited investment in the women's game. Eventually, I made the difficult decision to move on.

I then signed for Stoke City, which initially felt like an exciting new chapter. However, during a league match, I suffered a serious knee injury, rupturing my ACL, LCL, and posterolateral corner, snapping my IT band, and fracturing my knee. What followed was a tough period where I felt unsupported medically and emotionally. With no medical insurance in place, I had to launch a public GoFundMe to cover my rehabilitation costs.

That moment sparked wider attention around the lack of care and funding for semi-professional female players. It also led to unexpected support: Ian Wright saw my story, contributed to my rehab, and even funded legal representation through sports lawyer Daniel Geey at Sheridans.

After two gruelling years of recovery, I chose to keep playing. Hearing about the positive environment at Bolton made it a no-brainer to continue my career. Now, alongside playing, I'm slowly transitioning into a player care liaison role, a passion project to turn those tough chapters into something positive, so more girls and women can love the game without having to face its challenges alone.



TEN TIPS

BEING PART OF A FOOTBALL ACADEMY IS AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY FOR A YOUNG PLAYER AND THEIR FAMILY. IT CAN PROVIDE EXPERIENCES, FRIENDSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES THAT STAY WITH A PLAYER FOR LIFE

However, the academy environment also brings unique challenges, particularly during the teenage years when players are developing physically, emotionally, socially and academically.

At Manchester United Women's Academy, we want to develop talented footballers but, equally, we want to help develop the person off the pitch. Here are ten things parents should understand about the academy journey.

1. Every player has their own journey
There is no single pathway to becoming a successful footballer. Players develop at different rates and in different ways. Comparison is a killer of joy. Enjoying the journey is important.

2. Education matters
Balancing football and school can be challenging. Training, matches, travel, recovery and schoolwork all have to fit together. We want our players to understand that education and football can work alongside each other. Learning to manage their time, workload and responsibilities is an important part of becoming an independent young person.

3. Academy football isn't always straightforward
There will be highs and lows. Players may experience selection, non-selection, changes of position, reduced playing time or periods where they are challenged more than they have been before. These experiences can be difficult, but they can also provide some of the most valuable learning opportunities.

4. Development is about more than performance
We don't only measure development through goals, assists or performances. Decision-making, understanding the game, confidence, communication, resilience, physical development and responding to feedback are all important.

5. Girls' development has its own considerations
The teenage years can bring significant physical and emotional changes. Growth and maturation can affect how a player feels and performs. Two players of the same age can be at very different stages of development, so comparison isn't always helpful.

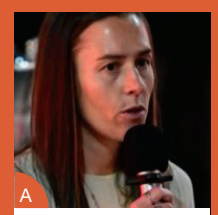
6. Don't compare your daughter with her team-mates
It is completely natural for parents to look at other players and wonder where their daughter sits. However, development isn't a race. The player who appears ahead at 13 may not be ahead at 16. Our responsibility is to understand each player as an individual and support what they need at that particular stage.

7. Opportunities look different for every player
Players may train with different age groups, be given additional challenges or experience changes to their pathway. These opportunities are often designed to stretch and develop the player. Sometimes the best learning happens when a player is outside their comfort zone.

8. Setbacks are part of the journey
There will be disappointments. Selection decisions, injuries, mistakes and changes in pathway can be hard for players and parents. Our role is to support players through those moments and help them learn how to respond. Resilience develops through experience.

9. Parents have a hugely important role
The support a player receives at home can make a significant difference. Often, the most helpful thing a parent can do is listen, encourage and provide perspective. Rather than focusing solely on the result or asking, "Did you play well?", sometimes the better question is, "How did you feel today?" Give your daughter space to own her football.

10. Most importantly, enjoy the journey
Academy football can become very serious, very quickly. We must remember that these are young girls who should still be allowed to enjoy playing football. They should be able to make mistakes, build friendships, challenge themselves and have fun.



By Amanda Goodwin
Academy Manager, Manchester United Women

04



ACADEMY LIFE & BEYOND

A GAME OF TWO SONS

WHEN BROTHERS BOTH PROGRESS TO A PROFESSIONAL CAREER, THERE'S A TENDENCY TO ASSUME THEIR CHALLENGES AND JOURNEYS WILL HAVE BEEN THE SAME





By Emma Mitchell *Mum of Zach and Billy Mitchell, Professional Footballers*

No two journeys are the same

If, like me, you have more than one child in football, you soon learn that no two journeys are the same, even when both have been raised in the same home, with the same schooling, values and support.

I work full time and am a single mum to two professional footballers: Billy, 25, and Zach, 21. Their routes through the game, and what they have needed from me, have been completely different.

After playing grassroots football from six and trialling for several clubs, Billy joined Millwall at 15. He progressed from scholar to professional, made his first-team debut at 18 and went on to make 196 appearances. This year, after ten years at Millwall, he joined Sheffield Wednesday.

Zach joined Charlton at seven, signed at nine and represented England at under-15 level. His senior journey has involved loans at Colchester, St Johnstone and Hibernian, before returning to St Johnstone this year.

Supporting them as individuals

Zach had stability early on and more uncertainty later; Billy's journey was almost the reverse. Their personalities differ too. One feels deeply and needs to talk things through; the other is more pragmatic, talks less and tends to adjust and get on with it.

As parents, we must learn the difference between treating our children equally and giving each child what they need individually.

The guilt of not being everywhere

As a single parent, I have felt stress and guilt. Zach drove the 12 hours to Scotland alone, but I knew he was comfortable and capable. Billy's situation was different, and he needed support with his five-hour move north. I understood my decision but still felt guilty about not being equally present.

We cannot split ourselves in two. I rely on trusted family and friends to attend a game or check in when I cannot. For parents without that network, No1Fan.Club can be invaluable. It connects people who understand football's highs, lows and practical realities, and reminds us that we are not alone.

The difficult choices

I also believe honesty is the best policy. Christmas feels particularly difficult this year. I have lost my dad and both sons have moved away, so how do I choose between my mum, Billy and Zach? Whose game do I prioritise, and how can I realistically visit everyone? These are some of the real issues we have.

When you cannot be there, talk openly to your children. Explain that you have made the best decision you can, based on who needs you most at that moment. Reassure them that supporting their sibling does not mean choosing their sibling over them. Equal suport does not always mean identical support.

Celebrating highs and supporting lows

Football also means that one child may be thriving while the other is struggling. In our family, we celebrate the highs and support each other through the lows. We never diminish one son's success because his brother is having a difficult time. I encourage Billy and Zach to embrace each other's achievements and allow each other that moment of glory. One child's success takes nothing from the other, and one difficult season does not define a career.

Roots and wings

I have always tried to give my boys roots and wings: roots so they have stability, security and a safe place where they will always be-long; wings so they have the confidence to fly and find their own way.

They will make mistakes and, however difficult it is, we have to let them. We can guide, advise and provide a safe place to return to, but we cannot make every decision for them.

Top Tips for Parents

Their Journey, Not Ours
We have to support the child in front of us and what they need at that moment, not just as footballers, but as people. Their paths may be completely different but, ultimately, it is their journey, not ours.
More details about Emma and her story can be found on our website **www.no1fan.club**

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MUNNY IS AN INDEPENDENT FINANCIAL EDUCATION COMPANY THAT HELPS PEOPLE BUILD THE KNOWLEDGE, CONFIDENCE AND HABITS TO MAKE BETTER DECISIONS WITH MONEY. WE WORK ACROSS PROFESSIONAL SPORT, WORKPLACES AND EDUCATION, COMBINING PRACTICAL FINANCIAL EDUCATION WITH DIGITAL TOOLS AND ACCESS TO EXPERIENCED MONEY COACHES.

We don't sell financial products or receive commission – our focus is simply on helping people understand money and make informed decisions for themselves and their families.

We're a proud delivery partner of the Premier League Life Skills Programme and supporter of No1 Fan Club

Top 10 money habits for footballers and their families

1. Ask for help

Nobody knows everything about money. Encourage your children to ask trusted people for guidance before making important financial decisions rather than guessing or feeling they have to work it out themselves. Never assume, never guess and never ignore it.

2. Build an emergency fund

Creating a financial safety net should come before expensive purchases. Having savings set aside helps protect against unexpected events and gives players more confidence and flexibility. Aim for 6-months worth of income saved up as a starting point.

3. Control impulse spending

Big purchases don't need to happen immediately. Players need to think about the "24-hour rule" – taking time to think before spending can prevent costly decisions made in the moment.

4. Avoid lifestyle creep

As income increases, spending doesn't have to increase at the same rate. Building savings alongside higher earnings creates long-term financial security. With every earnings increase; increase the savings %

5. Don't compare yourself to others

Social media and football environments can create pressure to keep up with others. Players need to make decisions based on what is right for them,not what someone else owns. Comparison is the thief of joy!

6. Save with purpose

Saving is easier when there's a clear goal. Whether it's buying a first home, travelling or planning for the future, meaningful goals help build consistent habits. Name those savings accounts and emotionally connect with saving

7. Protect your credit score

Good financial habits today improve future opportunities. Players should learn how their credit history can affect borrowing, mortgages and other financial decisions later in life.

8. Know your numbers

Understanding income, spending and savings is one of the simplest but most powerful financial habits. Players are encouraged to regularly check where their money is going.

9. Stay scam aware

Players are targets for scams and fraudulent investments. Slow down, ask questions and always verify info before acting. If something looks "too good to be true," it often is.

10. Learn to say no

As careers progress, requests for money, investments and financial support increase. Players should set boundaries and avoid making emotional financial decisions. Insulating themselves from those decisions by putting people inbetween the request and the response.

Top Tips for Parents

Know your numbers. Build good habits. Make better money decisions.

If you would like more information please get in touch
www.munnygroup.com/no1fan
Contact us
hello@munnygroup.com

NO1 ... SECOND TO NONE!



By Carly Sclare *Mum to Zach a Scholar at Norwich Academy U21*

Raising a son through the football system has been one of the biggest emotional journeys of my life. From the outside, it can look exciting – matches, training, opportunities and watching your child chase a dream. But behind all of that is a world of uncertainty, pressure and emotions that can be incredibly difficult to navigate.

Football parenting can be lonely

There are the early mornings, the long journeys, the sacrifices and the constant highs and lows. One week you can feel on top of the world because your child has had a great game. The next, you can be questioning everything because of a setback, a rejection, an injury, a change of team or simply watching your child lose confidence.

And as a parent, you feel every single bit of it. You want to protect them from disappointment, but you can't. You want to have all the answers, but you don't.

You want to make the right decisions at every turn, but the football system can be incredibly difficult to understand and navigate.

There have been moments when I have gone home carrying the weight of it all, wondering whether I am doing enough and how I can best support my son without allowing my own emotions to become his.

That's why No1Fan.Club has become so incredibly important to me.

What I found through No1Fan was so much more than advice or information; I found a family.

A community of people who understand. People who have experienced the same worries, excitement, heartbreak and pride. People I can turn to when I don't know what to do, when I need reassurance, when I have a question, or simply when I need someone to say, "I understand." And sometimes, that means more than anything.

The family and community I have gained through No1Fan has genuinely been second to none. The platform has become such an important part of our journey and knowing there are people beside me who have been through what I am going through, has made such a difference.

They are always there to provide support, advice, or just to listen. There is always someone to talk to who has had a similar experience, or some knowledge to share that is invaluable.

No1Fan.Club has reminded me that I don't have to navigate this journey alone.

Ultimately, my son's football journey belongs to him. My job is to support him, encourage him, pick him up when things don't go his way and remind him that his worth is never determined by a selection, a result or someone else's opinion.

I am incredibly proud of the footballer he is becoming, but even more proud of the person he is becoming. There will be more highs, more lows, more tears, more laughter and plenty more moments where we question what comes next. But one thing I do know, is that we have a family around us now.

That is what makes No1 Fan Club so special. It hasn't just helped me navigate football, it has helped me navigate the journey of being a football mum and I will always be grateful for that.

FUTURES Powered by EFL LFE

FUTURE'S BRIGHT

THE PREMIER LEAGUE, EFL AND LEAGUE FOOTBALL EDUCATION (LFE) ARE COMMITTED TO SUPPORTING ACADEMY PLAYERS THROUGHOUT THE FOOTBALL PYRAMID, HELPING THEM DEVELOP BOTH ON AND OFF THE PITCH.

Through rigorous standards, comprehensive support systems and continued investment in player welfare, the organisations strive to create a safe, inclusive and nurturing environment in which young people can thrive. This commitment extends beyond football, ensuring academy players are equipped with the skills, knowledge and opportunities needed to succeed in all aspects of life.

The opportunities available to former academy Players and those moving to new careers are collectively delivered by the Premier League, EFL and LFE under the "Futures" initiative, which aims to transform the support academy graduates receive to achieve success beyond their time in the academy system. This support is grouped under three core pillars:

- **Pathways** creating access to aspirational career opportunities
- **Programmes** delivering impactful experiences that enable the next steps
- **People** building a community that supports and celebrates every journey

Two recent initiatives that showcase the work in this area are the Futures Leadership Programme and the Futures US Tour.

Futures Leadership Programme

This focuses on career planning after playing, developing leadership skills and helping individuals realise their potential. It also promotes inclusivity and diversity across the sports industry. Originally launched by the Premier League in 2022, the programme provides participants with opportunities to gain insight into different industries and career pathways. Each participant is nominated by their club in recognition of their leadership qualities and personal strengths, reflecting the programme's commitment to supporting individuals who demonstrate character and potential both on and off the pitch.



Neil Saunders, Director of Football at the Premier League, said: "The FLP supports individuals to explore career pathways beyond playing and develop the skills needed to succeed in a broad range of professional environments.

"It forms part of our wider commitment to ensuring academy players are prepared not only for success on the pitch, but for meaningful, long-term fulfilment off it as well."

Futures US Tour

Now in its second iteration, this provides a life-changing opportunity to explore sustainable exit pathways on and off the field. In April 2026, 25 former Premier League or EFL academy players travelled to Tampa Bay, Florida, for a development experience which combined exposure to pro' and collegiate environments, as well as high-performing off-pitch settings from across the wider sporting landscape.

Participants had the chance to showcase their talents in training and match environments against high-level US teams and in the presence of scouts from MLS and USL teams and NCAA universities seeking players or student athletes for their programmes.

Under the Futures initiatives, the Premier League, EFL and LFE will aim to build upon the success of the Futures US tour and promote further opportunities to study and play in the US, as well as expand the education and career pathways for academy graduates with UK university and industry partners.

Self-Rep.com

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See the platform in action and start your journey today.

05

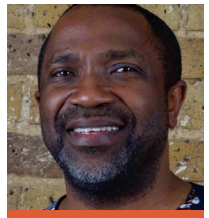
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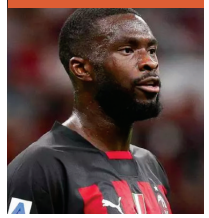


Nº1 FAN .CLUB

IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL PLANNING

THE IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL PLANNING IN THE LIFE OF A FOOTBALLER





By Yinka Tomori *Father to Fikayo Tomori, Professional Footballer, AC Milan*

I remember walking into the Chelsea academy in 2004 with my seven-year-old son and wondering what all the fuss was about. Twenty-two years on and after three loan spells and now at AC Milan, I sort of get it. I now realise that the opportunity to play football at professional level goes beyond just talent – time and chance play a big part.

So, as the first point of contact, what could I do as a parent to ensure my son makes the best of this good fortune if it comes his way? I figured the areas I could help most were to keep him grounded and to attempt making the "unusual" finances that may come with professional football truly count. I can only give what I have, so I needed to turn the mirror on myself, ensure I was grounded and maintain a planned approach toward finances. Burying heads in the sand and hoping things will fall into place just won't cut it.

Having the right attitude to managing finances at any level starts with your character, because doing well with money has more to do with your behaviour than how smart you are.

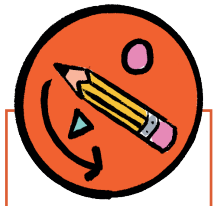
I'm an accountant but I certainly don't know it all when it comes to managing money. So, I bounced thoughts off financial advisers and friends who I felt had financial common sense. I also watched a few football parents from a distance to see how to go about it and how NOT to go about it. I read any story I could find on top level athletes who thrived financially after retirement and those who failed, looking for the common threads to success or failure.

My biased conclusion on the traits of those who thrived is that they:

- Set their own values and priorities and refused to hand them to others. Jockeying for social comparison is a killer.
- Played the long game. They kept a firm eye on the future and did not focus on immediate gratification.
- Paid less attention to the opinion of others. Other than within their sport, they chose not to be in competition with anyone.
- Saw their sporting talent as a gift to build upon rather than something they earned or deserved. Talent gave them an opportunity, not an entitlement
- Were mostly humble and generous people; a generosity that helped those in need and not to show off.

So, what do I think good financial planning looks like?

- A monthly budget is priceless; create it and stick to it! A good share should be committed to investments, while still factoring in some enjoyment. Review the plans periodically, especially when circumstances change.
- Get professional advice. This is crucial for long-term planning. Always get a second opinion if you are unsure and educate yourself so you know the right questions to ask.
- Plan for life after football and the financial commitment required. 40% of footballers face bankruptcy within five years of retirement – let that sink in. It's never too early to start!
- Two top people in football told me the biggest problems for footballers are the parents and the agents! If you have worked on yourself, pick an agent who shares your values and ideally, keep the agent separate from those managing the finances.
- Keep your ears to the ground and learn from the mistakes of others.



Top Tips for Parents

Football is a fickle business and the tables can turn very quickly. You are either chasing someone or you're being chased! So, footballers and their connections must consistently plan to make good choices. For some, this journey will bring thousands and for a few, millions. Whatever it brings, let's try to make it count!

COMMON MISTAKES

AGENT VIEW: THE MOST COMMON MISTAKES I SEE PARENTS MAKE

By Lindi Ngwenya *Football Agent and Director at Sisu Sports Management*

Having a child navigate the academy system, can be a rollercoaster of emotions, and, as parents you can't control the journey. However, there are ways to create a supportive environment. I've advised many parents since 2013, and there are common mistakes they make:

With the club

- **Reacting too strongly to selection decisions.** academy football has so many ups and downs. Not starting, being moved between groups or seeing another player promoted can feel hugely significant in the moment. As a parent, your role is to provide calm amongst the storm of emotions your child may be experiencing.
- **Believing a bigger academy is always better.** Sometimes being somewhere the child feels valued, plays regularly and has coaches invested in their development is much more important than the badge. The question to always ask is – what is the plan for your child? Vague answers or dismissiveness are red flags.
- **Wanting to move when things become difficult.** Sometimes changing clubs is right, but difficult periods can also be where players develop resilience and learn how to fight for their place.

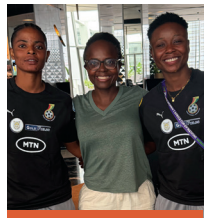
With agents

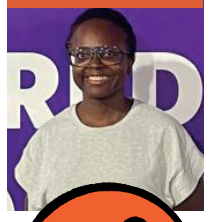
- **Not researching if the agency is a good fit.** For example, do you really want your daughter to be GK number 6 in the agent's roster when you have a women's professional game of just 26 clubs?
- **Having too many people involved.** Football in England is a national obsession, and everyone has an opinion... extended family, friends, coaches, different agents... the dog walker! It can be chaotic. For a young player and for you having several people giving different advice will become overwhelming.
- **Making the relationship with an agent too important, too young.** We have all seen those 12-year-olds with "an agent" - which is well before they're a potential professional footballer. Remember, they are still a child developing as a person and player. That should remain at the centre of everything until they are approaching scholarship decision point.

With your child

- **Comparing them to other players.** "He got called up." "She's playing a year above." "You were better than him last season." Young players develop at different speeds, physically, emotionally and technically. Ask yourself if the direction of travel in their development is still forwards and be mindful of the variations.
- **Solving every problem for them.** When something goes wrong, the instinct is naturally to protect your child but you are just preventing them from figuring things out. Sometimes allow them to speak to the coach themselves, deal with disappointment or work through a difficult period. It is part of preparing them for life as well as professional football.
- **Not acknowledging your own biases.** Of course, your judgement is biologically clouded...they are your kids! Consequently, don't let it become 'them against us' as you rail against coaches, other parents, your agent or the club, generally setting the example to your child of looking externally for excuses.

Remember, first and foremost, your child needs you to be their parent. Keep that in mind, and remember to breathe...







Top Tips for Parents

Ask what their agent to represented player ratio is. This will help you compare and give an indication of whether there will be good service levels, or they are playing the numbers game.

For more info: **Lindi@sisusportsmanagement.com www.sisusportsmanagement.com @sisusportsmanagement**

STEERING SUCCESS

YOUNG PLAYER, FIRST CAR? HERE'S WHAT YOUR INSURER NEEDS TO KNOW

By Graham Smith *Car Insurance Broker, Certis Insurance*

Dear Parent,

As your child takes an important step towards getting behind the wheel, there's a lot to think about – from choosing their first car to finding the right insurance. If your child is involved in sport, there's one key area we believe parents and young players need to be aware of – making sure their occupation and circumstances are correctly declared to their insurer.

So, ask yourself:

- Is your child involved in organised sport?
- Do they receive any income or payment from the club they play for?
- Do they have a contract with a club or an agent?
- Are they an academy player, Scholar, U17 player, U21 player or contracted sportsman?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, it's important to recognise that your child would be classed as a sports person for insurance purposes. It's not simply a label; it can make a difference to how their insurance is arranged and the validity of their cover.

Why does this matter?

We're increasingly seeing young players, particularly 17 year-olds buying their first car, describing themselves as a 'student' when arranging their car insurance. While they may of course still be in education, if they are also receiving an income from a football club or other sporting organisation, that information may need to be declared to the insurer.

Getting this wrong could cause serious future problems and the consequences could be extremely serious for everyone involved.

Depending on the circumstances and the insurer's terms, providing inaccurate or incomplete information can lead to:

- A policy being cancelled or invalidated, something which would need to be disclosed to all future insurers
- A claim being declined or limited
- Significant costs for damage to your own vehicle or someone else's
- The possibility of having to repay costs to an insurer resulting in serious financial consequences for the player and their family

Social media makes it even more important

Today, a young player's career can often be seen online. Contract signings, academy announcements, club posts and career milestones all shared across social media.

That means there can be a clear digital record of a player's involvement with a club or organisation easily accessible to insurers and claims departments when handling a claim.

For parents and players, the message is simple: make sure the information you provide to your insurer is accurate and up to date.

We're here to help

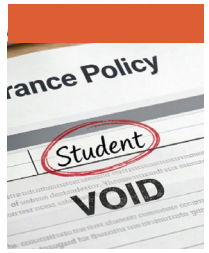
Our company specialises in car insurance for people working in the Sports and Entertainment sectors, and we're proud to be the official partner of the PDPA (Darts).

We understand that insurance can be confusing, particularly when a young player is buying their first car and starting to earn money from their sport.

Our aim is to make the process as straightforward as possible and help young sports people understand what needs to be declared, so they can have the right protection in place as their careers develop.

Getting the right insurance from the start could save a lot of stress and potentially a lot of money, further down the line.





Top Tips for Parents

Declare everything: If your child gets paid by a club, tell the insurer.

Social media has a memory: Insurers can see posts about contracts. Match your declaration.

One mistake costs big: Wrong info = cancelled policies, rejected claims, repayment.

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The Young Players Broker...

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INSURANCE. PROTECTING

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT'S AROUND THE CORNER, SO FOOTBALLERS MUST PROTECT THEMSELVES

By Nathan Duthie *Insurance Broker, Miller-Insurance*

Personal accident insurance

Who needs personal accident and injury insurance?

If you're a professional footballer and want to protect your future earnings against serious injury, it's a good idea to have the right insurance in place.

Whether you're just starting out or already established in the game, personal accident insurance can play an important part in your wider financial planning.

Professional footballers put in a huge amount of work to reach the top level, but many do not fully realise how much a serious or career-ending injury or illness could affect their income and long-term financial security.

What is personal accident and injury insurance?

Football player insurance can include cover for career-ending injury or permanent total disablement (PTD), as well as income protection or temporary total disablement (TTD).

Our experienced team works closely with players and/or their representatives to recommend policy options that fit their individual circumstances. We look at things like:

- The country you play in
- The type of financial protection you need
- The terms of your playing contract
- How long your current contract runs for
- Your potential future earnings

Contracts and club obligations can vary across Europe, so it's important to understand what applies where you play.

If you give us the details, we can take it from there.

Why should I get insured?

Insurance gives professional sports people and their families peace of mind and financial protection if an accident or illness interrupts or ends a player's career.

Your contract will usually determine how long your club has to keep paying your salary after a serious or career-ending injury. That can vary depending on both the contract itself and the laws of the country you play in.

In some cases, if the worst happens, a club may be able to terminate a contract and stop paying salary after six months. That is why personal accident & illness cover can be so important, it helps protect your financial future if the unexpected happens.

Why should I consider Miller for personal accident insurance?

Miller has one of the largest international sports and entertainment broking teams. Our specialists understand the pressures professional footballers face, and some of them are former sports professionals themselves.

That means we can offer insurance solutions that are tailored to the realities of the game.

- We arrange personal accident and illness insurance for more than 1,500 players across Europe.
- We work with all 20 Premier League clubs.
- More than half of the men's England and France squads are Miller clients.
- We insure 40% of the England women's football squad.

Our policies also include additional benefits designed to meet the changing needs of professional footballers today, including mental health support and academy player reimbursement.

Get in touch with our specialist team:

Personal accident
Nathan Duthie
07913919211
nathan.duthie@miller-insurance.com

Car insurance
James Dayton
07762215815
james.dayton@miller-insurance.com
www.miller-insurance.com

Giving you long-term financial protection in the event of a career ending injury

WHAT OUR CLIENTS SAY:

"AT THE YOUNG AGE OF 22, SUFFERING AN INJURY THAT WOULD LEAD TO RETIREMENT, WAS SOMETHING THAT I WAS NOT EXPECTING.

THANKFULLY, I HAD COVERED MY FUTURE BY TAKING OUT AN INDIVIDUAL CAREER ENDING INSURANCE POLICY WITH MILLER."

TRISTAN NYDAM
Former Professional Football Player, Ipswich Town FC

PROTECTING YOUR FUTURE

Find out more and get in touch with the team:

E: nathan.duthie@miller-insurance.com
M: +44 7913 919 211

miller

www.miller-insurance.com

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- ✓ Behind the Boots and The Real SideLine Expert: Full podcast Interviews
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You don't have to go through this journey alone. Join the community!

HANDBOOK 26/27

Sheridans | Sport

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About

Sheridans | Sport is a market leading, full service, legal offering to the sports industry. Made up of 35 specialist lawyers, across 6 core practice areas, we are the trusted legal advisers to some of the most recognisable international names in sports and entertainment on their most complex matters.

Core Practice Areas

- Athletes & Talent
- Branding, Marketing & Advertising
- Regulatory & Disputes
- Broadcasting & Digital Media
- Investment & Transactions
- Sports Tech, Data & Innovation

Breadth of Offering

SHERIDANS | SPORT

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- Gaming
- AI

YOUR CHILD'S PLAYING CONTRACT

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR WHEN RECEIVING THE FIRST PRO CONTRACT

By Daniel Geey and Alex Harvey
Sports Lawyers at Sheridans

If your child is offered a professional contract, here's what to look out for so you can ask the right questions and understand what their agent is negotiating on their behalf.

As a parent, you don't need to become a contract expert overnight, but knowing the basics below will help you follow what your child's agent is doing for them, and make sure nothing important gets missed.

Release clauses A release clause is the fee another club must pay to sign your child away from their current club before their contract ends. Make sure this figure, and how and when it must be paid, is clear and realistic. Some clubs insist the whole fee is paid straight away rather than in instalments, which is often not practical for a buying club, so it's worth checking this with the agent. It also needs to be clear that the agent and family are allowed to tell other clubs about this fee when discussing a possible transfer.

"Gross-Up" bonuses If the club pays the agent's fee on your child's behalf, your child may have to pay tax on that amount, as it counts as a received benefit. To help cover this, agents will often ask the club for an extra bonus (called a "gross-up" bonus), usually paid each January just before the tax is due.

Signing-on v loyalty bonuses There are generally two types of bonus a player might receive: a signing-on bonus (paid for joining the club) and a loyalty bonus (paid for staying at the club over time). Signing-on bonuses are usually better for your child because they are guaranteed and can remain payable even if they later leave the club. Loyalty bonuses, by contrast, are usually only paid if your child is still at the club when the payment falls due, so it's worth checking what happens if they are out on loan at another club at that time.

Appearances Bonuses and pay rises are often linked to how many games your child plays. It's worth checking what counts as an "appearance" – for example, does coming on as sub for the last minute count? Are all competitions included, including friendlies? The clearer these conditions are, the better for your child.

Relegation If the club is relegated, your child's salary may be reduced. If the club is later promoted back to the same league, your child's salary should return to what they were being paid before the reduction, including any pay rises they'd already earned.

Performance bonuses Where a bonus depends on your child scoring a certain number of goals or playing a certain number of games, it is often better to build in smaller bonuses along the way rather than one large bonus for hitting a high target. For example, instead of a single £20k bonus for scoring 20 goals in a season, it may be better to agree £5k for every 5 goals, so your child is rewarded for progress even if they don't reach the very top target.

If you have any questions, you can reach us at **dgeey@sheridans.co.uk** or **aharvey@sheridans.co.uk.**

What parents need to know about their child's brand deals
If your child is lucky enough to be offered brand deals alongside their football playing deals, here's what to look out for so you understand what their agent should be negotiating for them.

Brand deals can be a great opportunity, but the contracts behind them can be complicated. Here are some of the key things a good agent will be thinking about on your child's behalf.

Exclusivity Brands often want to stop your child working with any competitor in the same category. It's important this is kept as narrow as possible so your child can still take up other opportunities. Watch out for boot deals in particular. Sportswear brands often want to cover not just football boots but all clothing, footwear and accessories like sunglasses, headphones and watches. This matters even more in the women's game, where commercial deals can make up a bigger share of a player's overall income.



Creative control Most players want some say over how they're shown in public, whether that's a social media post, a billboard or a TV advert. A good agent will try to make sure your child has the right to approve any materials before they're published.

Fees Brand deals usually combine a guaranteed fee with extra bonus payments tied to performance. It's best to get as much of the fee paid upfront as possible, and to check carefully what conditions apply to any bonus. For example, a bonus for winning a tournament might only be paid if your child also plays a certain number of games and starts in the final, so it's worth knowing exactly what's required.

Usage rights It's important to be clear about exactly how and where the brand can use your child's name and image, for example, whether they can create AI-generated images of your child, or use their image in online virtual worlds. Where new technology like this is involved, there should also be a way to have that content taken down once the deal ends.

Image rights companies Some players set up their own company to manage deals involving their name and image, which can have tax benefits. If your child does this, it's important that any brand deal is signed by that company, not by your child personally.

Morality Brands usually want the right to end a deal if the player does something they consider inappropriate. That's normal, but a good agent will try to make sure this only applies in serious, clearly defined situations, not just anything the brand disapproves of. It's also worth asking for the same right in reverse, so your child can walk away if the brand itself is involved in a scandal.

Personal appearances If your child needs to attend events for the brand (such as meet and greets or filming days), it's important that this never gets in the way of their football, whether training or matches for their club or country. Any appearance dates should be agreed with everyone in advance, long-distance travel should be avoided during the season, and the brand should cover all expenses.



Questions
If you have any questions, you can reach us at **aharvey@sheridans.co.uk** or **DGeey@sheridans.co.uk**

PARENTS: THINK PENSIONS!

WHAT PARENTS AND PLAYERS SHOULD NOT OVERLOOK

By Saisha Penny *APFS, Chartered Financial Planner*

I've worked with sports people from scholars earning their first salary to six figure earners and the advice is always the same: think about what you want your life to look like in 10, 20, 30 years, then work backwards.

Pensions aren't sexy and get overlooked. But I'm talking to you, the parents, because you're the ones who can make your kids listen.

Here's why it matters in football: your child could be earning at the top level at 18 and finished by 28. That's a tight window to set up their whole life. The ones who've done really well? They plan around the contract they've got now, not the one they assume will come next. They discipline themselves around money.

Two questions you need to answer...

1. How much will they actually need?

This depends on what lifestyle they want after football. What are their commitments going to be? Mortgage? School fees? The car they drive? The lifestyle they get used to during their career is what they'll probably want after.

I've seen players who didn't plan and later had to sell the family home. It's preventable.

Start by tracking where their money goes now. That shows you their regular commitments and whether lifestyle creep is happening, spending gradually going up as earnings go up.

Once you know their annual costs, work backwards. When their playing career ends, their income will likely drop. Coaching or punditry might be a fraction of what they earn now.

They'll need assets to bridge the gap: stocks and shares, property, businesses, or a mix. The key is diversification and access. They need to reach these assets when they need them, and they can't depend on just one thing.

2. Where should they save it?

The only thing being invested automatically on your child's behalf right now: their pension.

The Professional Footballers Pension Scheme

Who and what

Your child joins if they're under contract with a Premier League or EFL club. They'll get an email from Broadstone to set up their account. Contributions are made from the Transfer Levy: £600 per month for 2025/26, automatically. They can add more but it won't get matched. Get advice before doing that (for tax implications).

The investment bit

When they join, they go into the Default Lifestyle Strategy automatically. Look at this. Is it right for your child? If they're 20, too cautious means they miss out on growth. If they're 30, too risky means unnecessary stress when they might need the money. Check www.footballerspensions.com for available funds.

Access

Retirement age is 55 (up to 57 in April 2028). But your child's career will end way before that. Pensions matter for long term planning but won't help with immediate post football finances.

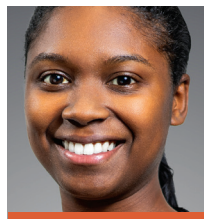
Two other things:

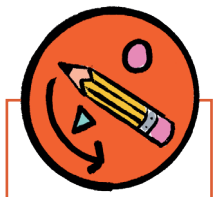
Make sure they fill out an Expression of Wishes form (email footballerspensions@broadstone.co.uk) to say who gets the money if something happens. And if they pass away while active, there's life cover of four times their earnings (up to £600,000 maximum).

The bigger picture

A playing career is short and the timing of its end isn't in your kid's control. So, the goal is: make the most of the years when they're earning the most and build a financial foundation that works after they stop playing.

The pension is important. But it's one piece of the puzzle, not the whole thing. Understand what's being contributed, how it's invested, what's available. But also build other accessible, diversified assets alongside it. And here's the best bit: you don't need to have everything figured out today. The plan evolves as their career, income, and circumstances change. The earlier they get good financial habits in place, the better. That relatively short football career can turn into long term financial security.





Top Tips for Parents

1. Don't wait. Start thinking about life after football while you're earning the money.
2. Track where your money's going right now. Know what your lifestyle actually costs.
3. Don't rely on your pension alone. Build other assets you can use when your career ends.

For a no obligation chat: **saisha@thepennys.co.uk**
LinkedIn: **linkedin.com/in/saisha-penny-622324bb/**

HaysMac

Expertise that goes beyond the game.

In sport, every second, every decision and every opportunity counts. So does the guidance you choose.

For over 20 years, HaysMac has been trusted accountants and tax advisors to athletes, agents and sports organisations. Combining sharp technical expertise with a deep understanding of sport, we help ambitious individuals and organisations seize opportunities and plan for the future with confidence.

For athletes, the decisions you make early can shape opportunities later.

From understanding tax obligations at the outset and structuring finances to launching business ventures and planning for life beyond competition, we help athletes build strong foundations for the future.

The same specialist expertise supports clubs, governing bodies and sports businesses, helping them navigate the financial, regulatory and commercial decisions that shape long-term success.

Discover how HaysMac helps athletes build strong financial foundations for life in sport and beyond.

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WELLBEING

CHOOSING A FIRST CAR?

A SIMPLE TIP FOR YOUNG FOOTBALLERS AND THEIR FAMILIES BEFORE BUYING A NEW CAR



ALL SPORT INSURANCE

By All Sport Insurance

For many young footballers, passing the driving test is a huge milestone. It can mean more independence, easier travel to training, and less reliance on parents for lifts to matches, gym sessions, work, college or university. Choosing that first car is exciting, but before falling in love with the look, badge or monthly payment, there is one important detail worth checking: the car insurance group.

Every car sits in an insurance group, usually from 1 to 50. In simple terms, the lower the group, the more affordable the car is likely to be to insure. That is not the only factor insurers consider – age, driving experience, postcode, mileage and claims history all matter too, but the insurance group can make a real difference to the final premium.

This is especially important for young drivers. A car that looks like good value on the forecourt can quickly become expensive if it sits in a higher insurance group. For families supporting a young player, it can be worth having the insurance conversation before any deposit is paid. A slightly more modest car may help keep the overall cost of motoring manageable, leaving more room in the budget for football boots, travel, kit and everything else that comes with the game.

At All Sport Insurance, we often speak to young footballers and their parents about realistic vehicle choices. As a guide, young drivers can usually look at vehicles up to around Group 26, with Group 28 sometimes possible depending on the circumstances. Going above that can make cover harder to arrange or significantly more expensive, so it pays to check early.

The good news is that choosing a lower-group car does not mean choosing something unsuitable. Many practical, reliable and smart-looking cars fall into more sensible insurance groups. The key is to balance what the young driver wants with what is affordable to insure, run and maintain.

For parents, the best advice is simple: make insurance part of the car-buying checklist. Before agreeing to a vehicle, check the insurance group, get an indication of possible cover, and ask questions if you are unsure. A quick conversation at the start can help avoid disappointment later.

All Sport Insurance is here to help make that conversation easier. We understand the needs of young sportspeople and their families, and we pride ourselves on being approachable, practical and straightforward. Whether your young footballer has just passed their test or is already looking at their next car, we can help you understand what may be possible before you commit.



Thinking about a new car?

Speak to All Sport Insurance before you buy and let us help you find cover that fits the player, the car and the budget.
Visit All Sport Insurance | Sports Insurance Specialists to get in touch.

THE PERFORMANCE CANTEEN

EVERY YOUNG FOOTBALLER HAS A TRAINING PLAN. BUT HOW MANY HAVE AN EATING PLAN?





By Kate Shilland and Fran Taylor *Sports and Public Health Nutritionists*

All players know when they're training and what they're working on. But a huge influence on performance is often overlooked. For optimal health and performance, young players need to learn to eat as hard as they train.

We work with young footballers and their families every day and, as parents ourselves, we see the challenges: public health messages about sugar, too many 'experts', and social media pushing supplements, and professional players' routines that aren't relevant to growing bodies.

After nine seasons as Head of Nutrition at a Premier League academy, here are the top six things football parents need to know, based on the questions we get asked every day.

1. Young footballers have two energy tanks

One fuels football. The other fuels growth. Kids aren't just fuelling training and matches; they're fuelling school, growing bones and brains, developing muscles and busy lives. If they don't eat enough for both, the body borrows from the "growth tank" to fuel sport, which impacts health, recovery and performance, and raises injury risk. Many parents underestimate how much their players need to eat.

2. Signs of under-fuelling

Kids don't come with a fuel gauge, so watch for: tiredness (even after a good sleep), poor concentration, low mood, light-headedness, dropping performance, slow recovery, frequent niggles, coughs or colds. Some overlap with just being a teenager – but, if these sound familiar, check their training load against their food intake.

3. More food, not more food rules

We all hear ourselves say "You'll ruin your dinner", or "You can't still be hungry." But growing, active players can genuinely still be hungry! They need far more food than we realise. Quality matters, but quantity counts most. The occasional burger isn't what worries us; not eating enough is.

4. Don't feed them like they're Ronaldo

Social media makes it easy to think young players should eat like the professionals they look up to. But, in reality, the only person who should eat like Ronaldo is Ronaldo!

Your child needs to eat like a growing young athlete, not a grown one. Kids have a unique set of physiological needs that need meeting to support growth first and football second.

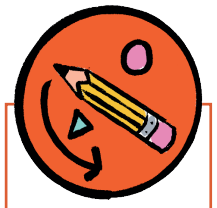
5. Sugar isn't the enemy, it's all about context

Carbohydrate is the key fuel for football, for body and brain, so foods containing sugar have a place around training and matches. A pack of Haribo isn't a great breakfast, but it's a great half-time fuel. It's not about good foods and bad foods – it's about good and bad timing.

6. Food-first foundations

Social media is full of compelling claims about performance powders, protein shakes and creatine (our number one question). Whilst supplements can sometimes play a role in specific situations, the most important thing is to build a solid foundation from real food. Supplements can sometimes be the icing on the cake, but you need to make the cake first.

The message we hope every parent takes away: food is an essential part of the training kit. The more they train, the more they need to eat, and something is always better than nothing. Don't beat yourself up about it. If you'd like any support, we'd love to help so get in touch....



Top Tips for Parents

Think of every session as a "training sandwich" – fuel before, fuel during (if over 60 minutes), refuel after. Alongside meals, not instead of them.

@performance_canteen

MORE THAN THE MATCH

RAISING A FOOTBALLER, DEVELOPING A PERSON



By Beth Kerr *Wellbeing Expert and Parent in Football*

After more than a decade on football touchlines, I've realised there are many types of football parent...

- The Future Premier League Parent... convinced their child is destined for bigger things.
- The Heart Attack Parent... pacing, wincing, covering their eyes, eying up the defibrillator
- The Specsavers Parent... "Ref, you should have gone to..."
- The Touchline Tactician... they basically are Pep in disguise
- The Italian Football Parent... living every kick and decision with flying arms and the occasional colourful word.
- The Super-Stylish Parent... arriving at a muddy grassroots pitch looking like they're heading to Milan Fashion Week.

Apart from the last one, I've probably been them all at some point!

My twins both joined Premier League academies at nine. Between them, we've experienced retention, release and everything in between. They're both still playing loads, currently in grass roots teams, and teaching me that the journey rarely follows the plan you imagined.

Professionally, I work with high-performing young people, researching how they develop, what helps them perform at their best, and how a rapidly changing digital world is shaping their brains, habits and behaviour. I'm particularly interested in young people who have grown up in competitive sport, because sport gives them opportunities to develop some extraordinary skills.

Bringing those two perspectives together - my work and many years as a football parent, these are three reflections I'd share with my fellow football parents.

Enjoy the journey - including the difficult bits

In an increasingly cushioned childhood, there are fewer opportunities for failure or disappointment. For example, schools are focused on inclusion, encouragement and protecting wellbeing - there is more of a "everyone gets a medal" culture to protect children from challenges and difficult feedback.

But the issue is that life, like competitive sport, isn't like that.

Someone else gets selected. You get dropped. You lose. You play badly. You miss a penalty. Sometimes you work incredibly hard and it still isn't enough.

Don't underestimate those moments. Football gives children opportunities to experience disappointment, recover, adapt and go again. Don't rush to remove the discomfort; help them learn what to do with it.

How you respond teaches them how to respond

Our children hear what we say about the coach on the way home. They hear us blame the referee, criticise the club, the coach, another player or their parents.

How we respond to disappointment is part of what they are learning from football too.

One of my favourite reminders comes from Michelle Obama: "When they go low, we go high." We won't always agree with decisions, but we can show our children how to handle disappointment, disagreement and other people's success without pulling others down.

And remember, particularly as they move into adolescence, you don't have to turn every moment into a lesson. Peer influence is increasing and independence matters more. Sometimes a well-timed comment or question, then leaving it to percolate, is more powerful than a lecture.

They often hear far more than they let us know.

Digital habits are performance habits

Some practical things to consider.

- Eyes up before and after the game. Suggest that they don't let the phone dominate the journey to football. Looking at a screen keeps attention in a narrow visual focus when it's better preparation to take in the wider environment and arrive ready to engage. Afterwards, ask if they could delay immediately picking up the phone to give their brain some space to process and learn from the game.

- Remind them to keep highlight reels in perspective. The wonder clips they see are moments in time, selected from hundreds of ordinary ones. Don't let them spend hours curating their own perfect reel either. People who know football won't be fooled by an amazing compilation; they're interested in the player behind it.

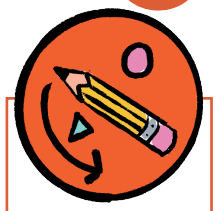
- Don't let the phone sleep in their bedroom. Protecting sleep is one of the simplest things you can do for recovery, attention, mood and performance – and teaching them to manage their digital world may be one of the most powerful performance skills you give them.

- Be particularly mindful during injury. Football provides natural sources of dopamine through movement, challenge, progress and connection. Gaming provides faster rewards and can quickly fill the gap. Keep other sources of movement, challenge and connection going, so gaming doesn't become their main source of reward

In summary, football will bring setbacks and uncomfortable moments. Don't rush to smooth them all away – some of the greatest growth happens through discomfort.

But enjoy the good stuff too – the wins, the laughs, the car journeys and even the lovingly prepared pasta pots they ignore because they want a McDonald's on the way home!

And finally, value this wonderful community of other football parents you are in. No one quite understands the madness like they do!



Top Tips for Parents

Let them struggle. Growth happens through setbacks, not around them. Build good digital habits early. As players progress and the margins get smaller, managing attention, recovery and reward becomes a performance advantage.

Find your people. No one understands this madness like other football parents do. For more information visit **www.bethkerrwellbeing.com**

BE THEIR NO1 FAN

A DESIRE TO SUPPORT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE IN FULFILLING THEIR DREAMS



By Katherine Chidiac *Founder of Plan.be**

Yes, who we are being matters, Mum and Dad. You matter. I love football. I love watching my Premier League team play and literally follow them over land and sea. Football evokes emotion, from the top – World Cups and Champions Leagues, to the bottom – a muddy field on a cold, wet Sunday morning.

We want to win. We want success. Football allows us to scream, shout, sing, dance and express what normally cannot be expressed in everyday life. But youth football demands a special type of care. Our anger, frustration, disappointment, excitement, pride and expectations can all land on our children. They soak it up like little sponges. There is pressure on beautiful young humans learning to play.

So, it is on us to make the whole journey and its emotional rollercoaster welcome. To care for our children's experience.

I cared. As a mum of three boys and a girl who all love football, I cared so much that I got entangled. At times, I was definitely not at my best.

I remember Marcia and I being at West Ham United together when our kids were five. Marcia was just being her joyful self, chatting away to me, not even really watching the match.

I was somewhere else, watching my child like a hawk. This was an opportunity, and I had carefully told him so all the way to East London in the car.

Wow, I'm taking my kid to West Ham!

I was excited, but that excitement had turned into anxiety. My son stayed at the back, feeling the pressure. Meanwhile, Myles was joyfully running up and down the pitch – at a very impressive pace. We were in the same place having two VERY different experiences. Marcia had not made it mean what I had.

But it was through moments like these that I evolved. I learned to step away from football enough to enjoy all there is to enjoy. Years later, when Marcia and I talked about the parent role in football, we were coming from different places - hers was, "How do I protect my child?" Mine was, "How do I support them to be at their best, especially when it does not go the way we hoped?"

What was the common ground? We both cared deeply. So NoIFan was born around her kitchen countertop.

In my work with young people in crisis in schools and institutions, I have learned so much about what is at the root of behaviours we find difficult. Different stories. Same fundamental human condition. Whether we are trying to get them to be "good" in school or on a football pitch, it is surprisingly simple. They need to know that all of you is welcome. You are not alone. You are OK. I care.

I saw this for myself. Four kids, depleted, driving up and down the North Circular week after week... It is a big investment. Weekends are no longer your family's own. Money goes on training, travel, boots and kits. It's a big ask. There is a natural pressure that can innocently be created.

We are human, trying to give our children everything we hoped they would have, that perhaps we did not.

I remember feeling so frustrated at my son for not showing up after I had ferried half his team to a tournament hours away. Was that helpful? No. We are asked to do a lot AND hold it lightly.

So, what do we do when their disappointment meets our disappointment? Their fear meets our fear? Their anger meets our anger? Our children don't just bring us joy. They bring us face to face with ourselves. It's humbling. Be gentle.



As parents, we can know that we care. So does our child. Because we care, we can easily get entangled and feel bad, so we protect ourselves. There is wisdom here. Our behaviours and feelings make sense in the context of what they are trying to protect. When they become repetitive, there is an invitation to listen.

The anger, frustration and disappointment we see on the pitch are not the problem. They are information. They tell us something matters. We only get angry at what we care about. Of course, we can create safety around anger, but emotions are never wrong. They offer an opportunity for deeper connection and understanding. We can get curious. What is happening for them? And if we can't see that, what is happening for us?

Step away from the child.

If we are getting out of sorts on the sidelines or afterwards in the car, can we ask other parents to take our child to their match? Maybe don't watch training. Go do a food shop.

"Making it" as a player is not on us. It's on our child – in each touch, pass, movement into space, handshake and early night, in how they play their game. Are they present, free to be brave, make mistakes, learn and, dare I say it, have fun? This is what the best players embody.

We have an opportunity to truly support our child by choosing to enjoy all there is to enjoy today. Being at our best is finding faith that they are evolving perfectly – today, one day at a time.

Plan.be was born from a desire to support young people to fulfil their dreams. YES. Go for it! All in on Plan. A – WIN. We want you to win. Become a Premier League player. To win, you have to believe it's possible. AND if it all goes sideways, know that you will BE OK.

Being our child's NoIFan means being there. Caring deeply. Holding it lightly. And when we get entangled, we go first. Because who we are being matters. You matter.





Questions?

be* at your best is a six-week programme for parents and caregivers exploring what it really means to be at our best, especially when parenting feels challenging.

www.loveplan.be

WE NEED SPACE TO LAND THE WAY WE FEEL

SOMEWHERE BETWEEN WRITING ANOTHER DRAFT OF THIS ARTICLE, A GROUP SESSION WITH PROFESSIONAL PLAYERS, AND WATCHING A WORLD CUP IN WHICH KOBBIE MAINOO FINISHED ON ZERO MINUTES, I WAS LEFT WITH ONE THOUGHT.

By Antar Adams *Youth Coach and Mentor*

They're human too. They want to be seen, to be heard and to matter. We all need somewhere to process the messiness of emotion – a space to land the way we feel.

At five, children express emotion freely – we all remember those tantrums in aisle two when you only needed to grab a few things from the shop! By 15, things have changed.

They know more about the world. They know what is at stake. They understand that other people have feelings attached to how they behave. They become less certain about where to place their emotions. Expression becomes harder, not because they feel less, but because they are more aware.

Sometimes the words never come. Instead, the patterns begin to speak. The Instagram photos disappear. Messages are read but not answered. They become quieter. They show up differently.

Behaviour is communication. We can often recognise overwhelm before a conversation has even taken place.

One young player described his routine to me simply: "I go football. I go home. I sleep."

I asked whether he was tired.

"No. I just need a break from the world."

But the break had become more scrolling, more content and more overwhelm. It wasn't helping him return to the other parts of himself. It was helping him shut the world out.

Parents are carrying a lot too

The more time I spend with young people, the more I'm reminded that parents are carrying a lot too. The uncertainty. The hope. The fear of getting it wrong. The desire to support without overstepping. The quiet pressure of trying to respond well.

Parents are often unlearning old habits while their child is asking them to become more attuned to what they need. Very few spaces exist where parents are invited to reflect on their own experience.

Every journey home is a transition. Whether your child has played brilliantly or something simply feels off, they are making the journey from football back to being your son or daughter. That journey doesn't always need to become another review. Sometimes they need a question. Sometimes they need silence. Sometimes they simply need mum or dad.

Before you fill the space, pause. Ask yourself:

- What am I bringing into this conversation?
- What might my child be carrying that I can't yet see?
- Am I listening to understand, or preparing to respond?
- What do they need from me in this moment?
- How can I help this become somewhere they can land the way they feel?

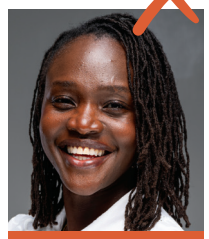
This is the work I care deeply about. Creating spaces where young people can make sense of what they're carrying, and where parents can pause, reflect and become more attuned to the child in front of them. Through group sessions and individual work, the aim isn't to provide every answer. It's to create space for the right questions.

We're not just shaping the child sat beside us. We're shaping the adult they'll become, and one day, the parent they may be.



FAQS

QUESTIONS PARENTS ALWAYS ASK US ABOUT YOUTH FOOTBALL (AND WHAT WE WISH THEY KNEW SOONER)



By Eve Emaru *Sports Physiotherapist*

Working as physios and performance specialists with young footballers including at GB and academy level, we hear the same handful of questions from parents again and again. Here are the ones that matter most, answered honestly.

"My child says they're tired all the time – is that normal?"

Often, yes. Young athletes are growing, training, doing homework, and socialising all at once, and their bodies don't always keep up with their schedules. Persistent tiredness isn't laziness it's usually a sign that load (training, school, sleep, growth) needs rebalancing, not that your child needs to try harder.

"Should I be worried about growing pains?"

Growth spurts genuinely change how a young athlete moves. Limbs lengthen before strength and coordination catch up, which can mean clumsiness, aching joints or a dip in confidence. This is a normal (if frustrating) phase but it's also when injuries are more likely if training load isn't adjusted. If pain persists, keeps returning, or affects how they walk or run, get it checked rather than waiting it out.

"How much should they actually be training?"

There's no single number that fits every child it depends on age, what else is going on in their life, and how well they're recovering. A good rule of thumb: if your child is dragging themselves to sessions, getting more knocks and niggles than usual, or sleep is suffering, that's a sign to look at the full picture rather than just training harder. The best support isn't necessarily doing more. Sometimes it's recognising when a young athlete needs more recovery, less pressure and someone to look at the whole picture.

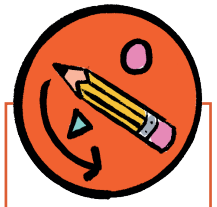
"What can I do to actually help, without being 'that' parent on the sidelines?"

More than tactics or fitness tips, what young athletes consistently tell us they need is to feel seen as a whole person not just a player. Asking "did you enjoy it?" instead of "did you win?" after a game does more for their long-term relationship with the sport than any extra drill.

"Is it normal for their confidence to go up and down so much?"

Completely. Identity and self-belief in young athletes are still forming, and football can feel like it's tied to their whole sense of self. A tough run of form isn't a character problem it's part of development. Steady, consistent support at home matters more here than anything said pitchside.

At its heart, supporting a young athlete well means looking after the whole picture – how they're growing, training, sleeping, and who's around them not just their performance on the pitch. That's the thinking behind our Circle of Care approach, and it's what we bring into every family and academy we work with.



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Top Tips for Parents

Growth spurts affect coordination, load tolerance and mood.

Sudden clumsiness or tiredness is usually physical, not laziness.

Speak to the coach or physio before pushing through it.

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Source – Internal graduate survey 2026

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