

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

AN OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE FOOTBALL LEAGUE

AWARDS NIGHT SUCCESS FOR LEAGUE'S HOMETGROWN TALENT

The success of Youth Development work at every level of The Football League was celebrated at March's inaugural 'Football League Awards incorporating FourFourTwo's Top 50 Football League Players' evening.

Players and clubs received recognition for the young talent playing throughout The League thanks to the dedication of scouts, coaches, managers and of course the youngsters who are making their way in the game.

Derby County's 17 year-old central defender Lewin Nyatanga capped an incredible few months by winning The Football League Top Championship Apprentice award (sponsored by Wickes).

'It's been a hectic year but very, very enjoyable,' said the youngster on collecting his award. 'I've had to deal with a lot and there's been some tough challenges, but I'm getting used to it and making my debut for Wales was a brilliant experience.'

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Derby's Lewin Nyatanga accepts the Top Championship Apprentice award from Wickes' Gary West.

LEAGUE 'CONFIDENT' OF SECURING YOUTH FUNDING PACKAGE



A young player in training at Sheffield Wednesday

Football League officials are close to securing continued funding for club Youth Development programmes following an intense lobbying campaign that has seen League Chairman Lord Mawhinney and Chief Operating Officer Andy Williamson in regular dialogue with the Government, Football Association and FA Premier League.

The League's effort to secure funding has also included a meeting with the members of the All Party Football Group at Westminster and the commissioning of a report from Grant Thornton to analyse the negative effects that a reduction in grant funding would have on football development, local communities and the game as a whole.

The existing £10m per season funding package, currently financed by contributions from the Football Association, FA Premier League, Sport England and Football Foundation concludes at the end of this season after eight seasons. The funding provides clubs with a grant of £138,000 to

help support their work in identifying and developing the next generation of local talent.

Each season more than 8,700 young players receive professional coaching from 1,800 trained staff at their local clubs. And the results have been impressive, in the last three seasons alone almost 400 young players have turned professional at League clubs and almost half (48%) of all current England youth internationals have been developed by Football League clubs.

'Following lengthy negotiations, we are increasingly confident that a successful resolution of this issue is on the horizon,' said Williamson. 'Although only a one season interim solution is currently being proposed, pending the outcome of the FA's restructuring review, we believe this will give clubs the comfort of knowing that funding will continue in the immediate term. It also demonstrates that the FA and Premier League remain committed to assisting Youth Development in The Football League.'

ITALIAN FIXTURE TO
BECOME ANNUAL EVENT?

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'Getting this award is great as well - as an apprentice people don't see all the hard work you do off the pitch, so the award is an acknowledgement of that as well as what I've done on the pitch and I'm very happy to win it.'

The League 1 and League 2 Top Apprentice awards (sponsored by League Football Education) went respectively to full back Scott Golbourne, now at Reading but whose work at his previous club Bristol City won him the award, and Wycombe Wanderers midfielder Ikechi Anya. Though 18 year-old Anya is not yet a regular in the Wycombe first team he has the distinction of being the club's youngest ever senior player when making his debut - at the age of 16 years and 279 days - against Scunthorpe United in October 2004.

'This award makes all the hard work you have to do as an apprentice worthwhile,' said Anya. 'When I first joined the club as an apprentice, I was in digs and had to get up at six in the morning and get the bus to work - thankfully I've got a car now!'

Apprentices looking to see the value of the tough schedule they are put through can take inspiration from two of the top Award winners, Coca-Cola Championship Player of the Year Phil Jagielka and Football League Young



Player of the Year David Nugent.

Preston striker Nugent thanked his previous club, Bury, for the start they gave him in the game while Sheffield United midfielder Jagielka, a product of the Bramall Lane youth system, gave a back-handed compliment to manager Neil Warnock. 'The gaffer will give me some banter,' said Jagielka.

'I was in the youth team when he came to the club and he's nurtured me - and he'll probably take all the plaudits!'

Another Award that was given for exploits in the area of Youth Development was the prestigious 'Contribution to Football' accolade, which was won by Huddersfield Town's long-serving Academy Manager Gerry Murphy.



Scott Golbourne accepts the League 1 award from LFE's Alan Sykes.



League 2 winner Ikechi Anya of Wycombe Wanderers.

'This award makes all the hard work you have to do as an apprentice worthwhile, When I first joined the club as an apprentice, I was in digs and had to get up at six in the morning and get the bus to work - thankfully I've got a car now!'
Ikechi Anya

SADDLERS COACHING SCHEME - A VIRTUAL SUCCESS

As the pilot club for a CD-Rom-based football coaching programme that is already proving a success, League 1 Walsall have established a new way of discovering young playing talent.



Several youngsters are in line for advanced trials with the Saddlers' Centre of Excellence following a day of collective trials that players had won through the club's 'Virtual Soccer Academy' scheme.

Centre of Excellence coach Adam Davy explained: 'The CD-Rom takes youngsters through various skill levels, right from basics like striking the ball, and at the end of each level they have to prove their competency before stepping up to the next level.'

'By successfully completing the whole programme they win a trial, and I have to say that after the first trials day we held at Bescot Stadium our coaches were impressed with the standards we saw.'

'We worked a lot on footwork, passing and the skills that the trialists had honed through the CD-Rom. Four of the players really caught the eye and we'll be running the rule over them again.'

Trialists from as far afield as the Isle of Wight attended this first trials day, which was for 15 and 16 year-olds. Other age groups are set to follow as Walsall add this novel approach to their more established scouting network.

Davy added: 'We feel that Virtual Soccer Academy is an innovative way of tapping into the computer generation and that it could prove a beneficial route to go down in our efforts to bring good young players into the club.'

'By successfully completing the whole programme they win a trial, and I have to say that after the first trials day we held at Bescot Stadium our coaches were impressed with the standards we saw.'

*Centre of Excellence coach
Adam Davy*



PUMA SIGN UP TO LEAGUE'S YOUTH SET-UP



The Football League has unveiled Puma UK Ltd as its first ever Official Technical Partner. The new agreement, which runs until 2009, will see Puma make a substantial contribution to Youth Development in The Football League. Firstly, as a sponsor partner to The Football League Youth Alliance and secondly, through the provision of complimentary, market-leading football boots to the 1,100 apprentice players (aged 16-18) on the books of League clubs.

In announcing the new agreement League Chairman Lord Mawhinney said: 'We have been impressed by Puma's desire to make a contribution to youth football at a local level and we are delighted to welcome them as our Official Technical Partners.'



Colchester United's Greg Halford, wearing Puma kit, in action for The Football League Under 21 team.

TRIALS GIVE YOUNGSTERS SECOND CHANCE

The Football League has staged its exit trials for the 2005/06 season at Derby County's Academy training ground with 120 scouts from Football League and Premier League clubs in attendance.

This annual event gives youngsters who are in their final school year and are being released by their current club a chance to earn an apprenticeship at another club.

Sixty young players attended the event and were organised into four teams. Following the event The League received expressions of interest in forty-one of the players and these were forwarded to the players' current clubs.

CLUB

FOCUS

STOCKPORT YOUNGSTERS GIVE GANNON HOPE FOR THE FUTURE



The words 'education' and 'empowerment' do not slip lightly off the tongues of most football managers, but for Stockport County's recently appointed boss Jim Gannon both are vital concepts in the development of players from youth to first team levels.

When he took over at Edgeley Park last December, the former County defender's main concern was preventing the Coca-Cola League 2 team - who were five points adrift at the foot of the table - from dropping into the Conference.

To achieve that aim he had to revitalise a playing squad which included no fewer than 15 former Edgeley Park trainees, several still in their teens and thus lacking the experience that many managers would want to call on in such a serious situation.

But after being a County player throughout the 1990's and having appointed ex-playing colleague Peter Ward, a coach with experience of Stockport's Centre of Excellence, as his assistant, Gannon had good knowledge of the club's youngsters.

'We've got a great crop of kids at the club,' he said, 'and I knew they wouldn't let me down. I believe in a developmental

approach even at first team level, so the education and empowerment of players is important to me.

'When I arrived at the club I talked with the players, listened to their opinions and took on board everything they told me. In that sense I empowered them and I'll continue to do that by listening to and respecting their views.

'Then, based partly on my discussions with the players, I laid down the way I wanted us to play and that's where education came in - they had to learn certain things and learn them quickly, but to their credit they did that and it paid off for us with results.'

Gannon's interest in youth development began when, as a Stockport player, the club's Centre of Excellence was firmly established by the manager at the time, Dave Jones. And he now feels that he and County can reap the benefits that are accruing.

'I worked with the Centre of Excellence lads when I was doing my first coaching badge,' recalled Gannon. 'We had good kids coming through then and that's obviously still the case, so credit to everyone who's been involved over the years.

'After seeing what was being done at Stockport in the 1990's then seeing the youth set-up at Crewe when I had my last season there as a player, I firmly believe that clubs should have a well-structured youth policy.

'If you get it right then it can be the future of the club. That's what I want for Stockport and it's already happening - as well as the kids in the first team I've got 14 and 15 year-olds being brought to my attention and that's great news for the club.'

'I worked with the Centre of Excellence lads when I was doing my first coaching badge. We had good kids coming through then and that's obviously still the case, so credit to everyone who's been involved over the years.'

Jim Gannon



ITALIAN FIXTURE TO BECOME ANNUAL EVENT?

The Football League is looking to repeat its recent Under-21 fixture against the Italian League next season in what it hopes will become an annual contest. The two leagues met at Hull City's KC Stadium last month, for the first time since 1998, with The Football League triumphing 1-0.

The match is viewed as the pinnacle of The Football League's successful Youth Development programme and of the seventeen players used eleven came from Championship clubs, five from League 1 and one from League 2, giving team manager and England Under-21 boss Peter Taylor the opportunity to cast his eye over the best young players in The Football League.

The League's Chief Operating Officer Andy Williamson commented 'The match was a great success and showed just how much young talent there is in The Football League. Our clubs are contributing a great deal to the development of young players for the national team and this match gives those players a chance to impress and earn themselves a future in representative football.'

The game itself, played against players from Italy's Serie B, was settled by a header from Southampton's Dexter Blackstock in the 68th minute and was played in front of an appreciative crowd of 6,265 with children under the



age of seven admitted free as part of The League's 'Fans of the Future' initiative.

Following the game Taylor commented 'It's been a very positive night. This inter-League game is a very good fixture. It gives players a chance to impress and, for myself as the England Under-21 manager, it gives me the opportunity to look more closely at players.'

'To beat Italy you have to work hard and that's exactly what we did. Lots of pluses came out of the game and a lot of players have done themselves no harm whatsoever - all of them have the potential to play for the England Under-21's.'

True to his word, in the week following the game, Taylor selected five players from his Football League team - including for the first time MK Dons' Izale McLeod - in his squad for the U21 international against Norway at Reading, which England went on to win 3-1.

The Football League Under-21 Squad

Goalkeepers

Lee Camp.....(Derby County)
Scott Flinders.....(Barnsley)

Defenders

Luke Chambers.....(Northampton Town)
Simon Francis.....(Sheffield United)
Wes Morgan.....(Nottingham Forest)
Sam Tillen.....(Brentford)
Scott Wiseman.....(Hull City)

Midfielders

Chris Eagles.....(Watford)
Tom Soares.....(Crystal Palace)
Simon Walton.....(Leeds United)
John Welsh.....(Hull City)
Greg Halford.....(Colchester United)

Strikers

Dexter Blackstock.....(Southampton)
Leroy Lita.....(Reading)
Izale McLeod.....(Milton Keynes Dons)
Ashley Young.....(Watford)
Billy Paynter.....(Hull City)



(above) The Football League Under 21 team.

(left) Football League Under 21 team manager and Hull City boss Peter Taylor with his assistant Southend United Manager Steve Tilson.

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