



Touchline



JACOB BROWN

GOING THE EXTRA MILE

The Luton Town and Scotland forward discusses his career, charity work and exciting post-football plans

BROTHERS IN ARMS + JACK MCMILLAN + THE 11 + MUCH MORE!

Careers

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

LFE Transition Officer

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

Contact him at acato@lfe.org.uk

Higher Education

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

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



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ALUMNI PLAYER VOICE

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

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

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GOAL OF THE MONTH

WINNERS



AUGUST WINNER
FRANCIS CHURCH

The Crewe forward's outstanding chipped finish versus Fleetwood Town earned him the first award of the season after his goal accumulated **1,613 votes (41%)**.



OCTOBER WINNER
CAYDEN BENNETT

Cayden Bennett's precise nutmeg finish versus Grimsby Town picked up **669 votes (41%)**.



SEPTEMBER WINNER
ANTONY MCCORMICK

Antony's brilliantly placed effort into the top corner claimed September's award, with his goal receiving **1,232 votes (42%)**.



NOVEMBER WINNER
JOSH ASHE

Josh Ashe's fantastic free kick versus Wigan Athletic claimed a massive **2,535 votes (57%)**.

LFE's Goal of the Month competition recognises the best strikes from across the academy leagues.

From individual moments of brilliance to excellent team goals, the 2024/25 season so far has been flooded with memorable efforts.

Here are this season's winners to date...

ACADEMY LEAGUES ROUND-UP



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH

Bolton Wanderers currently lead the way in the newly formatted combined Youth Alliance North division, sitting one point clear of second-placed **Wrexham**. The Whites also have three games in hand on the Welsh outfit, further strengthening their position at the summit. Dave Gardiner's side also boast the only unbeaten record in the league, with 10 wins and one draw recorded from their opening 11 games.

Defending champions **Preston North End** are also going strong, sitting just three points behind leaders **Bolton**, albeit having played three more games. The Lilywhites' forward line has been prolific during the first half of the season, having scored the most goals in the division (45). They displayed their attacking prowess in their final fixture before the Christmas break, dispatching **Salford City** 7-1.

Elsewhere in the division, it's proving to be a highly competitive season with just nine points separating **Lincoln City** in fourth and **Walsall** in fourteenth.

EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH

The Youth Alliance South West champions from the previous two campaigns **Plymouth Argyle** are now leading the title race in the new combined South division, however, the Pilgrims are being hunted down by a whole host of sides below them with games in hand.

Gillingham are just a point behind, with one game in hand. **AFC Wimbledon** are three points behind with two games in hand, whilst **Luton Town** sit four points off the leaders with three games in hand.

Oxford United are also in contention, with maximum points from their two games in hand would see them leapfrog Argyle as well. The two sides face off on the 25th of January in a potential six-pointer.

Looking further down the table, it's also incredibly tight, with just eight points the difference between **Swindon Town** in sixth and **Northampton Town** in fifteenth.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE NORTH

In the PDL North division, **Sheffield United** are so far proving too strong for the rest of the pack. The Blades sit comfortably at the top, six points clear of **Burnley** in second with the added advantage of a game in hand on the Clarets. After 14 games, 11 wins, three draws and a league best record of 40 goals scored, Matt Thorpe's side are still unbeaten. **Peterborough United** make up the rest of the top three, and with the Posh travelling to Sheffield United in mid-February lies an opportunity for them to close the gap.

Elsewhere in the table, it's shaping up to be one of the most closely contested divisions for some time. Only five points is the gap between **Crewe Alexandra** in fifth place and **Coventry City** who find themselves one place above the bottom.

U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE SOUTH

Bristol City are enjoying a highly successful 2024/25 PDL South campaign so far, with the Robins holding a seven-point lead at the top of the table. Their record to date this season stands: P:16 W:12 D:2 L:2. They also boast both the best defensive and offensive records in the division, finding the net on 46 occasions and conceding 17. **AFC Bournemouth** and **Watford** both sit on 31 points in second and third respectively, with **Millwall** and **Cardiff** sat just behind them.

There isn't much separating the teams further down the division with only two points between **Swansea City** in sixth and **Brentford B** in ninth.

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE NORTH

It's the blue and red of Manchester running away from the rest of the pack in the race for the Premier League North title this season, with both sides neck and neck. **City** are currently on top of the pile just a point ahead of **United**, however, the latter have two games in hand. Adam Lawrence's young Red Devils have been faultless this season, winning all their ten games so far. They have scored the second-highest number of goals (46) after leaders **City** (50) and possess an incredible defensive record having conceded just four times. **United** and **City** play each other in early February, a game that could go a long way in deciding who might win the league come the end of the season.

Elsewhere in the division, it looks as if it's going to be a fight for third place between several teams, with six points separating **Derby County** in third and **Wolves** in sixth. It's also very tight near the bottom end of the table, with the same number of points between **Blackburn Rovers** in seventh and **Stoke City** in twelfth.

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE SOUTH

Aston Villa currently have a strong foothold in the race for the Premier League South title in what is shaping up to be an extremely competitive division this year. James Shan's young Villains sit two points clear of second placed **Southampton** and possess two games in hand over the Saints. **Spurs** and **Fulham** aren't out of the picture, with the North Londoners just four points adrift of Villa, and the Cottagers six points off the pace, albeit with a game in hand on the league leaders.

Last year's league winners **Chelsea** are struggling to rediscover the same consistency, however. The Blues are six points off top spot but have played two games more than Villa. Further down the division it's extremely tight too, with only five points separating **West Ham United** in seventh and **West Bromwich Albion** at the bottom.



DEBUTANTS

A selection of talented young apprentices who have made their first team debuts since the beginning of the 2024/25 campaign.

CHAMPIONSHIP

Jaden Dixon

Stoke City

Defender Jaden Dixon made his senior Potters bow in August, playing the full 90 minutes of a first-round Carabao Cup tie at Carlisle in which he impressed as Stoke ran out 0-2 winners at Brunton Park.



Joseph Hatch

Plymouth Argyle

Second-year apprentice Joseph Hatch was handed his first taste of professional football in an away loss at Burnley in October by the then Pilgrims boss Wayne Rooney.

Hatch came on in the 89th minute as Plymouth chased a late equaliser.

Ronan Kpakio

Cardiff City

17-year-old right back Ronan Kpakio enjoyed a solid first senior outing for Cardiff City in the Bluebirds' Carabao Cup first-round win over Bristol Rovers, with the Wales youth international playing the full 90 minutes of a 2-0 win.



Igor Tyjon

Blackburn Rovers

Highly rated 16-year-old Igor Tyjon was introduced in the final minutes of Blackburn's 3-0 league win against Bristol City back in September. The striker, who represents England at youth level, replaced Yuki Ohashi in the 89th minute at Ewood Park.



Kiantay Licorish-Mullings & Fran Obiagwu

Northampton Town

Northampton Town defender Kiantay Licorish-Mullings made his maiden professional appearance in the Cobblers' 0-2 EFL Trophy win at Notts County in October, coming on at half-time. Meanwhile, 16-year-old Fran Obiagwu became the Cobblers' youngest-ever appearance maker in an EFL match in December, playing out the final stages of a home defeat to Charlton Athletic.



Terry Bondo

Blackpool

17-year-old Terry Bondo experienced his first taste of professional football in Blackpool's EFL Trophy clash with Liverpool U23s in November, coming on for the final 30 minutes at Bloomfield Road. The forward has since turned out a further five times for the Seaside.



Andre Garcia, Ashqar Ahmed, Tyler Sackey & Emmanuel Osho

Reading

There have been several current apprentices making their senior debuts for Reading this season. Left-back Andre Garcia debuted on the opening day at Birmingham City, playing out the final 15 minutes. Ashqar Ahmed and Tyler Sackey both made their first team bows in August's EFL Trophy clash against West Ham United U23s with Sackey netting a goal, whilst Emmanuel Osho turned out for the first time at Colchester United in a Carabao Cup match in the same month.



Freddie O'Donoghue

Carlisle United

From local football on the Isle of Man to a professional debut for Carlisle United, it's been a whirlwind couple of years for second-year apprentice Freddie O'Donoghue. The midfielder made his senior bow for the Blues in an EFL Trophy tie versus Notts Forest in September, playing out the second half of a 1-2 loss.



Seb Auton

Grimsby Town

Second-year apprentice goalkeeper Seb Auton enjoyed a memorable debut for Grimsby Town in September. With just 16 minutes on the clock away at Carlisle, Auton replaced Jake Eastwood in the Mariners net after the latter was forced off through injury. Grimsby went on to win the match 2-3, with Auton impressing between the sticks.



Pele Smith

Fleetwood Town

First-year apprentice Pele Smith was handed his senior debut in an EFL Trophy clash with Aston Villa's U21s, starting the match and playing 83 minutes as the Cod Army were narrowly defeated 2-3.



Jack Bray

Harrogate Town

Jack Bray made his professional debut for Harrogate Town in the North Yorkshire side's EFL Trophy trip to Crewe Alexandra in October, playing out the final 20 minutes at Gresty Road.



Botan Ameen

Swindon Town

Botan Ameen, who famously netted twice in an FA Youth Cup win over Manchester United last season was rewarded with his first-team debut for the Robins against Bristol Rovers in the EFL Trophy in October. It proved to be a dream first senior outing as the prolific forward notched a goal in the 4-0 victory.

THE 11

League Football Education has recognised eleven apprentice footballers for their outstanding efforts on and off the pitch in the latest edition of 'The 11'. The accolade acknowledges performance on the pitch and in the classroom, as well as assessing other factors, including involvement in community or charity-based initiatives. 'The 11' for November 2024 is as follows:



ADAM POW
HARROGATE TOWN

Adam Pow is an apprentice who possesses a keen interest in personal development and pushing himself educationally. Despite initially enrolling on the Level 3 BTEC Diploma, Adam has recently held discussions with staff members at the club about taking on additional units for the Extended Diploma. Not only is Adam hitting distinctions in all his BTEC units, but he has also been dedicating his evenings to undertake an A-Level in Business.

Away from the classroom Adam has been ever-present for the Sulphurites U18s this season, appearing in every fixture so far. He's also completed his UEFA C coaching qualification.

Academy Manager, Richard Jones, said: "His attitude towards his performance in education and football is exemplar."



ANJOLA POPOOLA
ACCRINGTON STANLEY

Accrington forward Anjola Popoola has been described as the "model apprentice with a bubbly, infectious personality."

Education wise, Anjola is in line to achieve his Sporting Excellence Professional qualification before Christmas and is working above his target grade in his BTEC, achieving distinctions in every unit.

On the pitch, Anjola has made outstanding progress. He made his league debut in February and has been regularly involved with the first team since. He also signed his first professional contract back in July.

Mark Whalley, Head of Education at the Club, said: "Anj has been a credit to himself in all aspects of his apprenticeship. His commitment to his education is exemplary and he will achieve way above his target grade. He is a role model for others both in his age group and the first years, and I am sure he will excel as he progresses throughout his career."



HAYDEN BULLAS
LEYTON ORIENT

Leyton Orient's Hayden Bullas has continued to exceed expectations since the beginning of his apprenticeship and "embodies everything that is good about a Sporting Excellence Professional apprentice footballer" according to David Bass, Head of Education at the Club.

Academically, Bass said: "He has continued to mock the algorithm that calculates the target grade at the start of the course, achieving distinction grades for Unit D3 A3 (Sports Injuries) and Unit 4 A1 (Nutrition & Ant-Doping) in the process. With his first year now completed, this 'PP' student is currently working at D*D."

On the pitch, Hayden has also been progressing too, travelling out to Spain in the summer for the first team's pre-season training camp.



ELKANNAH AKOR
COLCHESTER UNITED

Second year apprentice Elkannah Akor has been described as "outstanding in every area" by his Regional Officer, Gavin Willacy.

Elkannah regularly trains with Colchester's first team and played many games for the U23s prior to a recent injury. He has shown great versatility, performing as a wing back, right back, and centre back, excelling in every role. In his studies he is said to be highly committed to his work and has been achieving distinctions in his BTEC. He is also ready to do his Sporting Excellence Professional end point assessment and is also undertaking an A-Level in Psychology.

"His attitude is a credit to himself and his family. He is an example to all," said Willacy.



DANIEL GONZALEZ
SWINDON TOWN

Swindon Town's Daniel Gonzalez has enjoyed a fruitful start to the second year of his apprenticeship, both from an education and footballing perspective. In the classroom, he's excelling in all areas despite openly admitting that he doesn't enjoy education too much. In his BTEC he's on course to achieve D*DD overall. He's also ready for his Sporting Excellence Professional assessments and is targeting distinction grades in both.

Out on the grass, Daniel regularly trains with the first team and recently made his debut for them in the Bristol Street Motors Trophy.

THE 11 CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE



KOFI SHAW BRISTOL ROVERS

Kofi Shaw is making serious strides on and off the pitch this season. In the classroom he has passed his English Functional Skills and is currently on track to pass his Maths Functional Skills. He's also well on the way to completing his BTEC Extended Certificate. U18s coach, Bobby McKenzie said: "He has taken on additional responsibility to meet deadlines as well as making sure he attends extra education frequently to ensure he works towards the highest grades possible."

On the pitch, Kofi has made five first team appearances for the Pirates and scored his first professional goal vs Tottenham Hotspur's under 21s in the Bristol Street Motors Trophy. The midfielder has recently signed a three-year professional contract at the Memorial Stadium before being loaned out to National League side Yeovil Town.



TYLER SACKEY READING

Tyler Sackey epitomises the model apprentice with his ability to balance the demands of his first team and U21s commitments alongside his academic responsibilities. "Despite his busy schedule, Tyler ensures that he completes all his assignments to the best of his ability, never settling for less than his full effort. His commitment to his studies is further exemplified by his participation in additional sessions whenever his time permits," said Reading's Education Manager, Andrew Trott.

Footballing wise, Tyler has also made great strides this season. The midfielder made his first team debut in August vs West Ham's U21s at the age of 17, a game in which he scored.



SEB AUTON GRIMSBY TOWN

It's been a fantastic start to the season for second-year Grimsby Town apprentice Seb Auton. In the classroom, Seb has achieved distinction grades in all units of his BTEC Extended Diploma. He has also taken part in additional work and is ahead of where his tutors expected him to be in all areas of his apprenticeship. Callum Lester, Professional Development Phase Coach at the club said: "He strives to achieve the highest possible grades and in-turn has completed his SEP Portfolio and been entered to gateway to complete the qualification."

On the pitch, Seb has also really excelled. The young shot-stopper made his EFL League Two debut in September during an away match at Carlisle United, coming on as a 16th minute substitute with the Mariners losing 1-0. Grimsby went on to win the game 2-3, with Seb putting in an outstanding display. He's since been named on the bench on multiple occasions.

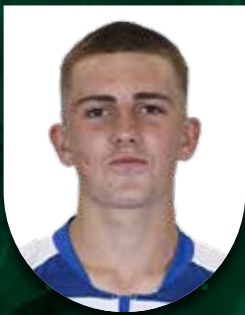


TYRESE WARMINGTON BIRMINGHAM CITY

Tyrese Warmington is a second-year apprentice goalkeeper who is developing well in all areas of his apprenticeship. He's recently spent some time on loan at non-league side Coleshill Town and has performed brilliantly for the Colemen. He is said to be balancing his training at the academy alongside his role as a non-league footballer with "extreme tenacity, professionalism, and hard work."

Educationally he's completed his Sporting Excellence Professional portfolio and is in the process of opening Gateway. However, his main achievements in the classroom are in BTEC. His target grades are PP, yet in his most recent review he is working at D*D*.

Tyrese also goes the extra mile with extra-curricular activities. He attends a primary school where he takes part in 'Buddy Reading' to KS1 and KS2 children.



TEDDY TARBOTTON QUEENS PARK RANGERS

Teddy Tarbotton is a first-year apprentice at QPR who has "hit the ground running" in the words of Academy Director, Alex Carroll.

The Hoops midfielder is said to display an outstanding attitude in everything he does, one that eclipses the expectations of someone his age.

"He is a credit to the club and his family. He is diligent, hardworking, organised, polite, and everything you would want from an apprentice," added Carroll.



JOHN WILLIAMS STOCKPORT COUNTY

First year apprentice John Williams-Lawless' start to his scholarship has been described as "exceptional", with his work in the classroom always hitting high levels of quality.

He's said to engage well and is a polite, well-mannered individual who carries himself professionally around the building at all times.

Footballing wise he's been likened to a "young John Stones" due to his calm and composed persona on the field of play, and has impressed all staff who have worked with him this season. The defender has also made his senior debut for Stockport in a Carabao Cup match versus Blackburn Rovers in August.

BROTHERS IN ARMS



At 15 years old, Luther Wildin was playing grassroots football with little thought of making a career out of the game.

“I just played Sunday league football when I was younger and mainly played just for fun, I never took it too seriously and never thought about becoming a footballer one day,” Luther told LFE.

“I was fortunate to play in a good team that won a lot, and I was always presented with opportunities to go on trial, but I never had the self-confidence to go for it. My dad would always tell me they were good opportunities and that I should go for it, but I always just said no.”

His older brother Courtney, however, was in the academy system from a young age and possessed a burning desire to go as far as he could. “I always wanted to get into the highest level of football that I could,” said Courtney. “At 13 I was picked up by Coventry City, and that was exciting. I spent two years there but was eventually released which hit me quite hard. However, four months later whilst on a family holiday I received a call and was told that Aston Villa wanted to offer me a trial, and six weeks later I signed.”

Courtney went on to sign a scholarship at Aston Villa, and it was then that Luther began to open up to the idea of trying to take the next step himself. “It wasn’t until Courtney got his scholarship at Aston Villa that I began to think about it. I could see that Courtney was earning a bit of money from it and that opened my eyes to it and made me think that it was a possible career for me. I went to Forest and Villa and didn’t get offered anything, so I thought maybe it wasn’t to be. Fortunately, I went to Notts County soon after and was offered a scholarship.”

Fast forward to the present and Luther has played 250 games for Stevenage and represented Antigua and Barbuda on the international stage. “When I was 15 years old and still playing Sunday league, I never thought I’d get to where I am today,” he admits.

Since joining the League One club in 2018, the 26-year-old has played under six different managers and proved a mainstay in the team under each one. He says the key to his success is down to his work ethic.

“It’s all about discipline and keeping up with your standards, making sure that no matter what is going on around you, you’re still giving the best account of yourself because you never know when a manager is going to go, and a new one is going to come in. I’ve always managed to stay professional and keep my standards high. Even with small things like pre-season running, since a young age, I’ve always done everything possible to win every run and they’re the type of things I’ve always prided myself on. I think that mindset has always given me an edge going into every season.”

In Courtney’s case, after spells at Aston Villa and Sheffield Wednesday, he found himself in the non-league echelons of the football pyramid and would go on to represent several part-time clubs. It was during this time that he was presented with the opportunity to become a model and make a name for himself in a completely different industry. “It was all out of the blue, to be honest. It was never something I thought I would end up doing, but it came at a good time for me having recently stepped aside from professional football.

I was transitioning into part-time football which meant I was about to have a lot more time. I got a message from who is now my agency and asked to meet up. We had a meeting, I signed for them shortly after, and then in the same week had my first job. Before I knew it, I was traveling around Europe and America working with brands like Nike. It was incredible.

“It helped me massively in terms of the transition out of full-time football. I didn’t have time to think about what I was going to do workwise whilst playing semi-pro as this opportunity just landed on my lap and I began to make good money and really enjoy it.”

However, in 2018, with his modelling career in full flow and playing for non-league side Coalville Town, the then 22-year-old was hit with the devastating news that he had leukemia, a type of blood cancer. “In the six months leading up to my diagnosis, I began to suffer from night sweats which was something that I had never experienced before.

“It seems silly now, but I just put it down to it maybe being an infection of some sort as I was really busy at the time. I just ignored it, but then I began to experience a weak bladder. ▶

"Again, I just put it down to working loads and maybe my body had picked up the flu and it was trying to get rid of it. Two days before I was diagnosed, I had a match and before the game, I told my manager that I wasn't feeling right. I felt very lightheaded and lethargic, so I didn't play. The next day was Luther's birthday, and I woke up with a swollen lymph node under my neck and it was at that point I thought something wasn't quite right. My girlfriend is a nurse and told me I needed to go and get checked, so the Monday morning I went and got my blood checked. Later in the day the doctor rang me and told me they had found something irregular in my blood and that I needed to head into the hospital with an overnight bag. When I arrived with my mum and my girlfriend, they told me that they thought I had leukemia. The next morning, I had my biopsies done, etc, and was officially diagnosed, and from that point, life was going to look very different for me."

During his battle, Courtney kept a positive mindset and was determined to overcome the illness and get back to the life he was living before his diagnosis, but unfortunately, complications began to arise. "I'd received this news off the back of being in a really good position in life, very fortunate to be playing football, modelling, and earning some good money, being in a place I wanted to be. My main motivation during this period was having a mindset of recovering from it and going back to normal, but it turned out to be very different. I began to feel the effects of the treatment and I was told of the severity of my leukemia. It then started to be a case of 'football and modelling might not be things I'll be able to do when I recover', then it was 'I might not be very well for a long time', and then it got to the point where I was beginning to think 'I might not even be here in six months'. It was scary how fast the reality of it all changed."

After little success with his first course of treatment, Courtney was told he required a more intense round of chemotherapy. Fortunately, his body reacted well to this, and he was placed into partial remission. He then needed a bone marrow transplant and discovered that Luther was a match for him and could be a donor.

"In a moment where you can talk about your brother essentially saving your life, that will always stay true," said Courtney. "When you hear that your brother has been diagnosed with leukemia, the only thing on my mind was thinking how I could help."

To find out that our blood types were a match was a godsend and felt so right. It was a blessing that I was in the position to be able to help Courtney. We were just very grateful that we were able to get it done," added Luther.

Thankfully, following his final round of treatment and a successful bone marrow transplant, Courtney came through the other side of his illness and was ready to get his life back on track. "I now have a different mindset. After my illness, I realised that life isn't a given and waking up every day healthy is a complete blessing and anything on top of that is a bonus."

The after-effects of Courtney's illness meant that a return to football would prove difficult, prompting him to turn his eye to other opportunities. This came in the form of property investment, and now, a few years on, he and Luther have gone into business together. ▶





"I've always had an interest in property investment and started reading into it years ago," Luther told LFE. "In the last couple of years, I thought there was no better time to start than now, so we started renovating properties, flipping them, and now we're about to do an HMO conversion (House with multiple occupants), and that will be a massive project for us."

The two brothers began to document their journey in property through their social media account 'Wildin Ventures' and this sparked intrigue from Luther's colleagues in the football world.

"We started documenting our property journey about a year ago and in that time, I've had loads of people in the game like current and ex-teammates wanting to find out more and gain some advice and I've been able to help these people, whether that's by helping them maximize their returns from their current portfolios or guiding them on how they can build more wealth in the future. These are all things that I have learned from my experiences and going down a paid education route too."

After becoming a line of advice for teammates and fellow pros further afield, Luther, alongside Courtney, decided to launch the 'Players Property Partners', a service that would help professional athletes embark on their own property investment journeys.

"Eventually, I got to the point where I was offering these people advice, but I wasn't providing the opportunity for them to get involved in investing. That's when me and Courtney decided to launch the Players Property Partners service to athletes up and down the country and provide these opportunities to them."

Courtney handles the majority of the nitty gritty side of the business to allow Luther to maintain full focus on his football career, something that provides a good balance for the two.

"I try and cover as much of it as I can so Luther can continue to give 100% to his football career and until the point when Luther hangs his boots up this will be the case. It's my job to make sure everything is running smoothly, for example, builders are doing their jobs, we're on time with payments, etc. We've got a really good balance and that's the reason why we're efficiently making good progress."

Discussing how he juggles being a professional footballer and business owner, Luther says his outside-of-football responsibilities have positively impacted his performance on the pitch. "Over the past year or two, I've been the most consistent version of myself and a lot of that is down to my ventures outside of football."

"I've been able to show the best version of myself, which comes from taking a bit of pressure off myself and my football career. I'm still as hungry and as driven as ever before, but I don't have to think about it as much as I did previously. I can give my all every single day at the training ground but I'm then able to go home and switch off. Having interests outside of the game has had a positive effect on myself and my performance."

Looking into the future, the Stevenage full-back is confident his transition out of the game will be a smooth and seamless one due to the off-the-field moves he's currently making, and advises today's crop of young footballers to do the same.

"When I retire, I want it to be an effortless transition. I hope I can prolong my career for as long as I possibly can, but when the time does come, I want it to be seamless and I'm more than ready to go into property full-time. I also want to be in a position where I can give back to football and share as much value and advice to young players as possible."

"Football is a part of your life, but it's not all of your life. After training, rather than sitting on your PlayStation or watching TV, you can take a couple of hours out of your day to find out what you're interested in. Understand that your life is going to kick in after your football career, so you might as well start realising what you want from life whilst you're still playing." ■



WE'VE GOT A REALLY GOOD BALANCE AND THAT'S THE REASON WHY WE'RE EFFICIENTLY MAKING GOOD PROGRESS.



COPING WITH ILLNESS AND INJURY

WAYS TO HELP YOURSELF



Confidence building

You want to have faith in your own abilities and preparation. Why not track your progress in a creative way such as a video blog.



Use your support network!

Your family, friends, coach and physio are just a few people around who can support you.



Research how you can help yourself

If you're a problem-focused copier, you might want to read into your injury and how others have coped.

COPING STRATEGIES



Your rehab environment

Know what environment best supports your rehab. You might want to remain involved by watching training and matches.



Remain positive and pro-active!

Your thoughts can influence your feelings and behaviours during recovery from illness and injury. Stay positive and focused on what YOU can do to support your own progress.



Motivation

To have the best chance of recovering fully, you need a strong purpose to do so. Identify what motivates you to recover.



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IVAN TONEY
Former Peterborough United apprentice





£40M

JADEN PHILOGENE
Former Aston Villa apprentice





£20M

AARON CONNOLLY
Former Brighton apprentice





UNDISCLOSED

MAX AARONS
Former Norwich City apprentice





LOAN

ON THE MOVE

Lots of deals involving former LFE apprentices have been made recently. Let's look at some of the most notable ones...

JOEL RANDALL
Former Exeter City apprentice





UNDISCLOSED

BEN BRERETON DIAZ
Former Nottingham Forest apprentice





LOAN

ROMAIN ESSE
Former Millwall apprentice





£12M

DELE ALLI
Former MK Dons apprentice





FREE


WILFRIED ZAHA
Former Crystal Palace apprentice







LOAN

BEN GODFREY
Former Norwich City apprentice





LOAN

JACOB BROWN

Going The Extra Mile



Jacob Brown was just 14 years old when he hit his first stumbling block on his quest to become a professional footballer.

“I was at Sheffield Wednesday at a young age and was in their academy until I got released at 14.” Brown told LFE. “I found that very difficult and it made me fall out of love with football a bit. I went and played local Sunday football with my friends, forgot about trying to make it as a footballer a little and started to love it again.”

After reigniting his passion for the game through grassroots football, Brown signed for non-league side Guiseley where he joined the youth team, and it didn't take long until professional clubs began sniffing around again. “At the start of my U17 season I went to Guiseley where I experienced my first taste of football and education. I did my first year there and then ended up signing for Barnsley where I went and did the second year of my apprenticeship. I loved being an apprentice. I think for me the timing was perfect after being out of a professional club for so long after leaving Sheffield Wednesday. I had a real buzz when I went to Barnsley, and despite having to balance the pressures of both my football and education, I was just buzzing to be back at a professional team.”

Discussing the combination of football and education further, the Halifax born forward voiced the importance of young footballers taking their education seriously. “Being in that professional environment when you're young is very different to the outside world because you might have to move away from home at a young age, so that's where I think the importance of the LFE Life Skills and Personal Development workshops come into play.

“Getting your education in as well as your football is vital because if you do happen to not make a career out of football, you need to have something to pursue after that. I would definitely advise young players to explore other avenues because you don't need to just focus on football, you can have interests in other things and find a balance.”

After completing his scholarship with Barnsley and subsequently earning a professional deal, the former LFE apprentice was loaned out to get his first taste of senior football.

“After my scholarship, I transitioned from the Under 18s to the first team and was then loaned out to Chesterfield in League Two which was a real experience as it was my first proper taste of senior football. “I was only nineteen and we got relegated so that was quite a difficult and negative time in one aspect, but on the other hand it was my first time playing football at a professional level, so it was definitely an experience that helped me.”

Reflecting more on that loan spell, Brown underlined just how crucial it is for young players to go out and gain those experiences in the lower leagues. “I think it's so important for young players to go out and get experience in the lower leagues because youth football and even Under 23s is completely different to men's football. If you're at a club in the Premier League or in the EFL and you have to go down to non-league for example for some experience, you shouldn't look at it as a step down, you should see it as progression.

“In my case I had played one game in the Championship and then went and played 15 games in League Two and that felt like a step up for me. The outcome wasn't great in terms of being relegated, but I learnt so much and was able to understand the pressures of first team football and trying to get three points on a weekend.”

Upon his return to Barnsley, the then 19-year-old was given a chance in the first team. Following a good start to the season, Brown quickly became a constant in the Tykes' promotion winning side in the 2018/19 campaign, finishing the season with 14 goal contributions in 32 games. “I went into the team and quickly solidified my position. I went onto get lots of goals and assists, my confidence was really high, and we got promoted. Being a part of team as an academy graduate was nice because the fans automatically have a soft spot for you. That season really set me up for the next move and stage of my career.”

Brown carried his promotion winning form into the Championship the following season and that sparked interest from other clubs. ▶

AS A KID, ALL I EVER DREAMED OF WAS PLAYING IN THE PREMIER LEAGUE AND TO ACTUALLY ACHIEVE THAT WAS AMAZING.



In the summer of 2020, he signed for Stoke City. "I went to Stoke, and I was really nervous when I joined because they're a big club and they had some massive names in the squad at the time. I found it difficult at the start and a lot of that was down to it being the behind closed doors Covid season which meant there was no fans, and I thrive off the fans' energy."

"In my second season the fans were back, and I did really well. It was probably my best season during my time there. I was voted the Player of the Season, and my confidence was really high again. I loved my time there."

Brown's biggest move to date would come following the conclusion of his third season with the Potters, signing for Luton Town who had just been promoted to the Premier League. "As a kid all I ever dreamed of was playing in the Premier League and to actually achieve that was amazing. When I sit back and look at my journey it's crazy."

"To think I was released from an academy when I was 14, went back to playing Sunday league, signed for Barnsley, and then went onto play in all four of the top divisions in England, I'm super happy with that."

Despite Luton's maiden season in the top flight ending with the disappointment of relegation, Brown has fond memories of the 2023/24 campaign.

When asked to recall his standout moments, he told LFE: "I automatically think of the goal against Palace as my favourite moment, my first in the Premier League. Also, our first win at Everton. The atmosphere at that game was probably the best that I've experienced and to get our first win there was great."

However, despite the highs he experienced, the former Barnsley academy graduate opened up about the anguish of his season being cut short to injury, one that extinguished his hopes of making the Scotland squad for the Euros in Germany. "It was really difficult and heart-breaking to miss out on the chance to possibly go to the Euros with Scotland. However, the motivation now is to get back in there, play on the biggest stage and show what I can do."

Luton Town are now back in the Championship and have endured a trickier start to the season than expected.

Brown, however, is still confident that the Hatters can turn it around and enjoy a positive campaign. "It's not been the best start, but the goal has to be to try and get promoted again. The Championship is really tough, but things can change quickly within a few results so that is the aim still."

Away from the pitch, the Scotland international is a big advocate for those with a platform, specifically footballers, going the extra mile and helping those less fortunate. In his case, Brown has forged a strong relationship with a young fan named Jack Powell. "Jack has followed my whole journey from being at Barnsley. He was a mascot at one of our games and I carried him out because he has brittle bone disease."



"After that game I kept in touch with him and his mum and dad. Whenever I get the chance, I'll always go and see him. His parents always send me photos of him watching the games with my shirt on, he's my number one fan."

"When I left Barnsley to go to Stoke, he kind of transitioned from a Barnsley fan to a Stoke fan! He's pretty much a Jacob Brown fan, and a fan of whatever team I play for. He's such a nice lad."

"It was Jack's birthday not long ago and I wanted to do something for him. We invited him down to spend the day at the training ground and he absolutely loved it. I then wanted to try and raise some money for the team who look after him at the Sheffield Children's Hospital as they don't get loads of funding, and they do so much amazing work for kids like Jack."

"We managed to raise nearly £10,000 which was amazing. The support it received from Barnsley, Stoke and Luton fans was incredible, and fans of other teams further afield. Footballers have a really big platform, so we should always try and use it in a positive way."

"Jack is such a massive fan of mine and I'm just a normal person. As a footballer, no matter where you are playing or who you are, there is always going to be someone who looks up to you, so I think all players should try and set a good example and use the platform that they have for positive things, whether that is charity work or taking time with fans."


On top of his commendable charity work, Brown possesses a keen interest in personal development and further education. Helping the next generation of footballers in his post-sporting career is something that he wants to practice them for.

"I'm currently enrolled on the PFA's Football Psychology and Emotional Intelligence Leadership course, which is a post graduate certificate. I've also just been offered the chance to do a master's degree at Staffordshire University in Sport and Exercise Psychology. I'm really passionate about this and when I stop playing, I want to help young players. I think me having those experiences, paired with the actual knowledge behind it, I can help give back to them as I know how difficult it can be in their position."

Brown is confident the game is changing with regard to it's views on players pursuing different interests away from the pitch and believes in doing so, a smoother transition into life after football can occur. "It's becoming normalised for players to have their career in football but to also pursue other interests whether that's education, business, music, fashion, anything. Just look at Luther Wildin with his property business."

"It's really important because whether you have a good, prolonged career or not, your career is going to end at some point, and you do need to be ready for that, so it's better to start early and build those foundations for when you are transitioning out of the game. If you are a young player now, start looking at other ways of developing yourself as it'll make that transition a lot easier and can only benefit you." ■





After trial spells at various academies as a youngster, Jack McMillan was offered a scholarship by Notts County. Following a successful spell as an apprentice, the midfielder penned a professional contract with the East Midlands Club.

JACK MCMILLAN

Widening Horizons

“I played local football in Leicestershire as a young kid and I would find myself on trial at different professional clubs, but nothing ever materialised until I was about 13 years old when I began to spend longer periods of time at academies,” McMillan told LFE.

“When I was 15, I signed for Notts County and went on to become a scholar there before signing my first professional contract at 18.”

Reflecting on his time as a youngster at Meadow Lane, McMillan holds his apprenticeship period in high regard, positive that the skills he learned on the job as an apprentice footballer, with the help of the LFE Life Skills Programme, were crucial to his development both as an athlete and a person.

“Being an apprentice was one of the best experiences of my life. I learned so many crucial skills with the main stand-out one being resilience. As an apprentice, you’re in an environment with other lads who at the beginning you might not know too well personally, so you need to be able to build relationships and connections quickly on and off the pitch to win, but ultimately develop as a person.

“Those skills are constantly being developed every day as a scholar and the life skills sessions emphasise what you are learning daily with more of a concentrated light. The external people that come in are there to add value to yourself as a human being, and of course as a footballer. 10 years on there are definitely sessions that still stick with me and had a positive impact.” ▶

Delving into his apprenticeship further, the Leicester-born ex-apprentice detailed how the professional backdrop of a football club played a huge role in fast-tracking his maturing process. "Amongst my friends I'm known as 'the grandad' as maybe I'm a little too mature for my age and I think that has come from leaving school at 16 and almost becoming an adult right away to try and navigate my way through the very topsy turvy, unpredictable environment that is football. It helped shape and provide me with a high-performance mindset that unfortunately didn't last in the football world but helped me in my next steps. The rigid and high-performance surroundings of a football club taught me a lot."

At the end of his first professional contract, McMillan wasn't offered a new deal by the Club and decided to shift his focus onto new opportunities away from the game, a prospect that didn't faze him. "After I left Notts County I went on a few trials at other clubs and played a bit of non-league, but I then realised that I needed a break from the game, mentally more than anything. At that time, I probably didn't have the resources to carry on sustainably, so a break was needed. I then went into some coaching before choosing to go to university. After university, I went to live in Rome to do my master's degree in business and realised that I was still a winner, a high achiever, and that I could make it in the corporate world."

"I was fortunate. Thanks to my circle of friends and family, I never got too high, and I never got too low. Never celebrated my successes too much and never allowed myself to feel too low on the way down. I also have the likes of LFE to thank as well. I was always made aware of the importance of having interests away from the game and making sure I was set up for a potential life away from football and this is so important."

Upon his return to the UK from university, McMillan headed down to the Big Smoke to begin a new life in the corporate world, however, he soon realised that the one hundred miles per hour London life wasn't one he wanted to lead. "I was approached about a job on LinkedIn and moved down to London for two years to do it. It was very high pressure and involved really long days. It was tough, but I learned a lot and realised I could transfer the skills that I had picked up in the sporting world into the business world."

"It wasn't a sustainable life for me to lead. It was so high paced, like a 'rat race' as some would call the London life. I remember waiting for the tube one day after work and I thought to myself I'm not going to get onto this next tube, I probably won't even get onto the next two or three after that. It's going to take me 3 hours to get home, and that's not how I wanted my life to be. I've also always been someone who puts health and well-being as a priority and by living that kind of lifestyle I wasn't doing myself any good."

After leaving the hustle and bustle of London behind, McMillan decided to pursue a career in something fundamental to his life – mental and physical well-being. "Yoga, breathwork, and meditation are seen as a feminine practice in a way. In the east where it originated from it isn't, but certainly in the west. When I first got into it at the beginning I didn't shout about it, especially in the football environment. I would do it for prehab and rehab purposes and luckily during my career, I wasn't injured much at all. However, when I stopped playing, the world came crashing down and the football bubble burst, the air outside was definitely different from the air inside it. Breathwork, yoga, and meditation allowed me to re-find my 'why' for life and my purpose because my identity was missing. ▶

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I WAS ALWAYS MADE AWARE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING INTERESTS AWAY FROM THE GAME AND MAKING SURE I WAS SET UP FOR A POTENTIAL LIFE AWAY FROM FOOTBALL AND THIS IS SO IMPORTANT.



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WITH MENTAL WELL-BEING COMES PERFORMANCE, AND WITHOUT IT, YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO PERFORM AT A HIGH LEVEL ON A LONG-TERM SCALE.



“Something that you learn in these practices is the power of ego and how that can cloud a person’s judgment and dictate how they view the world and where they feel they should be in life. I did a lot of self-reflection and as I evolved with the practice, I realised I wanted to teach this and more people should know about it, especially athletes.”

At the beginning of the year, McMillan launched his own company ‘Optima Yoga’ and within a few months of operating partnered with LFE to deliver breathwork sessions to current apprentices as part of our Life Skills Programme. “This practice (breathwork) is new and it’s something that raises eyebrows, but it’s something that is being adopted more and more within sport. When I go into clubs now and deliver a workshop, from minute one to the end of the session I see a real mindset shift from the apprentices and a change in how they view the practice. At the start, they almost look around as if to say ‘Well I know how to breathe this is a bit ridiculous’ but by the end when I bring them out of the meditation stage and they give me their immediate positive feedback, it makes it all worth it. I can have a big impact on my clients in such a short time frame due to what the practice can do. Athletes have so many resources when it comes to recovering physically, but not enough mentally.

Breathwork and meditation can bridge that gap. With mental well-being comes performance, and without it, you won’t be able to perform at a high level on a long-term scale. The last 12 months have been a whirlwind, I’ve learned a lot, and I just hope to continue to grow and expand. Without LFE and being given the platform by them to deliver my workshops it wouldn’t have been possible. The feedback that I’ve received so far has been amazing, it’s a real blessing.”

Discussing the practice in more detail, McMillan explained how it can prove an effective mental relief from stress and anxiety in particular and enhance physical performance too. “We breathe 25,000 times a day on average, and we have 6,000 thoughts, with 80% of those thoughts being negative, that’s just how the brain survives. 20% are open to neutral and habitual thoughts. Breathwork can allow you to silence your mind and allow a mental break. Stress and anxiety are more prevalent than ever, both in general life and sports and breathwork can silence that. It’s good to have that mental release, to breathe, relax, and allow the parasympathetic state, which is our rest and digest to drop in, slow nasal breathing is the best way to achieve that. Exhaling slower and longer than your inhale can allow the body to relax and that attention piece that you place

on your breathing will allow everything that’s on your shoulders to go away for a few minutes. The effect it can have is instant

“There’s a big emphasis now in sport on the mental side of the game and how it affects performance and recovery. The breathwork can allow you to enter your ‘flow state’ quickly. Also, from a physiological perspective, it can prepare you for performance by getting oxygen to the blood, improving it around the body, and activating different muscles. It’s now becoming a key part of some of my clients’ pre-game preparation. As the facilitator, seeing that effect is great.”

McMillan believes that football as a whole is opening its eyes to new practices, with the new generation of players helping to break down barriers. “Players are so much more open to learning nowadays and everything is so much more accepted, football is widening its horizons to how it thinks, and I believe the game is becoming more holistic as a result. When I played it was very much training, hitting the gym, playing, eating, and recovering. Now there has been an introduction of more psychology, player care, focus on well-being, and holistic practices. Players are also doing more off their own backs which is great.” ■

CAMBRIDGE UNITED



PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

In October, LFE visited Cambridge United's Abbey Stadium to oversee two personal development sessions delivered by Dru Spinks to the U's first and second-year apprentices.

Dru, a former professional basketball player turned LFE personal development mentor spent the morning relaying the importance of having other interests outside of the game and delved into how the skills scholars learn during their apprenticeships can be transferred into the outside world.

"The big push today was raising awareness of personal development's benefits, but more than just attachment and escapism. We discussed transferrable skills and qualities that are increasingly sought after in high-performance environments. Decision makers are looking at these aspects with just as much importance now."

Dru Spinks
LFE Personal Development Mentor



"The aim is to give the apprentices other things to think about away from football, trying to get their identity and mind frame to broaden and make sure that they do have other interests so that they're not just known as a 'footballer'."

Harsh Joshi
Cambridge United
Head of Education

"You learn a lot from these sessions. There are so many aspects away from football that shape you as a footballer. I learned the meaning of empathy today and how it can help on the pitch communicating with your teammates and so on."

Dempsey Crace
Cambridge United apprentice

"It was good to reflect and have that reminder that it's important to have other things in place in case football doesn't work out the way you want it to."

George Munday
Cambridge United apprentice

"The aim is to give the apprentices other things to think about away from football, trying to get their identity and mind frame to broaden and make sure that they do have other interests so that they're not just known as a 'footballer'."

Peter Holmes
Cambridge United apprentice



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NOVEMBER 2025



INTRO TO ISLAM & CULTURAL AWARENESS WORKSHOPS

Each year in the UK November is dedicated to Islamophobia Awareness month where Islamophobia is challenged through workshops and education throughout the country.

Join in this year and support Muslim Chaplains In Sport's challenge of visiting one club each day of the month and delivering a full day's workshop.

Workshops on Intro to Islam & Cultural Awareness will be delivered by MCS to academy players, 1st team and all club staff, and are free to take for all EFL clubs.*

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LIFE SKILLS TALENT TRANSFER



LFE visited the Coventry City Academy recently to take in a Talent Transfer Life Skills workshop.

Founder of the organisation, Cecil Jee Thomas, shared his own incredible journey and detailed his transition from footballer to professional dancer, presenter, media personality and much more.

The former Crawley Town apprentice's session raised awareness on the importance of having other interests outside of the game, and how the skills you learn as an athlete can be transferred into different walks of life.




CECIL HAD A REALLY GOOD DELIVERY. HE RELATED TO US BECAUSE HE HAS BEEN IN OUR POSITION, SO IT'S ALWAYS NICE WHEN SOMEONE CAN SPEAK FROM EXPERIENCE.

JOSH TOLUWALOJU, APPRENTICE



THE SESSION WAS VERY GOOD, AND I LEARNT A LOT ABOUT WHAT CAN HAPPEN AFTER FOOTBALL IF I DON'T MANAGE TO GET A PROFESSIONAL CONTRACT. THERE IS A LOT OF OPEN DOORS AND OPPORTUNITIES. THERE'S SO MUCH MORE TO LIFE THAN JUST BEING A PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER.

MACKENZIE STRETTON, APPRENTICE

A sunset over a beach with people playing soccer. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a golden glow over the scene. Several people are visible on the beach, some standing and some playing soccer. The sky is filled with soft, golden light, and the ocean waves are visible in the distance.

In November, two groups of former apprentices travelled to Australia and the United States for the latest round of Turing trips.

Turing Trips 2024

The trips saw 14 ex-apprentices head out to Melbourne, with another 16 going to Tampa, Florida, all funded by the UK government's official global learning and exchange programme, Turing.

Through these trips, attendees were able to immerse themselves in the culture of Australian and U.S. Soccer and were given the platform to showcase their talent in front of National Premier League (NPL) and United Soccer League (USL) clubs and coaches.

They also provided a chance for attendees to secure long-term football employment in U.S. and Australian professional football, at the same time fostering sustainable pathways for future EFL academy graduates not offered professional terms in the UK.

Discussing the trips, LFE's Chief Executive Sarah Stephen said: "These trips encapsulate everything LFE aims to achieve, opening up realistic playing opportunities abroad and also wider developmental outcomes for our former apprentices.

"Playing in USL Academy Events, whilst also volunteering to help with the Hurricane Milton clean up, or hearing from former apprentices who are now Australian citizens that own their own companies after playing over there.

"These experiences offer inspiration, develop vital skills, and offer tangible transition pathways, allowing our former apprentices to build on what they've learned in the Academy system and thrive in the short, medium, and long term."

Turing Trips 2024

AUSTRALIA

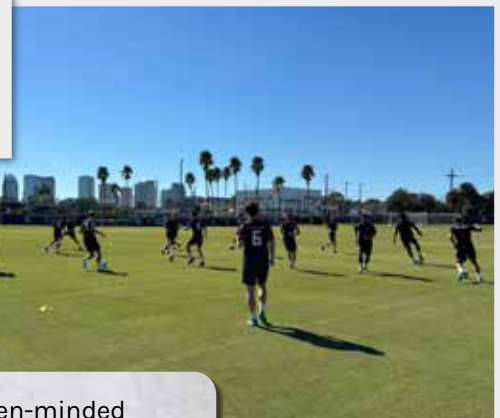
UNITED STATES



“To have the chance of playing full-time again, training every day and playing matches in front of different clubs was brilliant.”



“It was a life-changing experience. Not many people can say they’ve been to America to play full-time football, and I’ll take that with me for the rest of my life.”



“I’ve definitely developed certain skills out here. I’ve become more resilient for one and feel like I’ve become more of a leader.”



“I wasn’t that open-minded coming out here, but it’s now massively changed my outlook. The opportunities out here in the States are endless.”





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17.5K tweets | 2,268 following | 7,666 followers

Northampton Town Academy @NTFC_Academy
 🙌 Thank you to our U18's who have been sorting the toys donated to the club's Christmas Toy Campaign! They will be delivered around Northamptonshire over the coming days by @ntfc and @NTFCWomen players. Thank you to everyone who donated a toy! @LFEonline @PFA #ShoeArmy 🙌

League Football Education @LFEonline
 📌 @MTFCAcademy apprentices visited The Oaklands residential care home in Warsop last week to get involved with some Christmas festivities with the residents. #MansfieldTownFC 📌

Burton Albion FC Academy @BAFCAcademy
 Safeguarding. Last week Paul Stewart came to the Pirelli Stadium to tell his powerful story of the child abuse he suffered as a young aspiring footballer. It was a stark reminder of the crucial role we play in safeguarding our young footballers as they play the game they love. @burtonalbionfc @LFEonline 📌❤️



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