



Touchline



SAM OKOLIE

GOING GLOBAL

The Cambridge United apprentice details his remarkable rise to the international stage

CONOR MANDERSON + LFE GLOBAL SHOWCASE TOUR + MUCH MORE!

LFE's Academy Education Managers



Paul Bartlett
 North East



Will Morford
 South West



Carl Craner
 West Midlands



Tom Palmer
 South East



Simon Dwight
 South



Neil Chadwick
 North West



Peter Hood
 North East



Ian Tombs
 East Midlands



Ben Lavelle
 North West



Claire Wilberforce-Marsh
 North West



Gabriel Mellor
 North East



Gavin Willacy
 South East



David O'Donovan
 South East



Richard Donnelly
 Wales

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 academy graduate 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

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 season so far has been filled with memorable strikes. Here are this season's winners so far...



CHARLIE ANDERSON
AUGUST WINNER

Leyton Orient's Charlie Anderson picked up the first Goal of the Month award of the season, with his perfectly struck free kick against Oxford United securing **38%** of the votes.

SCAN HERE
TO WATCH



DANIEL EZENDU
SEPTEMBER WINNER

Bristol City midfielder Daniel Ezendu claimed September's award after his delicately placed free kick against Brentford picked up **34%** of the votes.

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JOSHUA WALTERS
OCTOBER WINNER

Joshua Walters of Mansfield Town was named October's winner after his expertly taken chip against Kidderminster Harriers in the FA Youth Cup won the poll with **29%** of the votes.

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DAWID GAWEL
NOVEMBER WINNER

Picking up a massive **38%** of the votes, Luton Town forward Dawid Gawel claimed the November award for his incredible overhead kick during their derby win over Watford.

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LOUIE REA
DECEMBER WINNER

The final award of 2025 went to Birmingham City forward Louie Rea. Louie's inch-perfect free kick versus Coventry City in the FA Youth Cup accumulated **41%** of the votes.

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ACADEMY LEAGUES ROUND-UP



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE NORTH

It is **Preston North End** who currently lead the way in the Youth Alliance North after the turn of the year. The Lilywhites endured a somewhat stuttering start to the campaign, winning just one of their opening four matches; however, Ryan Taylor's side have put together a run of solid form since the former Newcastle United player's appointment as Lead Development Phase Coach and now find themselves top of the pile on 36 points.

However, **Grimsby Town** are breathing down their necks in second place, sitting just three points behind the league leaders but possessing the luxury of having four games in hand. If the Mariners were to take maximum points from those games, they would skyrocket to the top of the table with a nine-point cushion.

Elsewhere in the division, it is extremely tight and competitive, with just nine points separating **Blackpool** in sixth and **Lincoln City** in eighteenth.



EFL YOUTH ALLIANCE SOUTH

Cambridge United are flying high at the summit of the Youth Alliance South division, having picked up a whopping 40 points from a possible 45 after 15 matches. Despite the U's excellent campaign so far, they are not the only team boasting a near-perfect record. **AFC Wimbledon** are hovering just behind them on 38 points. The two sides face off on March 14, a game that could act as a potential title decider if both teams continue in their current vein of form.

Stevenage should not be discounted in the title race either. The Boro, in third place, have played one fewer match than the two sides above them and would move up to second - just one point behind league leaders Cambridge - if they were to win their game in hand.

Last season's champions, **Luton Town**, have struggled to replicate their incredible 2024/25 form so far. They sit fourth in the table and, once again, have been impeccable in front of goal, leading the way for goals scored with 54 after 17 matches; however, defensive issues have proved costly, with 31 goals conceded.



U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE NORTH (PDL NORTH)

It has been an extremely tightly contested season in the PDL North division so far, with just seven points separating **Wigan Athletic** in first and **Sheffield Wednesday** in sixth. The Latics hold a narrow lead at the top, sitting two points ahead of **Sheffield United** in second and three points clear of **Hull City** in third. However, both of those sides have games in hand on the north-west outfit. It is the Tigers from the East Riding of Yorkshire who could propel themselves to the summit if they were to capitalise on those games in hand and collect maximum points.

David Vaughan's **Crewe Alexandra** are also going well. The Railwaymen currently find themselves in fourth position, four points adrift of the top spot. Despite needing some help from elsewhere, results-wise, if they are to mount a title challenge, the underlying numbers look positive: they boast the second-most potent attack in the league while conceding the fewest goals so far.



U18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAGUE SOUTH (PDL SOUTH)

Charlton Athletic have enjoyed a very strong first half of the 2025/26 campaign. The Addicks sit top of the PDL South division after 14 matchdays, with the closest challengers, **Swansea City**, four points behind in second place. Former first-team captain Jason Pearce's side are the only unbeaten team remaining in the division, recording nine wins and five draws. As well as boasting the second-best attacking record in the league, their defence has been rock solid, conceding just 15 goals in 14 matches.

Cardiff City, **Watford**, and **AFC Bournemouth** make up the chasing pack, sitting five, six, and seven points behind Charlton respectively.



ACADEMY LEAGUES ROUND-UP

U18 PREMIER LEAGUE NORTH

Once again, it is the two Manchester rivals battling it out at the top of the U18 Premier League North; however, it is **City** who are setting the pace - and then some. The Citizens are four points clear of the Red Devils while also holding three games in hand over **United**. If Oliver Reiss' side can take all nine available points from those fixtures, they would skyrocket to a surely uncatchable 13-point lead.

The five clubs in the division on LFE's programme are enduring a mix of fortunes so far this season. **Sunderland, Middlesbrough** and **Derby County** are currently in the mid-table mix, sitting sixth, eighth and ninth respectively. **Blackburn Rovers** are eleventh, with **Stoke City** thirteenth.





U18 PREMIER LEAGUE SOUTH

Chelsea are renowned for their development of young talent, and their current crop of apprentices are going strong this season. The Blues are the only unbeaten team remaining in the U18 Premier League South division, having won eight of their 11 matches so far and drawn the remaining three. Their defensive solidity has proved to be the cornerstone of their success, with just 10 goals conceded to date. They also hold a three-point cushion at the top of the table and have two games in hand on the three sides immediately below them in the title race.

LFE's clubs in the PL South are experiencing similar campaigns to their northern counterparts. **West Bromwich Albion** are performing well, sitting in mid-table just above **Arsenal**. **Reading**, **Birmingham City**, **Norwich City** and **Ipswich Town** are all grouped together near the foot of the table.

DEBUTANTS

A selection of apprentices who have made their professional debuts since the beginning of October.

Cruz Ibeh

Middlesbrough

First year apprentice Cruz Ibeh was handed his Boro debut in January's FA Cup third round defeat to Fulham. The young forward replaced Hayden Hackney in the 81st minute.



Dean Gardner

Rotherham United

Second-year Rotherham United apprentice Dean Gardner made his debut during extra time of the Millers' FA Cup defeat to Swindon Town in November.



Stan Sargent

Gillingham

Stan Sargent made his senior bow in November, coming on for the final five minutes of Gillingham's Vertu Trophy match against Stevenage. Sargent went on to score his penalty kick as the Gills progressed through on penalties.



Leo Pecover

Bristol City

Midfielder Leo Pecover was handed his first taste of senior action by Robins boss Gerhard Struber in an October Championship win over Southampton at Ashton Gate, playing the final 18 minutes plus stoppage time of the 3-1 victory.



Jamal Williamson, Matty Lay, Daniel Matthews, Bodi Thistleton, Zach Scutt, Will Earley, Kairo Piper, Robbie Meakin & Samuel Oyemade Burton Albion

Jamal Williamson, Matty Lay, and Daniel Matthews appeared in Brewers colours for the first time in a Vertu Trophy clash at Chesterfield in October. Just over a month later, a further six apprentices made their senior debuts in the same competition against Crewe Alexandra: Bodi Thistleton, Zach Scutt, Will Earley, Kairo Piper, Robbie Meakin, and Samuel Oyemade.



George Elder, Derek Oshodi, Ky-Mani Leliendal, Oluchi Nwankwo, Harry Williamson & James Butterworth

Blackpool

Six Blackpool apprentices were awarded their first-team bows across two matches against Nottingham Forest U21s and Tranmere Rovers. George Elder, Derek Oshodi, and Ky-Mani Leliendal featured against Forest on October 14, while Oluchi Nwankwo, Harry Williamson, and James Butterworth appeared for the Seasiders a month later against Tranmere Rovers.



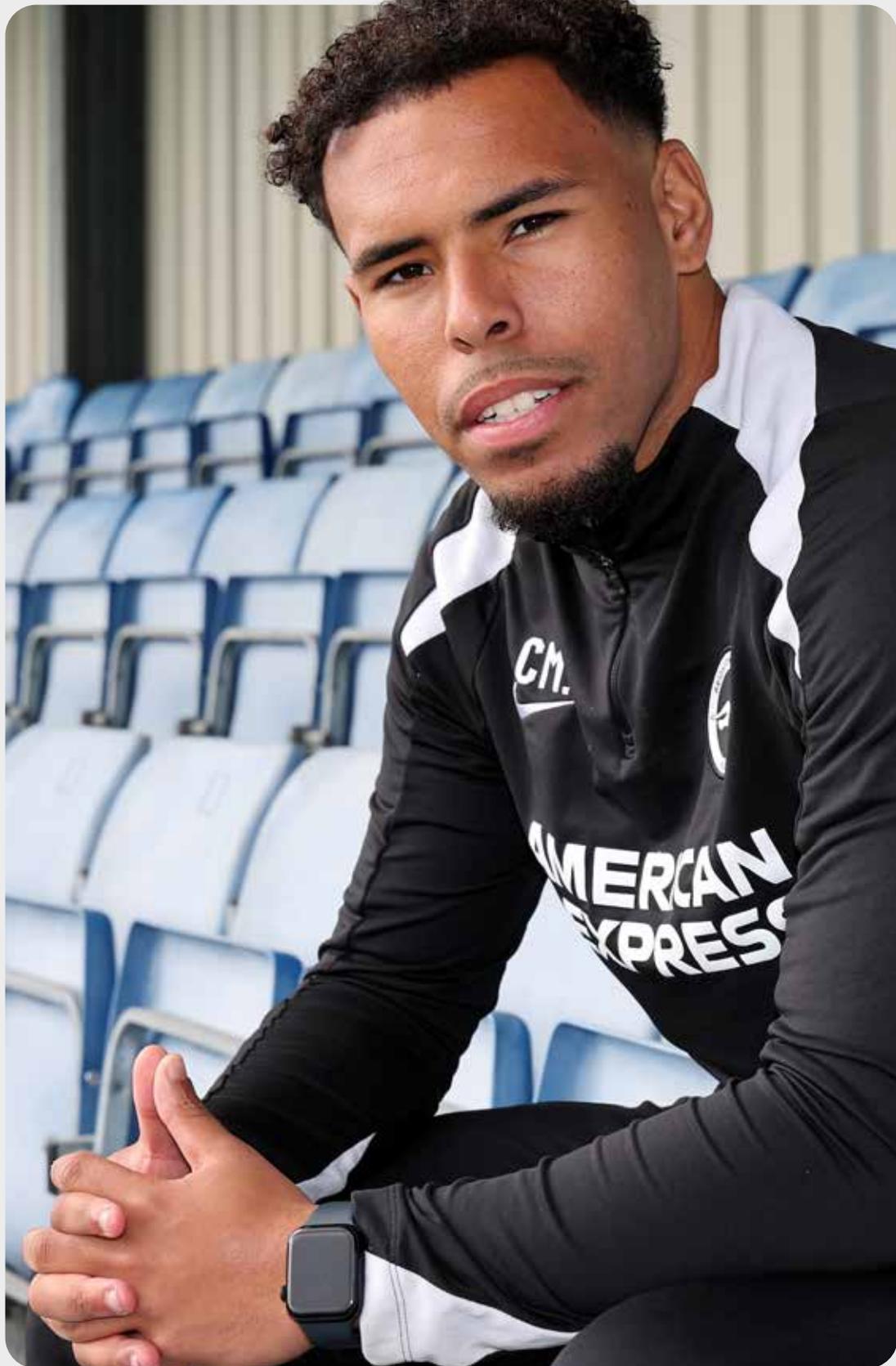
**Ryan Chadwick, Iago Scott-Abel,
Lucas Swann & Patrick Mlynarski**
Crewe Alexandra

A Vertu Trophy fixture against Liverpool U21s in October saw Ryan Chadwick, Iago Scott-Abel, and Lucas Swann make their first senior appearances for the Railwaymen, while Patrick Mlynarski made his first outing a month later against Burton Albion in the same competition.



**Tjay Parfitt, Robert Tankiewicz,
Harry Watts, Jack Sykes
& Noah Williams**
Cardiff City

Five apprentices have made their Bluebirds debuts in recent months. Tjay Parfitt and Robert Tankiewicz were awarded their first minutes against Newport County in October. Harry Watts and Jack Sykes made their first team bows a month later against Arsenal U21s, while Noah Williams earned his maiden appearance versus AFC Wimbledon in December.





CONOR MANDERSON

A BUDDING YOUNG SHOT-STOPPER AT GRASSROOTS LEVEL, **CONOR MANDERSON** MADE HIS FIRST MOVE INTO A PROFESSIONAL ENVIRONMENT AT 15 YEARS OLD, SIGNING FOR PORTSMOUTH AND MOVING AWAY FROM HIS HOME IN BRIGHTON.



“I moved away from home at 16 and into digs. Leaving my family and friends at that age was difficult,” Conor told LFE. **“It was a big learning curve, and very quickly I had to become self-sufficient.”**



After a year at under-16s level, he signed a scholarship with the south coast side. Reflecting on his time as an apprentice, Conor looks back on his two years on the programme with fondness and gratitude. “The apprenticeship was great for me. It’s an amazing opportunity to play lots of football and begin getting used to a full-time football schedule. You’ve also got the education side of it as well, which again is fantastic, and I felt really fortunate to have been exposed to all of the support you receive as an apprentice. It was also a great opportunity to meet new people.

“I remember first meeting Troy Townsend during one of his LFE Life Skills sessions, and I still keep in regular contact with him now. Those sessions were great for meeting people from all walks of life, and I learnt a lot from them.”



Despite admitting that education and personal development were a slight afterthought at the time, Conor is adamant that the level of support apprentices receive can’t be overlooked. “I think it’s so crucial. At the time, because you’re so fixated on becoming a footballer, you don’t really realise how important all of the sessions and help you’re exposed to are. It’s not until you get a bit older that you realise just how much support you received. You gain so many skills through the apprenticeship as a whole.”

Whilst part of the under-18s side at Pompey, Conor was called up to represent Northern Ireland on the international stage - an experience he will never forget. “I played a few times, and it was an amazing experience. I played in and won the Victory Shield, which was probably the highlight of my youth football career. I also played in European qualifiers, and it was just brilliant to be part of such a professional environment. International football is a whole different level; even the small details, like walking into the changing room and seeing all your training kit folded and laid out, along with your drinks and energy gels, were things I’d never experienced before.”





**"EVERY DAY I'M HERE IN THE BUILDING;
I'M JUST TRYING TO LEARN MORE. I'M NOT
LOOKING TOO FAR AHEAD; I'M REALLY HAPPY
WITH HOW MUCH I'VE ACHIEVED SO FAR."**

With all the highs that come with football, there are also lows. At the end of his apprenticeship, Conor was not offered a professional contract. However, unlike many, he was able to accept the decision and move on to the next chapter swiftly. "I'd say I half-expected it, to be honest," he admits. "Being at a lower-league club, the margins are so fine, and if you're offered a professional contract then you're expected to be ready for first-team football, because not many sides have an under-21s team. At the time, I probably wasn't ready for League One football. It didn't really affect me too much, though, because I always had an idea that I wanted to be a coach and managed to get into it fairly quickly due to the coaching badges I'd earned during my apprenticeship, as well as some of the connections I had made in football. I was quite fortunate in that sense."

Even though Conor's transition out of the academy system was fairly seamless, he credits the aftercare provided by LFE. "I was definitely supported during that period. Even to this day, I still receive catch-up calls from LFE to check in on how I'm doing. I think it's brilliant and such an important thing to do, because a lot of young players struggle after they've left a football club. Thankfully for me, I was okay, because I had my mind set on becoming a coach immediately after leaving Portsmouth."

The former Portsmouth goalkeeper's tunnel-vision approach to his next steps led to his first break in the coaching world almost instantaneously, as he joined the Brighton & Hove Albion Foundation. "I first started working within the foundation programme as a pathways coach, leading activities such as lunch clubs and after-school clubs. This gave me a really good understanding of how to work with and manage young people, and I think it was the perfect starting point for me, as it taught me a lot about planning and delivering sessions with large groups."

After a period of finding his feet within the foundation set-up, opportunities to move into the academy began to arise. "I was also doing one night a week in the pre-academy thanks to a link I had with one of the coaches there, so that was how I first got my foot in the door. I worked my way through the pre-academy until an opportunity arose to become a goalkeeper coach within the academy. Since last year, I've been fortunate enough to be in a full-time role after gaining a position through the Premier League's CIDS (Coach Inclusion & Diversity Scheme). I now lead on the goalkeepers from under-7s to under-12s, and I'm absolutely loving it."

Reflecting on his time as an apprentice, Conor insists that the experiences he was exposed to as a young player have benefited his coaching career. "Coming through the academy system myself has definitely helped me on my coaching journey here at Brighton - 100%. With those experiences, I already had a strong understanding of how an academy environment works, and I think that's a strength of my coaching as well. I can connect with the young goalkeepers because I was in their shoes not too long ago. That's one of the big positives of being a young coach like me, fresh out of the academy system."

Looking ahead to the future, Conor is taking each day as it comes, recognising the fortuitous nature of his situation given his rapid development within the coaching world. "My goal within coaching is to just be better than the previous day and show up as the best version of myself. Every day I'm here in the building; I'm just trying to learn more. I'm not looking too far ahead; I'm really happy with how much I've achieved so far. I'm very aware that being full-time in an academy at 21 years old is very young, but I've got great people around me every day, and I'm just soaking up every bit of information and advice."

ON THE MOVE



Lots of deals involving former LFE apprentices have taken place during the January transfer window. Let's look at some of the most notable ones...





ANTOINE SEMENYO

Bristol City academy graduate



£64M



BRENNAN JOHNSON

Nottingham Forest academy graduate



£35M

ROMAIN ESSE

Millwall academy graduate



LOAN

YISA ALAO

Current apprentice



£500K



DANNY ROSE

Barnsley academy graduate



UNDISCLOSED

AJAY MATTHEWS

Middlesbrough academy graduate



LOAN

JAY MATETE

Fleetwood Town academy graduate



UNDISCLOSED

SAM MORSY

Port Vale academy graduate



FREE AGENT





Gavin Willacy (54)

What is your role within LFE?

GW: I'm the Academy Education Manager in the East, currently working with five clubs: MK Dons, Cambridge United, Luton Town, and - new this season - Peterborough United and Watford. Over the years, I've worked with more than 20 clubs, from Northampton down to Brighton and nearly everyone in between. I'm also part of the Communications group.

How long have you been with LFE?

GW: I joined back in September 2009, so this is my 17th season. Next season, most of the first-year apprentices won't even have been born when I started!

Could you describe your daily responsibilities?

GW: Primarily, my role is to work with clubs and education providers to ensure apprentices have the best experience possible and come out of the programme having learned a great deal, succeeded in every area, and enjoyed it.



Gavin with his former apprentices Ademola Lookman (then Charlton, now Atalanta) and Ben Wilmot then Stevenage, now Stoke City)



What do you enjoy most about your role?

GW: Just seeing lads do well - whether that's on the pitch, developing into impressive young men, or finding something that truly fulfils them. I'm just as happy for those who've gone on to become teachers, coaches, a dancer, a poet, or a GP as I am for the dozen or so England internationals I've worked with. Seeing someone as likeable as Ebere Eze, my former apprentice at Millwall, go from being released to where he is now - and still staying in touch - is wonderful.

What did you do prior to working at LFE?

GW: I've had a couple of other lives! I was a football reporter for eight years - first at Shoot magazine (ask your dad or grandad), then at Football365.com, which I absolutely loved. I was made redundant and took a part-time job teaching. Once you've had Year 11 Set 8 for English on a Friday afternoon, everything else seems pretty easy! I taught for seven years at a north London college, which certainly toughened me up. We delivered BTEC Sport to Barnet's youth team, which is how I ended up at LFE. So, if I hadn't lost my dream job, I wouldn't be here. Some setbacks can turn out to be the best thing.



How do you like to spend your time outside of work?

GW: Walking our dog, Star, going to the cinema and gigs, travelling in the UK and abroad, and taking dance lessons with my wife Jo - though after nearly 20 years, I'm still not very good! I also go to non-league football, watch cricket in the summer, and report on rugby league for The Guardian and BBC Radio Manchester, which I love.

What football team do you support?

GW: My dad sentenced me to life as a Preston North End fan. As I live in Hertfordshire, I only get to about six to ten games a year. I've seen us go ahead against Arsenal and Manchester United and win at Manchester City - but also lose at Barnet and be thrashed by Hartlepool. We've finished 91st in the league and been one win away from the Premier League, so it's been a mixed experience, to say the least!

Favourite holiday destination?

GW: Anywhere warm, sunny, attractive, and interesting! Barbados, San Francisco, and Croatia are all wonderful, but Italy is my go-to destination. I've been to more places there than most Italians I meet!

SAM

Rewind twelve months and Cambridge United apprentice Samuel Okolie was in and out of the team, lacking belief both on and off the pitch.



OKOLIE

A year on, the 17-year-old has represented the Seychelles senior national team on the world stage and now cuts a confident figure as he sits down with LFE at the club's training ground to discuss his journey so far.

Raised in Finchley, North London, Okolie spent his childhood much like many of the other local kids, playing football. "My first footballing memory would've been just playing in the garden with my dad when I was maybe four or five years old," Okolie told LFE. "I joined my first team when I was eight and played simply out of enjoyment, as you do when you are young. It wasn't until I got a little older that I realised I had some talent and began to take it more seriously."

As Okolie reached his early teenage years, his confidence grew and his ability began to shine through. After excelling for his school team and various local grassroots clubs, he was offered a trial at Cambridge United - his first taste of academy football. "I went on the trial, did really well, and scored some goals. Despite the pressure, I was still having fun, and that was the most important part to me. I signed in November 2024 and pretty much went straight into my apprenticeship."



Despite the thrill of earning his first contract at a professional club, the fact that he had joined the academy system at a later age than most meant a challenging period awaited Okolie. "It was a shock to the system," admits Okolie. "The levels in training and matches were a lot higher than what I was used to. I also had to adapt to coming into training four or five times a week and being in a professional environment constantly. The majority of the squad had been together for six or seven years, so at first, I did feel a bit out of place. I had the talent, but I didn't have the chemistry with the other players, and that was difficult. I'd say it took me a good year to find my feet and feel comfortable enough to start building real connections with everyone."

The young forward also had to come to terms with living away from home for the first time in his life. "That was hard for me. I'd spent my whole life living with my parents and seeing them every day. All of a sudden, I was only getting to see them once a week at best. I sat down for a conversation with them though and they made me see the situation as a positive. They told me I was learning life skills that many people at my age aren't. It's helped me mature and grow up a lot faster."

Looking back on his difficult period of adaptation in greater detail, Okolie feels the experiences and obstacles encountered during his apprenticeship have stood him in good stead. "The apprenticeship programme has really brought me out of my shell and made me much more sociable. I've always naturally been a quiet person, but over the last 12 to 18 months I've learned to push myself out of my comfort zone. I used to be very reserved and reactive in my interactions with other people, but now I make an effort to say hi and form proper conversations. The apprenticeship has taught me to use my initiative."

Okolie's rise in confidence over the last twelve months is encapsulated by his recent on-the-pitch exploits. After some impressive displays for the U's under-18s in the back end of last season, an unrecognised phone number rang on the 17-year-old's phone. "I received a call from the Seychelles under-17s head coach. He had watched clips of me from some of my games and invited me to a training camp in France. I did really well. I played in seven games, mostly against French academies and some lower-division senior teams and scored nine or ten goals."

"I then came back for a few days before going out again for another tournament, this time against other countries' youth sides, and I proved myself to be one of the best players there. I scored two goals in four games and was able to show my strengths even more."



Scan here for
video clips of
Okolie's interview



His impressive displays for the youth team didn't go unnoticed, as he received a call-up to the senior national team shortly after - a moment of immense pride for the second-year apprentice. "It came as such a big surprise," Okolie confesses. "It all happened so quickly after my initial experience with the under-17s, and I just couldn't believe it, but I was so proud. I was so happy to see that all my hard work up to this point had resulted in an opportunity like this.

"I was mainly happy for my parents, though. The fact that I was able to give something back to them after everything they have done for me felt amazing. Driving me to all my training sessions and matches when I was younger and following me to whatever team I went to, they gave me the best possible platform to achieve something like this. They always wanted me to represent my country, and to be able to do it whilst they are still present is something that I am so grateful for."

Okolie jetted out to join the senior squad for a series of FIFA World Cup qualifiers in September and October against the likes of Gabon, Kenya, Ivory Coast and Gambia, featuring in three of the four matches against some of African football's biggest stars. "It was an incredible experience and learning curve. As an academy player you always hear coaches say that as the level goes up, you get punished even more for mistakes because the tempo and quality is so much higher and it's so true. It was pretty humbling to feel it in person. The intensity of their play, and quickness of decision making is very different from under-18s football.

"I played against some top players. Against Ivory Coast I was up against players like Willy Boly, Franck Kessie, Simon Adingra, Sebastian Haller and Ibrahim Sangare. You watch them on TV and they obviously look good, but until you see the quality in person you don't actually understand just how good they are.

"The main thing I took from that experience was seeing where I'd like to be in five to ten years. Witnessing the minor details that they have in their game was really important."

Facing up against some of Europe's elite wasn't the only surreal experience Okolie was exposed to, with the match against Kenya played in front of 28,000 supporters. "Coming on as a substitute in front of a crowd like that was crazy. In academy football, you're used to playing in front of coaches and a handful of parents, so to be on the international stage being watched by thousands was incredible. The raw passion and noise from the Kenyan fans whenever their team went on the attack was insane - it felt as if the stadium was erupting. I couldn't even hear what the person next to me on the bench was saying, it was that loud."

Okolie reflects on his first stint of international football with great fondness, certain that the experience has had a significant impact on him. "It's made me so much more confident. Before I went, I was in the mindset of questioning whether I was even at the level required to be there, but I worked hard to show my ability. I've come back since with so much more belief in what I can do. I know I still have plenty of room for improvement, but to have already played for my country at 17 years old has been massive for my confidence. Seeing those top players in action has made me really hungry to push on and improve. I want to reach a point where I'm consistently putting in eight or nine out of ten performances - I think that's the difference between elite players and average players. I now know what I need to focus on, thanks to my time with the national team. I've learned so much."

FF

I was mainly happy for my parents, though. The fact that I was able to give something back to them after everything they have done for me felt amazing.



MAGPIES APPRENTICES ENJOY CONSTRUCTION WORK EXPERIENCE AT NOTTINGHAM COLLEGE

Notts County's U18s squad were recently invited to Nottingham College for a morning of construction-based work experience.

The apprentices tried their hand at both bricklaying and joinery under the guidance of college lecturers Andy and Dean.

The Magpies Academy staff have made a conscious effort this season to expose their young players to different environments and experiences, with the aim of broadening their skill sets and opening their eyes to various career pathways after football, while also honing vital social and life skills.

Josh Bradshaw, Head of Education at the Club, detailed the importance of providing apprentices with these kinds of experiences while on the programme.

"At Notts County, we're all about encouraging the lads to step out of their comfort zone and try their hand at something that isn't the norm for them. Every day, we expect them to perform on the pitch, but this is about how they perform in a completely different environment, surrounded by different people.

"It's important for us to see how they get on from a teamwork and social perspective. It's good for them to adopt the mentality of, 'Yes, I might not be very good at this, but I'm going to give it a go.' They've done well."





“It’s been really good for the lads to get out and experience something completely different. Construction isn’t anything I’d ever thought about doing before today, but I’ve really enjoyed it.”

GEORGE LODGE – APPRENTICE



“It’s important to develop these skills, as anything can happen in football. You might suffer a career-ending injury at some point, and then you’ll need to do something else. Learning different skills now could take us very far.”

RARES CIUREA – APPRENTICE



“I’m old enough to remember Brian Clough, and he once said, ‘If you don’t make it one day, son, you’ll always need something in the background,’ and that quote has stuck with me for life.”

DEAN HOWITT – JOINERY LECTURER



**Scan here
for more
information**



“They did really well. Bricklaying isn’t an easy skill to learn; it’s a motor skill. It takes a lot of coordination; I suppose similar to football in a way.”

ANDY RILEY – BRICKLAYING LECTURER

COPING WITH ILLNESS AND INJURY

WAYS TO HELP YOURSELF

COPING STRATEGIES



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.



Your rehab environment

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



Use your support network!

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



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.



Research how you can help yourself

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



Motivation

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

FootballCV Marks 25th Anniversary With Rebrand



FootballCV, one of our proud partners, recently celebrated its 25th anniversary and announced a rebrand to reflect its global reach in the game.

The international football consultants, who have been managing operations and events since 2000 – including our very own Assessment Trials – are now known as Football105.

The company began as a website that was likely the first of its kind – a CV-style portal that enabled unsigned footballers to register their details for professional clubs and scouts to access.

FootballCV quickly expanded from its database to run trial days, first at the old Rockingham Road stadium which was home to Kettering Town until 2011. Sixfields Stadium hosted an event in Northampton shortly after, before the trials scaled up to Premier League and EFL stadiums around the country.

More recently, having founded and managed the UK's first private international football academy for 15 years before selling to new owners,

FootballCV's services have expanded tenfold. Football operations, investments, coach education, communication, player recruitment and pathways, and camp delivery are all part of the company's growing arsenal.

Discussing the company's milestone and rebrand, Co-founder Graham Starmer said: "I am very proud about FootballCV's origins, opening doors to new opportunities for hundreds of out-of-contract footballers.

"This is something that remains at the core of our day-to-day operation, as we continue to manage the delivery of football camps for young players from the UK and Europe, while also expanding our services to the board level at clubs and organisations.

"There are lots of people – far too many to mention – who I'd like to thank for playing their part in the last 25 years. While football is the focus, any successful club or organisation in this game is built for people, by people.

"I'm looking forward to continuing to work with many long-standing friends and projects as part of Football105, and expand our footprint in the global game."



THE

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 2025 is as follows:



GEORGE ELDER **BLACKPOOL**

The Tangerines' George Elder is said to have displayed outstanding all-round capability and professionalism since the beginning of his apprenticeship. Academically, the first-year apprentice has thrived, achieving excellent grades in his early assignments and setting a high standard for himself and his peers.

George's maturity off the pitch has been described as "well beyond his years." Having moved away from home and into club accommodation at just 16 years old, he independently cooks healthy, nutritious meals for both him and his host family, showing his dedication to his wellbeing and individual responsibility.

On the pitch, George has been a consistent starter for the club's U18 side and has regularly trained with the first team. He has also recently made his senior debut in the Vertu Trophy – a testament to his talent, attitude, and application.



LEO PECOVER **BRISTOL CITY**

Leo Pecover has been described as "an outstanding young man, both on and off the pitch" by the club's Head of Education, Jodie Baker. The young midfielder earned his first professional contract in the summer and impressed in a number of matches before being invited to join Gerhard Struber's squad full-time in September. He made his competitive debut for Bristol City in October, coming on for the final 20 minutes of the Robins' 3-1 home win over Southampton.

Alongside his impressive exploits on the pitch, the second-year apprentice continues to excel academically. Leo is studying the BTEC Extended Diploma and is working towards a D*D*D* grade. He is also undertaking an A level in French and recently achieved an A grade in a mock exam.

"Exceptionally bright, polite, humble, and hardworking, Leo embodies the qualities of a true professional and a remarkable role model for young athletes," added Jodie.



LI-BAU STOWELL

PRESTON NORTH END

Goalkeeper Li-Bau Stowell is enjoying tremendous success in his apprenticeship. In the classroom, Li-Bau is working above his predicted grade of MM, with the 18-year-old shot-stopper now striving for a DM. He has also completed more than 85% of his SEP (Sporting Excellence Professional).

On the pitch, Li-Bau put pen to paper on a three-year professional contract in September – a huge achievement for someone just entering the second year of their apprenticeship. He has also been a permanent fixture in first team training this season.

The highly regarded keeper, who has been with the club since the age of 10, has also been praised for his commitment to community-based projects and helping others. The most recent example of this came when a young goalkeeper within the academy needed extra support. Li-Bau sat down with the player and his parents and offered guidance and advice.



LUCCA MENDONCA

PETERBOROUGH

Centre-back Lucca Mendonca is a rare Brazilian in the EFL, having now featured for the Posh's first team in League One, the Carabao Cup, and the Vertu Trophy under former manager Darren Ferguson and now his successor, Luke Williams.

The Bishop's Stortford-based defender is said to have impressed staff around the club with his calm and measured approach to his professional development.

Academically, Lucca is working hard to hit his targets. He is taking on the BTEC Diploma and has already gained a Distinction in his SEP (Sporting Excellence Professional) assessment – an impressive feat considering he is tackling these academic responsibilities in his second language.



NIKO TKACZUK

NORWICH CITY

Goalkeeper Niko Tzaczuk has been praised by club staff for his “seamless transition into full-time football” and has shown great maturity and commitment after relocating nearly three hours from home to pursue his goal of becoming a professional footballer. Niko is continuing to excel in all areas of the programme, displaying clear week by week improvements in both his performance and personality. His attitude to learning has been described as “exemplary”, consistently demonstrating elite behaviours in all aspects of his work.

THE 11 CONTINUED ON THE NEXT PAGE



OLUTAYO SINGERR

PORTSMOUTH

Olutayo Singerr is said to work exceptionally hard both on and off the pitch, consistently demonstrating a level of maturity well beyond his years. He sets the standard for model behaviour across the academy and has quickly become a role model for younger players, leading by example through his attitude, professionalism, and daily habits.

Academically, Olutayo has excelled, completing his EPA (End Point Assessment) with a Distinction and remaining firmly on track to achieve DDD*. His commitment to his studies reflects the same discipline and drive he shows on the pitch.

On the pitch, Olutayo has adapted to men's football admirably while on loan at non-league club Moneyfields, showcasing his physicality, composure, and willingness to learn in a demanding environment. This follows the impressive achievement of scoring on his senior debut in the Carabao Cup. He has since returned from his loan spell and made his Championship debut for Pompey



RIAN SILVER

MK DONS

Midfielder Rian Silver has made several first-team appearances across various EFL cup competitions and has become a regular in the Dons' new development team. He has consistently impressed both on the pitch and in the classroom, with his mature and positive attitude marking him out as a natural leader. Those leadership qualities have earned him the captaincy of the U18s side, where he sets a strong example for his peers, while also demonstrating the same professionalism at MK College, where he is studying the BTEC Extended Diploma in Sport.

Rian particularly impressed LFE staff with his outstanding preparation for his SEP EPA (Sporting Excellence Professional End Point Assessment).



RONNIE HARVEY

COLCHESTER UNITED

Ronnie Harvey has continued to excel across all areas of his apprenticeship. On the pitch, he has made significant strides, debuting for the first team in the Carabao Cup away at Oxford, earning minutes against Bristol in the league, and featuring in the Vertu Trophy against Gillingham.

Off the pitch, Ronnie has remained equally focused on his BTEC programme, with only one assessment left to complete. He is working above his target minimum grade and is now preparing for his SEP EPA (Sporting Excellence Professional End Point Assessment). Throughout, he is said to have "exemplified the Colchester United Academy values of respect, hard work, and discipline." Changes to the midfielder's timetable due to first-team commitments have not affected his dedication, and he continues to serve as a positive role model within the club and the wider community.



SAMUEL OKOLIE

CAMBRIDGE UNITED

U's forward Samuel Okolie has enjoyed a rollercoaster few months on the pitch. In July, Samuel was called up to train with the Seychelles U17s and, just a few weeks later, made his senior debut for the Seychelles national team in a FIFA World Cup qualifying match. The Finchley-based striker impressed on the world stage, even facing off against Ivory Coast in the final match, going up against several established players, including Nottingham Forest's Willy Boly and Ibrahim Sangare, Sunderland's Simon Adingra, and Al-Ahli's Franck Kessie.

Despite being away for several weeks on international duty, Samuel managed to stay fully up to date with his educational responsibilities, demonstrating the same dedication and professionalism off the pitch as he does on it.



SEB CAMPBELL

PLYMOUTH ARGYLE

Seb Campbell is a first-year apprentice at Plymouth Argyle who has made an excellent start both on and off the pitch since joining the programme. Educationally, Seb is working at a Distinction level in the two units he has started so far, successfully balancing his studies alongside first-team commitments, including training and travel. He has also made good progress on his SEP (Sporting Excellence Professional), completing 50% of his portfolio – on par with others in his cohort – and has already gathered eight minutes of footage for his video showcase. Seb continues to demonstrate a positive attitude in life skills sessions and across all aspects of his apprenticeship.

On the pitch, Seb made his first-team debut in September, coming off the bench at half-time in the Vertu Trophy game against Tottenham Hotspur U21s. When he scored in the second half at just 16 years and 279 days, he became the youngest scorer in Plymouth Argyle's history.



ZACHARY HAMBURY

LEYTON ORIENT

"I think Paul McVeigh (ex-footballer turned author) had someone like Zac in mind when he wrote his book *The Stupid Footballer is Dead*," said David Bass, Head of Education at Leyton Orient. The young Orient midfielder is said to be quick at absorbing information and new concepts, both on and off the pitch. "It is not the quality of his BTEC work, where he is currently on target to achieve an impressive DDD* for the Extended Diploma, that has impressed me most during his time as an apprentice; it's more his willingness to dive deeper into topics, extract relevant information, and then apply it to his work that really makes him stand out from the crowd," added Bass.



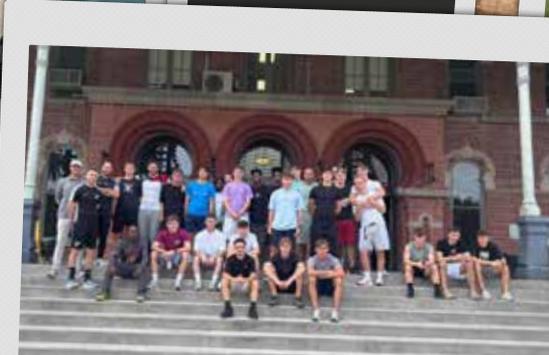
November marked the return of LFE's Global Showcase Tour, with 20 EFL academy graduates jetting off to Tampa, Florida, USA, following the success of the inaugural trips in 2024, which saw two groups of out-of-contract players head to the U.S. and Australia respectively.



LFE Global Showcase Tour 2025



Scan here to hear more from trips' attendees



Thanks to the generous contributions of LFE's partners - The Players Foundation, U.S. Sports Scholarships, United Soccer League, and Varsity Nine - participants were able to:

Train Like a Professional: Take part in training sessions and gym programmes at the Tampa Bay Rowdies' Waters Sports Complex, led by professional coaches and athletic trainers. The state-of-the-art complex has been selected as a base for the upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup.

Compete on the Big Stage: Represent LFE's All-Star squad at the USL Academy Finals Tournament at IMG Academy, where top-tier college and professional scouts were present at every match.

Experience the U.S. Soccer Pathway: Enjoy an exclusive visit to the USL's league headquarters, featuring a behind-the-scenes tour and a professional pathway panel with league executives.

Undertake Campus Visits: Explore top U.S. universities and learn about the college soccer and scholarship system.

Experience Cultural Adventures: Enjoy team dinners and sightseeing, including downtown Tampa's Riverwalk and Bayshore Boulevard.

Develop and Grow: Strengthen key personal attributes and essential life skills.



Tom Rennardson
Grimsby Town Academy graduate

"It's been an amazing experience and has opened my eyes to so many new opportunities. I've realised just how many exciting possibilities exist beyond the ecosystem of English football. Football is progressing at a really fast rate in America, and it's been great to explore all the different avenues we could potentially pursue."

Ollie Robinson
Harrogate Town Academy graduate

"The biggest takeaway from the tour for me is the number of pathways available out here. There are many different levels of colleges you can attend, and you can also sign for a professional team if that opportunity arises, along with many other possibilities. It's been an amazing experience."

Connor May
Portsmouth Academy graduate

"Coming over from the UK, I wasn't really aware of the opportunities available in other parts of the world, and that's why the tour has been so important for us boys. We've met loads of great people, been to some amazing places, and learned so much along the way. It's been very enjoyable."

Joshua Clark-Anderson
MK Dons Academy graduate

"This opportunity has been great for me. It's good to find comfort in the uncomfortable, and that's exactly what I've done out here. I've also been surprised by the standard of football, which is a big positive, as I now know that if I choose to go down this route, there won't be a drop-off in quality."





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Doncaster Rovers' Foundation, Club Doncaster, runs regular 'Walk and Talk' sessions that allow local people to connect, stay active, and support their wellbeing.

As part of the initiative, the Doncaster Rovers U18s joined the Foundation last week to spread some Christmas cheer among local people who regularly attend these events, hosting a Christmas party at the club's stadium. The apprentices helped serve Christmas dinner and played games with attendees.

Find out more 📌

<http://bit.ly/3Klp6nz> 📌



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🇺🇸 LFE's Global Showcase squad are a few days into their time in Tampa, Florida, training and getting ready to kick off their USL Academy Finals campaign.

#LFEGlobalShowcaseTour



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Careers

LFE learners can take advantage of employment opportunities thanks to LFE's partnerships with a variety of different organisations.

Scan the QR code to browse our range of exciting pathways.



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.

Scan the QR code to view our informative guides to Higher Education or USA Scholarships.

