

Match of the day – every day!

Now let me tell you, I'm not a footballer, I never was and never will be. I follow the team of my home town and watch them on television when there is the chance, and then more often than not I feel incredibly frustrated at seeing what amounts to cheating on the pitch, bad language, bad behaviour and very important matches decided by refereeing errors – terrible.

But how wonderfully refreshing it is to be able contrast and compare this with the simple pleasure and fun that is experienced, by players, coaches, managers, parents and even referees who are involved with junior football.

In late summer of 1999 we didn't have a footballer in our household. This time last year having attended under 8s team training and having started to play in the second team on a few occasions, my (then) six-year-old son was contemplating an international rugby union career, or fighter pilot, racing driver, professional golfer, etc., instead of football! He'd decided that he wasn't a very good player. In actual fact what was happening was that he and a few others were trying to learn the game whilst trying to play alongside and compete with boys who had already been playing for a year and were older as well. At the time of writing he's just won the player of the week award for the second week running and is one of the best players in the current under 8s team. More importantly he's having a terrific amount of fun and has gained a lot of confidence from the role that he is able to play in the team.

Henry is one of a number of boys who we've seen develop in this way. Right now at under 8s training on a Thursday night we have a real mix of ages and abilities, from the best players in the team, to five year olds who have barely kicked a ball before. But what is most exciting is seeing the progress and development that some of them have made already. Many of them will be super footballers for the under 8s and under 9s next year. I think that the following extract from Rob Schofield's weekly Under 8s news sheet accurately reflects the skills of the players and the interest generally in the team.

"Toby (Walker) has become a confident goalkeeper after a few weeks between the posts, in front of him James (Rawlins) proved to be a competent defender alongside the reliable and disciplined Adam (Karazinski). Conrad (Palejowska) continued to win tackles as usual, being a constant threat to anyone who holds the ball for more than a second and Liam (Agg) is beginning to show some of the huge potential that we see in training. We also have the possibility of an explosive midfield partnership with Ben (Schofield) playing off Henry's (Purdy) strength"

Outside of the actual football itself, what has also developed in support of the younger teams is a large supporting cast, who are also getting a huge amount of enjoyment and satisfaction from the junior football: Mums, dads, brothers and sisters as supporters. Older brothers refereeing. Dads, designing and constructing additional floodlighting for training nights. Mums bringing along hot drinks and snacks. Dads becoming managers, assistant managers, coaches and groundsmen. Mums volunteering to wash the kit. Mums and dads as adhoc touchline coaches (one of my abiding memories will be the looks on the faces of a team of 7 and 8 year olds who were being told "we need to keep it tight at the back, guys!"

What a shame that not one of them asked what this meant!. A Dad sponsoring a new first team kit. Mums and Dads attending Wychwood Football Club committee meetings (some of whom do not now have children playing!)

Eat your heart out professional football!

So what's the purpose of me telling you all this, well the facts are that in some teams going from under 8s right through to under 15s we are short of players, or can see ourselves being short next year. We don't want this to happen and want to have many boys and girls involved in the younger age groups so that when some natural wastage to other pastimes occurs in later years we will still be able to field very competitive teams.

In addition there is always the opportunity for more parents to get involved. If you or your child (girl or boy) would like to join in call the relevant manager, contact below:

Under 8s	Rob Schofield	01451 824256
Under 9s	Mark Stratford	01993 831703
Under 10s	Martin Evans	01993 830353
Under 11s	Sarah Calcutt	01993 831170
Under 12s	David Agnew	01993 832494
Under 13s	David Catling	01451 822782
Under 15s	PaulMarsh	01993 830506

Andrew Purdy

Oxfordshire Jubilee Wildlife Spaces Project

The Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum, with the support of Hugo Brunner, HM Lord Lieutenant for Oxfordshire, are planning a wildlife spaces project to celebrate Her Majesty's Jubilee next year. Fund raising has already begun.

The aim is to create or enhance one key Jubilee wildlife site for each District of Oxfordshire, with possibly one big site as well serving Oxfordshire as a whole. Typical sites might be wetlands, woodlands, unimproved grassland, river-sides, heathland, or a combination of such habitats. The sites need not necessarily be in public ownership, but should be accessible to the public, to help foster public understanding of Oxfordshire's wildlife and countryside.

The Project was launched a few weeks ago, and a number of sites have already been proposed elsewhere on Oxfordshire. Only a few will be chosen. It would be excellent – not least to recreate a royal link – if at least one of these sites was in the area of the ancient former royal hunting Forest of Wychwood. If you have any ideas for a site, or would like more information about the Project, please contact me on 01993 831403 or Belinda Flitter, Wychwood Project Manager, on 01993 814143.

Charles Keighley