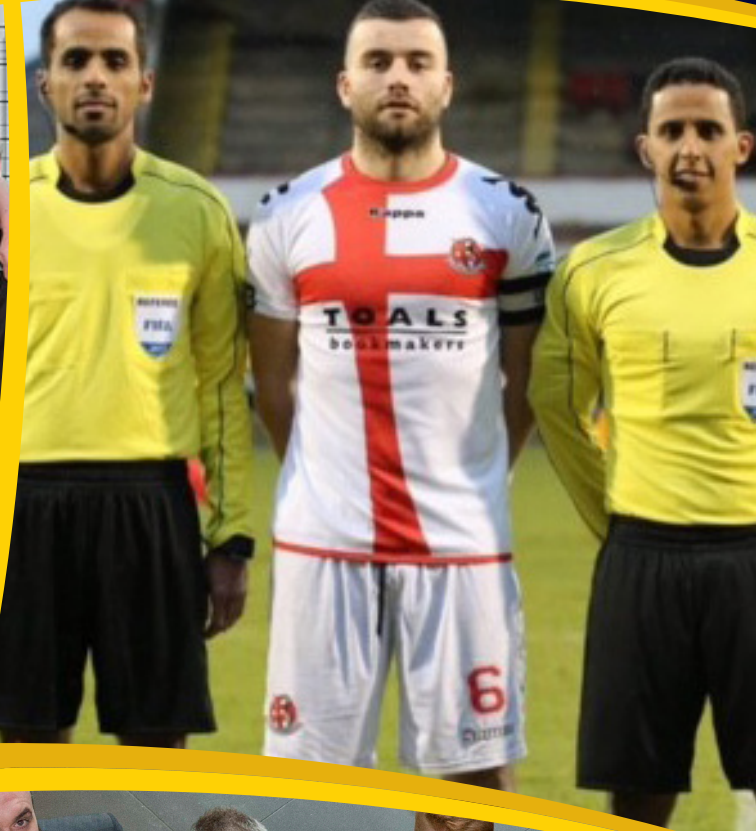


DELIVERING THE YOUTH STRATEGY

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT



Foundation



FFA Schools Programme

St Louise's Comprehensive College crowned National Girls' Football Champions

St Louise's Comprehensive College are this year's National Girls' Football Champions. The Belfast School's Senior squad proved too strong for five other teams at this year's National Finals Day.

The finalists for the end of season tournament were confirmed after three 11-a-side regional schools' tournaments. Six teams from the three heats made it through to the finals to play each other once in a league format.

The games were staged in tricky conditions at Meadowbank in Magherafelt with the girls producing some excellent football in front of the women's international manager, Alfie Wylie. In action at National Finals Day were St Louise's Comprehensive (Belfast), St Genevieve's High (Belfast), Holy Cross College (Strabane), Devenish College (Enniskillen), Assumption Grammar (Ballynahinch) and Foyle College (Derry-Londonderry).

St Louise's produced the best displays on the day and won four of their games and drew the other. The girls from the Falls Road effectively claimed overall victory in their final game with a 5-3 win over Foyle College. On their way to glory the Belfast school also defeated Assumption 1-0, St Genevieve's 3-2, Devenish 4-0 and drew 0-0 with Holy Cross.

Jonathan Michael, the Irish FA's Schools and Futsal Manager, said: "The association has made a commitment to increase football participation within schools through the Let Them Play youth strategy. "This tournament was an excellent example of this in action and the standard of play from the girls was fantastic. "With the Women's Under-19 European Championship coming to Northern Ireland this summer, it is wonderful to see the standard of girls' football here constantly improving, which will have a positive impact on international teams in the future."



Mind Your Head Workshop

An Irish Football Association Foundation event aimed at coaches of girls' and women's teams has raised awareness and understanding of mental health issues.



Mind Your Head was organised by the foundation with support from the Northern Ireland Executive Office and Belfast City Council and was staged at the National Football Stadium at Windsor Park. Attendees at the event completed a workshop delivered by trained facilitators from mental health charity Lighthouse.

Apart from raising awareness and understanding of mental health issues, the course provided useful strategies to deal with issues if they arise within clubs and explored services and support available. And it looked at ways to prevent emotional burnout in coaches.

The event also provided attendees with an opportunity to help form the Irish FA's mental health strategy, while each club represented at the workshop received a health and wellbeing resource pack.

Jackie Blyth from the Irish FA Foundation, who helped to organise Mind Your Head, revealed: "More than 80 coaches were at the event and we were delighted with the turnout. Mental health is a very important issue and this was reflected in the large attendance. "The association strives to deliver courses that are beneficial to clubs and players and the feedback we have received so far about last night's workshop has been very positive."

Refereeing

From Friday 24th February to Sunday 26th February all Premier League officials met for their annual residential at the Slieve Donard Hotel. All referees, assistants and observers were invited to attend lectures on Teamwork, Psychology, Game Management, Dealing with Pressure, Post Match Debriefs and Laws of the Game and technical topics.

We were also joined by officials from Saudi Arabia who attended the conference and officiated the NIFL Premier League game between Portadown vs. Crusaders. They also joined us for the conference continuing the successful exchange programme between the two countries. We were also joined by Alastair Smyth (psychologist with the PGMOL), Mike Mullarkey (world cup final referee and PGMOL Assistant Referee Manager) and colleagues from Wales and the Republic of Ireland.

This weekend sees the Senior (Championship officials) meeting for the weekend as well as continued development at Junior and Intermediate at a National Level.



Futsal Development

Crusaders Senior Women's Futsal National Champions

The goals flowed as North Belfast rivals Crusaders Strikers and Cliftonville battled it out for the title of Northern Ireland's Senior Women's Futsal Champions. The Crues eventually came out on top in an enthralling decider, winning the game 11-7.



Some of the best female futsal players in the country took part in the 40-minute match, which featured some excellent individual performances. Northern Ireland international Julie Nelson was solid in defence for the Crues and also weighed in with a few goals. One of her successful efforts saw her run out of defence and charge towards the opposition's area before unleashing a powerful shot from an almost impossible angle which flew into the top corner.

Another impressive performer was Crues striker Aimee McNeill who looked comfortable in the senior environment despite only being 18. She held the ball up well and helped bring other players into the game, and she scored goals. There was also a solid display from Laura Armour who appears to be recovering well following a cruciate ligament injury.

For the Reds there were impressive performances from Marissa Callaghan and Louise Lewsley. Callaghan, who scored for Northern Ireland in a senior women's international against Portugal last month, worked tirelessly throughout the 40 minutes, while Lewsley was solid in defence for Cliftonville and communicated well with the rest of the team.

Female Futsal Youth Development

Fourteen clubs have been helping the Irish Football Association to develop girls' Futsal across Northern Ireland. The Irish FA hosted its annual female futsal programme throughout November, December and January. The development section for Under-9, Under-11 and Under-13 players proved to be a great success.

At the Mid-Ulster Sports Arena in Cookstown young players from Sion Swifts and Mid-Ulster Ladies were given the opportunity to be coached and to play the game.

Futsal sessions at Shankill Leisure Centre in Belfast attracted many more teams, with Greenisland Girls FC, St Mary's FC, Crusaders Strikers, Cliftonville Ladies, Carnmoney Ladies, Glentoran Belfast United, St Oliver Plunkett's, Ballymena All-Stars, Carryduff Colts, Cumann Spoir An Phobail, Linfield Ladies and Banbridge Rangers all represented.

St Mary's coach Lauren Moore praised the Association's efforts in promoting futsal. "Girls' futsal has been ongoing now for several years with our girls participating in the matches each week. It is a great programme for teams to develop and take part in a fun environment as no scores are kept. "I have seen ongoing improvement in my girls' abilities, with their game awareness and skills developing each week. Their confidence on the ball has improved, with futsal becoming a big part of our wider training. It will definitely help long term towards preparations for the girls playing in small-sided games programmes."

The Association's Female Futsal development work in Northern Ireland also includes leagues for teams at Under-15, Under-17 and Senior levels. Top scorers in the final were Aimee McNeill (Crusaders) and Marissa Callaghan (Cliftonville) who each bagged four goals apiece.

Irish FA President David Martin presented the winners and runners-up with their medals. He said he was impressed with the attacking prowess of both teams.

Recruitment and Retention

During January and February, we have launched a Female Football Fitness programme in conjunction with Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. This programme is running at Greenmount College and The Bracken Centre, Kilkeel. We currently have 50 girls and women taking part in football related physical activity followed by educational workshops on topics such as nutrition and mental health. Recruitment and Retention has also delivered Football For All workshops at Ashfield Boys' High School and continues to work with partners to deliver alternative Holiday Camps and a Corporate Business League.

Club & Volunteer Development

The Irish FA Club and Community Development Officer (CCDO) has finalised a revamp to the entire Club Development accreditation with a relaunched planned for early March. This revamp will ensure clubs now have a step by step process by which they can develop and all under the McDonalds Clubmark branding. Clubs continue to work towards submitting folders for assessment with 4 clubs submitting over the last few weeks. The CCDO has set clear targets to be achieved in 2017 across all levels of the game.

The CCDO, with support from the Football Development Manager, the Female Domestic Officer and the Youth Development Co-Ordinators has been working hard to develop NIFL Premier League clubs in the male and female game. This work is ongoing and has already seen huge progress being made both on and off the pitch within some of the Irish FA's largest and highest profile clubs.

Disability Football

- 2 new disability sections of football clubs launched. CSP in West Belfast and Windmill Stars in Newry. Over 30 members across both clubs now enjoying weekly structured football coaching sessions
- Coaching programme started with Orchardville. 3 centres from Bangor, Lisburn and Belfast coming together on a weekly basis to participate in football activities. Males and Females, ages 18+ with a learning disability.
- Irish FA Level 1 Coaching Disabled Footballers Award delivered in Sion Mills with 20 participants.
- Powerchair Football promotional video recorded at Girdwood Community Hub. Will be used to promote the expansion of the game in Northern Ireland with potential new clubs starting in Dungannon and Enniskillen in 2017
- Disability Module delivered as part of C Cert in Londonderry with 18 participants
- International Under 19 Learning Disability Squad continue preparation for 2017 Home Nations Championships, Dublin 18 – 21 April
- International Cerebral Palsy Squad continue preparation for 2017 World Championships, Argentina 6 – 22 September
- Irish FA Disability Leagues continue with 16 clubs involved and over 100 participants playing regular competitive football

Football and Social Responsibility

Mental Health Strategy

A Mental Health Sub group has formed to discuss the development of a Mental Health Strategy for the Irish FA. Throughout January and February the team met with various organisations and professionals to identify areas for development. Working the Football For All Futsal Team and Belfast City Council we partnered with Lighthouse a mental health charity based in North Belfast to deliver a Mental Health awareness workshop for Girls and Women's Clubs at the National Football Stadium. We plan consult with clubs and leagues throughout Northern Ireland to identify areas of need in within the domestic game.

Education

As part of our Let Them Play strategy we have been providing work experience opportunities throughout the association to more than 28 young people so far in 2017. Our yearlong placement opportunities are now open for the 2017/18 intake, we have advertised all opportunities with the University of Ulster.

The Irish FAs accredited skills programme will kick off this year with Belfast City Council providing funding for 12 fully subsidised places for clubs from the Belfast Council area on the OCN Level 2 Football Administration course. The Course will run throughout March on Tuesday evenings 14th, 21st and 28th at the National Stadium.

For more information on any of the programmes above please contact Health and Education Officer, Sarah Keys – sarah.keys@irishfa.com

Social Integration and Reconciliation

The Stay Onside programme is half way through with participants completing their Level 1 Coaching assessments on March 15th. The programme highlights the huge benefit of a partnership working approach to build capacity for our grassroots clubs, enhancing community relations and using football as the vehicle in eradicating anti-social behaviour in Belfast and Ballymena.

The Irish FA Foundation continues to engage with PSNI, Probation Board NI, Youth Justice Agency and Prison Service NI along with community groups such as Street Soccer NI, Limestone Utd and World United to offer various opportunities in football and education that will ultimately boost communities in Northern Ireland.

Outreach

The Irish FA Foundation, as part of its continued commitment to 'Football for All' are delighted to announce a new and innovative partnership with the Extern Syrian Refugee Support Team. This partnership will develop programmes and initiatives using football as a vehicle to engage and integrate refugees into Northern Ireland Communities.



The Irish FA Foundation are working in partnership with Extern to engage the Syrian community in the local areas using football. This will involve an eight-week programme with specialist coaching and nutritional expertise.

Speaking at the launch, Irish FA Foundation Director of Football Development Michael Boyd highlighted the Foundation's continued dedication to football and 'social responsibility'. "We are delighted to be supporting Extern in this highly beneficial programme, creating new partnerships that will help bring communities together in Northern Ireland. We are also looking to offer more opportunities for participation that will help advance our objectives in The Irish FA Foundation Youth Strategy 'Let Them play'.

Also, speaking at a recent session Extern Syrian Key Worker Gavin Connolly added "This is a fantastic opportunity for Extern and the Irish FA in creating a partnership moving forward, which can only be beneficial for the Syrian families".

The Foundation have donated training kit and continue to offer 2 hours coaching a week at Playball, Stormont. Outreach is very much embedded in the Irish FA Foundation philosophy and we recognise the huge significance football can play in bringing communities together. For further details, please contact Diversity and Outreach Officer Andy Waterworth at andy.Waterworth@irishfa.com.



Schools Football

Bangor Academy celebrates first ever Irish FA Gold Quality Mark Award

It's official, football is flourishing at Bangor Academy! A delegation from the Irish Football Association led by Irish FA President, David Martin, attended a special ceremony at Bangor Academy to



present the local school with the first ever Gold Quality Mark to be awarded in Northern Ireland.

The Irish Football Association praised the school for the heritage of quality football it has cultivated and its continued innovation and commitment to grassroots football. The Academy was the first school in the history of the North Down League to win in all five age groups in 2016 and has enjoyed consistent success in progressing talented players into national teams. Currently Alex McIlmail and Jack Henderson are on the Northern Ireland Under 16 and Under 18 squads respectively and the Academy has always been proud of the number of pupils who have successfully progressed into professional and or national football teams such as Josh Magennis, Ashley Hutton and Jamie Mulgrew to name but a few!

Irish FA Schools and Futsal Manager, Jonathan Michael said; "We are very proud that Bangor Academy have been the first of many schools who will complete the School Quality Mark. They have a strong background in schools football and are playing their part in developing young international players both boys and girls. The structures and programmes that Bangor Academy have in place are an example of best practice for other schools striving to achieve the School Quality Mark award".



The School Quality Mark is part of the Let Them Play strategy which looks to promote and develop school football in Northern Ireland. The accreditation seeks to revamp our schools football development work and rebuild connection that has been lost to schools or alternatively engage schools that don't traditionally play football. Through School Quality Mark it is hoped to maximise the number of school children exercising and playing football, enhance grassroots football, and build capacity in schools for football to flourish.

Girls' and Women's Football

Girls Football League

The Irish FA in Partnership with Active Fit and Sporty and Department for Communities have launched MIDNIGHT SOCCER. A five-a-side league for girls' teams is getting under way in three venues across Northern Ireland this evening. The championship - it is part of the wider Midnight Soccer initiative - will run over a seven-week period and culminate with a National Finals Day. Ballymena Showgrounds, the Waterworks in Belfast and Lurgan Town FC (Craigavon) are the three venues for the games, which will run each Friday from 8pm to 11pm until 17 March. Teams featuring girls aged 13 to 19 will participate in the five-a-side championship. The national finals will be held in the Meadowbank Sports Arena in Magherafelt on 19 March. Apart from playing games, participants in the league will have an opportunity to have a question and answer session with some of the country's best players who represent Northern Ireland at the highest level. And they will also get to meet some of the women's U19 international team who will be playing in the UEFA Women's Under-19 Championship, which is being staged in Northern Ireland in August. The Midnight Soccer initiative, which is supported by local councils, increases sporting opportunities for young people and the physical activity levels of participants. It develops social, cross-community and good relations opportunities and provides activities for identified target age groups.



New League

The Mid Ulster Game Development Centre and The Mid Ulster League are currently taking applications for U11 and U13 girls league due to start at the end of the spring. Below are the teams that have entered.

U11 Lurgan Town, Craigavon City, Lurgan Celtic, Banbridge Town Ladies, Portadown Ladies.

U13 - Lurgan Town, Craigavon City, TTBS Juniors, Lurgan Celtic, Portadown Ladies, Mid Ulster Ladies.

New Pilot Programme

The Irish Football Association in partnership with Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, and the Harry Gregg Foundation have launched a monthly Blitz's. The 9 aside matches will be for U13 girls teams. This new initiative has been set up to generate a U13 girls only league in the Causeway Glens area.

Friday 3rd February: Rugby Avenue, Coleraine (3G)

Friday 7th April: Rugby Avenue, Coleraine (3G)

Friday 5th May: Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, Ballymoney (Grass)

Friday 2nd June: Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre, Ballymoney (Grass)

Below are the teams that have entered:

• **Ballymoney** (2 teams) • **Coleraine** • **Dungiven** • **Foyle Belles** • **Roe Valley**

Club Development

In Partnership with the Belfast City Council club mentoring has begun with 8 girls clubs in the Belfast area. Each club mentor will engage with one coach in a structured format. They will assist in a Club development plan which will include club festivals and player recruitment. Below is the list of the clubs.

1. **Crusaders**

2. **Albert foundry**

3. **Saint Oliver Plunkett**

4. **Cliftonville**

5. **Glentoran**

6. **Linfield**

7. **CPS**

8. **Rosario**

New Teams in the NIWFA League

Congratulations to 22nd old Boys/Girls Team based in Belfast and Mountjoy Utd based in Omagh.

Girls Regional Excellence Programme

The Four Regional centres got into full swing after some weeks of TalentID sessions in January with the various Development squads (03,04 ,05)continuing with their extra weekly sessions which included for the 04 + 05's gymnastic sessions. Games also took place for all the squads with matches against local boys clubs this included games for the U15 Development squad as they prepare for the Bob Docherty Tournament in April. Half term holidays provided an opportunity for extra sessions for the various Development squads to train and play games.

Over the last weekend the U15 Development squad and the 04,05's travelled to Dublin for games against the ROI schools and teams representing MGL from Dublin, this was a very worthwhile exercise and it is hoped that the teams will meet again late March in N . Ireland.

International Women's Football

Over the last weekend of January the U17's hosted Scotland in two friendly games losing 2 – 0 at Ballymoney and drawing 2 – 2 at UUJ. These were very encouraging games for the young NI squad who had 7 of the U15 squad in their panel against a very strong and older Scotland team who have qualified for the U17 Elite round.

In preparation for the UEFA U19 Finals in August the coaches decided to hold a camp and look at where they would be staying , training and playing in the Finals ie Europa Hotel , Ulster University at Jordanstown and Mourneview Park and Ballymena Showgrounds. Two games were played against Turkey who are in the U19 Elite round later this year and possibly could qualify for the Finals . NI won one game 1 – 0 at Mourneview and drawing the second 1 – 1 at the Ballymena Sowgrounds. Again this was very beneficial both on and off the pitch with a lot been learnt prior to the Finals .

The month ended the Women's A squad in Croatia for the Istra Cup where they will play games v Slovakia the holders , Slovenia , China Taipei and a country from the other group . Playing 4 games in 10 days will be a big test for the girls and an opportunity to build on their win over Portugal in January. All of the 7 countries taking part are ranked above N . Ireland in the FIFA rankings so the squad will learn a lot from the trip.

Girls Performance Academy

Three staff members of the IFA and two of the Senior staff involved from the Ulster University travelled to Herriot Watt in Edinburgh to look at the Scottish National Girls Academy. From the trip a number of useful tips were learnt to help with what we can offer at our Performance Academy.

Club Coaches

A number of local NIFL coaches attended a workshop at the Ulster University based on fitness. They were allowed close up views on what the girls do both on the pitch and in the gym and were given two presentations. This was part of our strategy of helping clubs and ensuring that everyone is very aware of what takes part in the Regional Excellence and international training sessions.