



## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

This is now my ninth seasonal report as I proudly lead the BCFA team going into 24-25.

The game continues to grow in all areas within the Region and I'm immensely proud of the team who continue to strive to make the game affordable and accessible for everyone to enjoy all aspects of the game, not just playing and whilst bucking some national trends.

There is now a definite trend that sees clubs merge which has led to record numbers of teams playing along with record numbers of players and officials with last season's figures in brackets:

<b>Clubs:</b>	1,000	(1,050)
<b>Teams:</b>	5,600	(5,200)
<b>Players:</b>	82,000	(78,000)
<b>Referees:</b>	1,500	(1,300)

The role of volunteers in any sport is not lost on me or members of the BCFA team and the help and constant work that Club and League volunteers do to maintain and grow the game in all areas and formats astonishes me to this day – in roles that take up many hours of unpaid work, personal, family and free time – in order for the many thousands of teams, players and officials enjoy and benefit from their regular football 'fix'. A big thank you from me/us and everyone involved in the game for your dedication and also to Jim McGettrick who has a primary focus on generating and supporting volunteers for Clubs and Leagues.

We have an exceptional team at Birmingham County FA along with a fantastic Board of Directors who also give up their time to help support and direct and challenge myself and the Executive to grow and be better and bolder each day. This year saw a significant change in the leadership with Mike Penn stepping down as Chairman and Sandra Hampton stepping up as the Association's first female Chair and first Independent Non Executive Chair.

The Association and local football in general are indebted to the tireless work that Mike and his family have put in over the years since and before becoming Chairman. Mike has been my rock and my Midlands 'Dad' since I started and the business would still be in the doldrums without his efforts, especially in the early days of his tenure when some tough decisions had to be made for the greater good. Thank you Mike for all that you have done for me and BCFA along with past and current colleagues and I'm delighted that Mike is staying on to help Sandra with the transition. The business is in great shape and it's a continued pleasure to work closely with Sandra and the other Board members who all have a passion for football at every level and facet of the game.

We are here to help, guide, support and assist clubs and leagues in the main with our ultimate aim to make them sustainable entities that flourish and are hubs for their local communities. We are by no means perfect, and I appreciate there are some tough decisions which we make or are party to which aren't received well at certain times when it comes to rules and regs and especially the discipline process.

But rest assured, we run a tight, effective and non-biased ship and the team is heralded at the FA for its high standards and the support we offer in the various guises which has seen over 11,000 ticket enquiries received via the customer service portal alone with customer satisfaction sitting at a consistent 87% let alone all the emails and calls we take on a daily basis. Thank you and well done to the customer service team of Mandy, Chris and Max along with all members of the BCFA team who answer and liaise and help all of our customers when required.

However, an increase in participation has again seen an increase in indiscipline at all ages and at all levels of the game that we are all supposed to love with a shared enjoyment and mutual respect and, quite rightly, far less tolerant match officials last season compared to previous seasons. That said, the following statistics should still shock everyone involved in the game so there is a lot of work still to do with more stronger and stringent sanctions to enforce and implement in the coming season...

Summary	Season 23-24	Season 22-23
Yellow Cards	17,391	15,777
Standard Charge (Red cards)	2,011	1,876
Misconduct	925	1,140
Stage One Warnings	438	324
Abandoned matches (any reason)	258 (199 home team)	257 (193 home team)
Serious cases (discrimination/assaults on officials)	290	235

As the figures in green suggest, perhaps people are starting to take note and proactively take responsibility by not only recognising their own and other people's bad behaviour but stop things at source before FA charges and potentially legal action can be brought. Perhaps many participants took heed during the cost of living crisis and recognised the financial implications of being sanctioned and also the financial impact on their Club! However, each figure is still far too high, especially abandoned fixtures, but I'm hopeful the downward trends continue into future seasons, and it is EVERYONE'S responsibility to make sure they do.

A massive thank you to Juned, Pat, Jemma and Max for having to read and administer all the awful cases and also to the local, regional and national panel members. A special mention to Pat who is stepping down and away from the business after 40 years with the Association. Pat has been a constant, main stay of the Association and has done probably every role in the business since she started and I know that many Clubs and participants and volunteers know and have relied on her vast knowledge and experience over many years, as I and many other colleagues have done. Thank you Pat and good luck for the future. I'd also like to thank Sport Integrity Matters (SiM) again this season for their valuable help and support and especially investigating our many cases.

Our fantastic County Cup competitions continue to be a highlight of the season with huge interest throughout the region and for each of the 15 competitions. Yes, we added a new Women's competition this season which was well received by participating Clubs and is a reflection of the huge popularity and growth of the women's and girls' game both locally and nationally.

A special mention to Juned and Mandy for administering each round as well as the Finals and also the wider team for their help and support before and on match days. Ray Hall Lane (Excellence Arena) looks fantastic with special praise to Paul, Liam, Steve and Kieron for the work they do each week on our pitches and the facility in general. Aston Villa kindly hosted a somewhat one-sided Men's Senior Cup Final which Villa won by beating Racing Club Warwick. The Women's Senior Cup Final was held at Burton Albion with Rugby Borough beating Wolves on penalties after a fantastic 90 minutes of football.

Safeguarding will always remain a priority for the business and the within the game itself and I am still amazed that some clubs are far too lax and do not take this area seriously and check and challenge their colleagues and recruitment processes, especially volunteers and 'helpers' who remain on the periphery of the game and without specific and defined roles with far too many of these 'helpers' going under the radar and often un-challenged. A plea from the team... when recruiting any coach or volunteer then please check their qualifications either to hand or on the FA system. Thereafter, please remain vigilant at all times and if you are in any doubt on anyone's behaviour or credentials or why they want to be involved, then please speak to your Club or League Welfare Officer and/or contact the fantastic Safeguarding team at BCFA. Congratulations to the team of Sarah, Tighe and more recently Kat in also achieving the FA's Safeguarding standard for the fourth year and whilst dealing with another huge rise in serious cases and low level concerns and general enquiries.

Coach and Referee education saw the best team in the network deliver and administer more courses than ever across the Region including a fabulous and varied CPD programme. The new Referee course is still proving really popular with a steady stream of new Referees trained and registered with some as young as 14 years old being deployed within the game in the last 18 months. We also developed a brand new, BCFA grassroots analysis course and a big thank you to Rachael, Dawn, Keiran and Nicola for all the work you do for and on behalf of the coaching and Referee network throughout the season.

I'm delighted to confirm that our four-year strategy (24-28) has been approved by the Football Association with the majority of the CFA network following a more consistent, national approach for the first time. We conducted a series of local consultation events and captured and included the valuable feedback we received. Disappointingly, like most CFA's, we are £15k down in FA funding for each of the next four years so if there are any businesses who'd like to partner and support the Association with our endeavours and alongside specific projects then please contact me direct.

Pitch and facilities are a key strategic enabler and a priority for us and the FA. We have a fabulous team in Joe and Caroline who are really making an impact and unlocking investment into the game and making a significant difference at all levels of the game. The HQ site itself is currently being transformed into a community football hub. We purchased an existing 11v11 grass pitch to the north of the site in 2023 with a further investment into a new 3G facility which should be operational before the end of 2024.

We rightly invested in a full-time media and content officer and much of the above success is down to Ella and the team at Oporto who promote what we do and what is available widely on the web site and across all the (social) media channels to reach and inform new and existing football consumers and potential customers on activity, events, news and ways we can and do help.

The Football Development team continue to work their magic across the region and increase participation across all formats of the game whilst also supporting Clubs and Leagues. The fantastic team is led by two exceptional leaders in Luke and Rachael and includes Miz, Vicky and Ryan and our new intern, Emilie. As you will note from my opening paragraphs, the focus going forward is on building sustainable and thriving community clubs via the England Accreditation programme. Having also reiterated the importance of volunteers, I'd also like to praise the work carried out by Jim McGettrick our new volunteer co-ordinator.

A massive congratulations to Trooper FC on winning the FA Sunday Cup at the Bet365 stadium. Well done to the vast amount of BCFA affiliated clubs who gained promotion at every level in what was a record year for local success. Well done and commiserations also to Solihull Moors on reaching two Wembley Finals but just missing out on penalties each time. And well done to all our officials who were rightly awarded and appointed to a County Cup Final, play off fixture and/or Final, a League Final or officiated or supported at some of the more senior and prestigious Pyramid, EFL, PL and FA fixtures across the season – testament to their dedication and the support of many during their careers.

Our unique 'Save Today Play Tomorrow' programme continues to lead the way within football and sport in general and is now positively impacting all areas of the national game. Whilst working closely with DCMS and Sport England and UEFA, the programme recently received the monarch's approval by being awarded the King's Award for Enterprise and full credit goes to Richard Lindsay for his drive, passion and foresight in such an important topic in trying to reduce the elements which negatively impact the game and its wider environmental footprint for the benefit of future generations.

I'd like to thank all the BCFA team – from the new starters such as Max, Kat, Ryan, Emilie and Myles who have all settled into their roles but are also engrained in our values and driving specific aspects as part of their roles. The team as a collective is great to work with and alongside and their energy, passion, dedication and commitment to improving and growing the game makes them the best in the business as is their humour and support. At the same time, a thank you to the few colleagues who have left and for their positive contributions in recent years.

I'd also like to thank the Senior Leadership Team of Luke, Richard, Juned, Sarah and Rachael who have provided fantastic support, drive, ideas and motivated the team throughout the season as well as myself. A special mention to Luke who has spent many days and hours in driving myself and colleagues in order to attain the FA's Code of Governance for the first time – a massive effort and one that has changed and also improved and strengthened the business as we approach our amazing 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2025.

With our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in mind, then there will be a number of opportunities to partner and sponsor programmes or activity or the new 3G so again, please do not hesitate to contact me direct to discuss your ideas.

I'd also like to take the opportunity to also thank the Directors for their individual and collective support and passion in the last 12 months with each one driving specific areas of the business.

Finally, a personal thank you to Mike and Sandra for their unwavering support in allowing me to lead and develop the business each and every year since I first landed and was accepted in the Midlands nine year ago!

However, by far the biggest thank you must again go to the thousands of volunteers who make football happen week in week out with little or no reward. Our continued success is a reflection on the positive relationships we have with all our customers, especially the volunteers within the clubs and league network in order to grow this fabulous game in all its formats within the Region and for the benefit of the many thousands who participate and watch and enjoy our national game on their doorsteps.

Have a great, enjoyable and RESPECTFUL football season ahead. The BCFA team is here to help so please do not hesitate to contact us at: [support@birminghamfa.com](mailto:support@birminghamfa.com)

**Kevin Shoemake**

CEO

[kevin.shoemake@birminghamfa.com](mailto:kevin.shoemake@birminghamfa.com)

BCFA Web site: [www.birminghamfa.com](http://www.birminghamfa.com)