



FA Mars Just Play Case Study

Hull

If you require any additional information on the Just Play programme please email justplay@TheFA.com

Hull's Premier League superstars may be struggling at the KC Stadium this season, but up the road the city's walking football scene is thriving thanks to The FA Mars Just Play.

Every Wednesday lunchtime at Haltemprice Leisure Centre, just three miles from the Tigers' famous stadium, a group of over 50s are back on the pitch and rediscovering their love of the game despite some not having kicked a ball for over 30 years.

Walking football is one of the fastest-growing sports in the UK, and that is certainly true in Hull as under the watchful eye of the Just Play Development Officers the scheme has rapidly expanded from the five players that arrived at the first session.

In just eight months more than 50 people have signed up to dip their toes in, and now 15 to 25 people between the ages of 45 and 80 are eager to play every single week.

The programme is so popular that local football club Cottingham Rangers have offered to take some of the sessions under their banner, which has allowed Just Play to add another time-slot in on Friday afternoons.

Geoff Gollikel, a retired insurance salesman, is the chairman at

Cottingham and having experienced walking football first-hand when the scheme began, knew he had to get the club involved.

"I first got involved with Cottingham Rangers when my son was nine-years-old. He's 34 now and I'm the chairman of the club," he said.

"So having come down here for a few months and seen what a great set-up they had, I had a word with the exec and we've affiliated the team with Rangers.

"The first few sessions I had back ache and my legs were killing me and I was thinking, 'why am I doing this?'

"But you have to work through that and once it goes you absolutely love it, and I now can't wait for Wednesdays and Fridays to come around.

"Friendship is a big part of it. We always get at least seven-a-side and there's a lot of banter that comes with that.

"One of the guys I've known since I was five, although we did lose touch after primary school. But now we both come to this and it's a friendship renewed.

"We're looking to take it to the next level with kits and matches against other teams. We even went to a contest in Grimsby where we held our own with guys who have been playing for years."

Players of all levels of experience and ability are encouraged to attend, and

despite the friendly nature of the game, 76-year-old William McCutcheon admits as soon as they are on the pitch it is like being back on the playground with everyone still desperate to win.

McCutcheon brings some footballing pedigree to the sessions having played for Scottish Division Two side Annan Athletic in his youth.

But for the retired electrician, the friendships he has formed on the training pitch in Hull are just as important as continuing his love-affair with football.

William said: "I first stumbled across this when I was out on a walk and I saw the leaflet. To begin with there were only five of us, but it's amazing how much it has snowballed since then.

"I've always loved football, although when I played for Annan in Scotland we were only a regional team, so it was totally kick-and-run stuff.

"When I moved down to Hull for work I did not get to play as much from then on.

"My wife passed away 21 years ago, and although my daughter lives nearby and looks after me I am on my own now.

"So having these sessions on twice a week is so much more important for me, and I come for the social side just as much as the health aspect.

"It's everything combined really. I'm 77



Where:
Haltemprice Leisure Centre, Hull

What:
FA Mars Just Play

When:
Two sessions a week;
Wednesday lunchtimes
and Friday afternoons

Structure:
One hour session; ten
minute warm-up followed
by a 50 minute match with
a half-time interval

Running for:
Eight months

Participation numbers:
15-25 each session

Age range:
45 to 80 years old

now, and I want to go as long as I can. In fact, if I could die on this football field I'd die happy.

"So I'd advise anyone with a little bit of energy, a little bit of get up and go, to come and get involved."

Not even Chris Johnson, the Just Play Development Officer for East Riding, expected the programme to be so successful after setting it up in June last year.

And with the sessions now in the hands of Cottingham Rangers as well as The FA Mars Just Play he thinks walking football in Hull can only go from strength to strength.

"The physical benefits of this are obvious," said Chris. "It is keeping the guys involved fit and healthy, and when



someone comes down who says they haven't kicked a ball for 30 years, that's what it's all about.

"The first ball they kick you can see the spark come back again, straight away. "But it also stops the guys from getting isolated. We find that there are a lot of single men, or those that have unfortunately lost their partners, who wouldn't normally be keen on organised activities.

"But because it is football it has really rekindled their love of the game when they never thought they'd play again, and the friendships they've been able to form and the social side of it is massive for them.

"I absolutely love these sessions and I think what we've accomplished is fantastic. That's why we persevered at the start.

"So to see the fruits of our labour now, and the fact that we've been able to make the sessions sustainable by working with a club as well, is really pleasing.

"A lot of people walk past and see us playing, and in their own words think they are past it. But that couldn't be further from the truth as everyone here is the same.

"Once they try it they're hooked and we haven't had anyone who has come down once and then not come back."



Bob Smith, 63

Retired BAE Systems aircraft inspector. Took up walking football in 2014

These sessions have been brilliant for me as it helps get your muscles back in tow, as well as your brain because it's a sport where you've really got to think.

I've always loved football but since I retired I had never been bothered to play. Now I can come to this once or even twice every week if I want to, and I look forward to the sessions all week.

It's a great bit of exercise which you wouldn't normally get. Today is a cold Wednesday in February and in this weather usually you'd be sat at home reading the paper.

But this gets you out and about, keeps you active, and is a great way to make new friends.

I've really noticed the benefits in terms of my health. I was totally unfit before and it was my daughter who pushed me to come down and give it a go.

When I came to the first session it was the first time I had kicked a ball in many years, and it really, really did hurt the muscles.

I was puffing and panting and my legs hurt, but now I don't feel anything when I play.

I am able to walk a lot better, and I can walk further and faster than I used to - I even do a bit of endurance walking from time to time.

Having just played an hour session I'm not tired, whereas I really was to begin with. Now I feel like I could go for another hour.

So it has made a big difference to me, and I'm hooked on the game now. I've got myself semi-fit, not fully fit yet, but a lot better than where I was a year ago and it's all thanks to this.

The social side of it is great too. After the sessions we'll all head into the

leisure centre and get a coffee, and we had a get-together at Christmas as well.

We all get on and that makes the whole experience better, but it is still competitive when we get on the pitch. We're all getting better at football too as we're starting to speed up.

I am happy we're getting involved with the local club as well as there are a lot of other teams starting up in the area, so we could go elsewhere to play and pass on what we know about the game to other people.

It's fantastic that this sport is growing and we are helping that to happen. If anyone asks me I would definitely recommend it, and not just for people our age.

It is a sport for everybody, and it could be good especially for people around 30 or 40 who've had injuries and are looking to get back to fitness.