

Redressing the Balance



COACH programme provides second season of bursary funding.

COACH, English football's programme promoting coaching as a career for the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic community (BAME), is providing a second year of bursary funding to address under-representation at the higher levels of the coaching profession.

The programme, launched in 2011, last year supported 46 coaches in their coaching journey to attain higher level coaching qualifications and gain valuable insight observing more experienced coaches in professional football environments.

Applications are currently being considered for season 2013/14.

Kenny Ricklesford and Helen Nkwocha are two coaches who have benefited from the COACH bursary scheme in year one. The following Q&A highlighting their coaching stories:



The programme supports black and minority ethnic coaches who are aspiring to higher levels of coaching



Kenny Ricklesford

Through the COACH bursary scheme Kenny has gained a placement in Fulham FC's academy. He is also the co-founder and coach at Futsal Elite a coaching school specialising in Futsal. Kenny also works full-time in a specialist school for children with autism.

Tell us about your coaching journey?

When I left school I wanted to go to college but I was unsuccessful. I was looking for alternatives and completed The FA Level 1 and 2 at Fulham. These were my first coaching experiences.

How have you benefited from the COACH bursary scheme?

The key thing from my perspective is that it has enabled me to go into an academy system in a flexible capacity.

The COACH bursary programme could also fund my further football education, if I am successful in a future application as well. An A Licence is expensive and it will be hard for me to invest in that level of qualification, in my current situation. So COACH has been big help.

In a sense it has been just as good, if not better, than being directly employed by the club because it is flexible and I do other work around it.

What has the opportunity at Fulham offered you?

I have been able to travel with different age groups and different coaches; I get to see all of the players, I get to see how all of the coaches work and just piece my own puzzle together. It's just full of learning. I feel privileged to be involved and it's great to be in the club and learning so much.

Will the placement lead to paid work at Fulham?

We have been given an opportunity and have gone in as volunteers, so it is for us to kick the door down; to get in and show a lot of professionalism, a good work ethic, discipline and be different, be creative and imaginative within our sessions and our work.

How important is it that young black players in clubs have role-models to look up to and learn from?

It's one of the biggest things that sticks out for me. We have got a lot of young black footballers and there are also the white kids that have grown up on the local council estates too.

These kids need role models with whom they can relate to. A lot of the problems they face is that they feel they are not being understood, so we do need more people that they can relate to.

What I have found is that because there are such a lack of role models, a lot of kids seek attention from people like me.

I think it is all down to the education of coaches. They need to know the background of these children. The players need to understand that they are being understood. The coaches have got to be willing to work with them and that's the biggest thing. I try to develop the kids I work with as people before as players.

How hard is it to survive football in football coaching?

It is hard and it is exhausting because football takes place during the unsociable hours - evenings and weekends.

So, unfortunately, depending on your lifestyle and your circumstances some us can't afford to live by just coaching, so we have got to get our day jobs. That's what a lot do; there are not many who are in full time coaching positions.

I teach in a school specialised for children with autism. It is full time, Monday to Friday, but again that is benefiting me in my football development because I have to teach in a different way.

I am learning all these different learning and teaching experiences. I can deal with behavioural issues from the autistic work.





We are in the process of moving to a house boat because it is the cheapest way to live to allow me to coach.

To learn more about the COACH bursary programme visit coach-bursary.thefa.com

What is your advice for others who want a career in coaching?

I would say to just believe in themselves and don't worry about set-backs. I have had plenty of set-backs. I have been told I can't have this job or I am not qualified enough, or that I am not ready yet.

You have just got to persist. If we are persistent then we can go places. I think my environment has helped me because you want to get out of the struggle.

In the area where I come from ambition seems to be same old things – playing football or making music. But it can be more than that; it doesn't have to be just being a footballer. It can be coaching, it can be running a good structured business; it can be anything you want it to be.

But you have got to use the same hunger that we put in to playing football and making music into all things.

It is for us to kick the door down; to get in and show a lot of professionalism, a good work ethic, discipline and be different, be creative and imaginative within our sessions and our work.



Helen Nkwocha

Helen is a UEFA B Licence qualified coach working at Middlesex County FA Girls' Centre of Excellence and Arsenal's Development Centre. The COACH bursary scheme has helped Helen to enrol on the UEFA A Licence course.

How important has the COACH bursary scheme been to your coaching journey?

It has been significant. COACH is about financially supporting coaches who ordinarily wouldn't be involved at the higher levels of coaching.

I am currently working towards my UEFA A Licence. If I hadn't received this support I would have had to take out a credit card to allow me to continue learning. The support through the bursary scheme is crucial.

How hard is it trying to make a living from football?

We have had to sell our house. We are in the process of moving to a house boat because it is the cheapest way to live and to allow me to coach.

I have had to find lots of part-time jobs and lots of part-time coaching jobs to get anything near a full-time salary. I applied for one today before I came to this interview.

To consider a career in coaching you might have to consider adjusting your whole lifestyle. The things I only really buy now are tracksuits. I have the same jeans on I had five years ago, my wardrobe is very bare – it is just track suits. It is very difficult, but that's life and I love doing what I do.

What drives you to make these sacrifices?

I grew up in Peckham, south east London. My mother raised five of us on her own and she gave us structure and discipline.

I also played women's football for 23 years at near enough the highest level. There are players in the England team, who I played against, who had unbelievable focus and dedication.

When I was turning up late for training, they were already there and raring to go. I have taken many of these principles into my life and my coaching career because it gives me focus, structure and determination.

I am educated but I didn't get any of those things just by chance. I got them because I think football gave me discipline as well. I want to pass these things on to the young players I am now working with.

Have you ever experienced any discrimination in your coaching career?

The reason I will say no is because I think you have to be a strong character to succeed in coaching. The same way you would have a strong character as a player, you also need to be emotionally stable and strong willed as a coach.

I genuinely believe it comes down to whether you are good enough or you're not. Coaching is very competitive. You get a lot of strong characters in football. But what can you do? It is just another area to compete with and you have to continually prove that you're good enough.

What advice do you have for young coaches?

You should enjoy coaching – it shouldn't be an intense routine – it is meant to be enjoyable. It's the same as playing the game, you do it to enjoy it.

Players want coaches who understand how important the game is to them as individuals. It is not just important to coach; it is important to allow players to go through that journey.

You also have to be coaching for the right reasons: to help the players improve. Players will suss you out very quickly. If you are doing it just to gain a qualification or to gain something for your CV they will sense it.

If I hadn't received this support I would have had to take out a credit card to allow me to continue learning.