

# Pre-match build up...



by Gordon  
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As the long, hot, tropical Scottish summer has now finally given way to our more traditional weather the thoughts of many will be turning to the return of our national sport, football. (Disclaimer: That weather forecast may not turn out to be 100% accurate but, due to the idiosyncrasies of publishing deadlines, this is written while we're still experiencing near 30-degree temperatures!) Also, talk of football 'returning' when the World Cup in Russia has been apparently omnipresent on TV screens may seem strange and inaccurate. But this month we feature two articles on 'real' football – not the overpaid, over-pampered, egotistical demigods of the World Cup, nor even the not-quite-so-overpaid yet still over-pampered wannabees of our Scottish professional game, but the genuine grassroots kind.

According to the Scottish Football Association website, Scotland has almost half a million registered footballers. Since the professional game can only account for a small percentage of those, it's clear that football is our major participation sport and is hugely popular, important and influential in everyday Scottish life. This month, iScot Magazine offers two inspirational stories of what ordinary people can achieve *within* their communities and *for* their communities...





# Dundee United Women's FC - Doing the right thing



WHEN A football team goes through their entire inaugural season as double-winners with a 100% league record you would expect that to be big news... but can you name the team? That they then followed that up in a higher division with a season featuring only two defeats and finishing as runners-up... are you any closer to recognising them? Now halfway through their third season with another unbeaten record on the cards... take a bow Dundee United Women's Football Club!

Women's football is one of the fastest growing participation sports worldwide and the showpiece tournaments, like the World Cup and European Championships, now attract major sponsors and international live TV coverage. In Scotland, the game is growing apace but without the same level of promotion and media interest in the domestic leagues. There are currently 178 clubs and 410 youth teams registered with Scottish Women's Football ([www.scotwomensfootball.com](http://www.scotwomensfootball.com)) and the number of registered players stands at 5,681 at the time of writing, an increase of 113% since 2011! The credit for this impressive growth lies with an army of players, coaches, volunteers, administrators and supporters, quietly working away in the background, in virtually every community in Scotland.

When Justine Mitchell joined the board of Dundee United in 2013 she was following in the footsteps of her father, mother and brother in what was truly a family affair. As she recalls, "Dundee United ran in the family. My father, Eddie Thompson, had moved

from Glasgow to Dundee after he got married, about 1965, and he chose to support United. When we won the league in 1982/83 there was a huge party in Dundee, the whole house was going mad, big celebrations and I remember thinking 'I want a piece of that! I really did want to be involved and, the following season, I started going with my Dad - I got my first half-season ticket for Christmas! I went to every home and away game with my Dad until I was 18, then still continued to go to as many matches as I could when I was a law student at Aberdeen University'.

The family's commitment to Dundee United reached another level when Eddie Thompson bought the club in 2002. He became Executive Chairman, with son Stephen joining the board as a Director, and the plan was for Justine to enter the family business too. Yet after a double tragedy in 2008, her father and husband Ken both passing away within days of each other, Justine understandably took a step away from the football scene. In 2013 she eventually returned, joined the board and felt that she needed to focus on a particular niche within the club.

"When I joined the board I started thinking, why don't we have a women's football team and what can I do about that? I think a football club should be there for the community and I felt passionately that Dundee United is such a big club that it should have a women's football team. There had been a previous women's team that had used the United name many years ago, but it wasn't official. Other big clubs haven't had women's teams, even Manchester United are just setting one up at the moment and they're the biggest club in the world! I indicated to the board that I wanted to set up DUWFC and they were happy for me to do that. I believed, and still do, that it was simply the right thing to do."

And that's where the hard work really started - how do you build a football club from scratch? Justine explains, "I looked around at the other clubs for information and ideas and saw that Hibs and Motherwell, for example, had set up their women's teams through their community trusts, which can help with funding. So, we decided to do the same through United for All, which has since been renamed Dundee United Community Trust. I originally wanted to also set up a girls academy to run alongside the football club but, after speaking to many people and researching it, I felt

that it might stifle the development of the game in the area because it would attract all the best players from the other local clubs, deplete their resources and not grow the game. So, we concluded that we would get the team up and running and then go into partnership with local clubs. In that way we would help with coaching and provide a route for their girls to progress into the women's game."

The first step was to recruit a Head Coach and for that Justine enlisted the then manager of the men's team, Jackie McNamara, to help in the selection process. They were looking for someone whose role would 'encompass all areas of developing the women's team at the club and include building the foundations to support women's football at Dundee United for the foreseeable future'. In June 2015 Gavin Beith, a former professional player and UEFA qualified coach, was appointed to the position, saying "this is a fantastic opportunity for me to use my experience to introduce a new Dundee United women's team, ensure that the team plays in the right manner, and produce a competitive team to represent the club in the Scottish Women's Football League". Justine was delighted with this appointment, stating "Gavin was the outstanding candidate in the many applications we received. His ideas on how the game should be played links in with what Dundee United as a club believes but also what we want to encourage in the Dundee United women's team". As a potential hostage to fortune, Beith also said at the time that his ultimate ambition was to lead DUWFC into the Championship League...

With a Head Coach in place, Dundee United agreed that the new team should train and play at the club's Gussie Park all-weather training complex. Since renamed the GA Arena, and upgraded to a new 3G playing surface, this remains the base for DUWFC as they continue to progress through the leagues. All that remained were the small matters of recruiting players, applying to join the SWF, and raising funds to cover all of the necessary expenses involved in running a football team - playing and training kit, travel, physiotherapy, referees, and a whole host of other things that pass beneath the radar of the average fan!

Paul Reid, Head of Business Development at Dundee United, used his contacts within the football industry to help Justine with initial sponsorship and fundraising. He explained, "it's increasingly hard to attract sponsorship as there are so many competing organisations. It helps if the product you're offering is a new innovation, which the women's team was at the time. Sponsors generally like to align themselves with success, so that's definitely an attraction given the team's progress so far."



Action from Dundee United v East Fife (Credit: APP Photography)



Dundee United and Deveronvale players supporting the Show Racism the Red Card campaign (Credit: APP Photography)



There are currently 178 clubs and 410 youth teams registered with Scottish Women's Football





Dundee United WFC win their first trophy - the SWFL2 League Cup (Credit 'Scottish Women's Football')

While all that activity was going on in the background, Gavin Belth was settling into his new role and actively recruiting players. In the first instance he encouraged females who had played football in the past but had been lost to the game, and who would like the opportunity to play for Dundee United, to get in touch. More proactively he

*They proceeded to win every league game they played, finishing the season as champions*

set up open trial sessions for any girl or woman interested to come along and try their luck, saying "this is an opportunity for those that have played the game previously to get back involved. We want the players to develop their skills and ability under my guidance and take Dundee United to a standing within Scottish women's football that will make us proud".

Having assembled a squad over the summer of 2015, the team embarked on what remained of the season by training regularly and playing friendly matches whenever possible. The professional approach adopted was impressive and hopes were high when the 2016 season began with the club in the bottom tier of the Scottish Women's League, SWFL2.

What followed was nothing short of sensational as they proceeded to win every league game they played, finishing the season as champions with a playing record of: Played 16, Won 16, Goals Scored 141, Goals Against 7, Points 48. They also won the SWFL2 League Cup making them double-winners in their first season. Indeed, at this stage their only taste of defeat had been in the third round of the Scottish Cup where they were drawn against an experienced Premier League side in Stirling University, losing 6-1.

Several of the players had also impressed individually resulting in international recognition for several girls at U16, U17 and U19 levels. For season 2017 the team appeared to take the step up to SWFL1 in their stride but, despite only losing twice, they eventually finished in second place, thus missing out on promotion. They also suffered a cruel blow during the season when their most experienced player and captain, Fiona Mearns, suffered a cruciate ligament injury and missed the last couple of months of the season.

Aside from the business of actually playing football and attempting to win trophies, DUWFC has continued to develop its community role in line



with its founding principles. Entering into partnership with established local club Dryburgh Athletic Girls means that there is now a recognised progression route for girls from under-9 level all the way through to the senior women's game within the city of Dundee. When the initiative was announced in late 2016, Gavin Belth commented "I believe working with local clubs is the best way to offer opportunities for players to develop and, most importantly, stay involved in the game. Whilst many clubs in the women's game are focused on their own academies to bring through young talent, this form of partnership brings a very different and innovative approach to linking grassroots football to the senior game". Dryburgh Athletic Chairman John Beatt agreed, adding "as well as the benefits of a women's football pathway, this partnership will aid Dryburgh in many other ways; coach education, training opportunities, training visits, session resources and support from the DUWFC back room staff are just a few of the benefits to our club". Earlier this year, Dundee United Community Trust further enhanced the opportunities for younger girls to get involved in football by opening the Lisa Evans Soccer Centre Club at the GA Arena. Coached by DUWFC players, who also act as role models, these sessions for girls in P1-7 have proved extremely popular with girls and their parents.

Women's football in Scotland, unlike the men's game, has also embraced the much-debated concept of summer football in order to avoid the harsh Scottish winter weather. Of course, in our 'four seasons in one day' climate there are never any guarantees, but the game certainly appears to be thriving so far. The season is split into two phases to allow for a mid-summer break with summer holidays for the players - there are no full-time women players actually in Scotland, though some of the current national team players are full-time in England, Italy, USA and Sweden. The first part of the season runs from March to June then starts up again in August running through to November. So, this current issue of *Scot Magazine* is published just as the second phase is about to kick-off, literally, on August 5th.

Women's and girls' football is clearly on an upward curve and the enthusiasm and commitment of everyone involved is infectious. All of the hard work being put in at grassroots level is evident not only by the growth of the game in terms of participation numbers, but also by the improvements being seen at elite level, as personified by the Scottish National Women's Team. Last year they qualified for the finals of a major tournament, the Euros, for the first time and they are currently in second place in their qualifying group for the 2019 World Cup finals with two games remaining.

Meanwhile, going into the second half of season 2018, DUWFC are still on course for another unbeaten record as they currently stand second in the SWFL1 table, only three points behind leaders East Fife, but with a game in hand. A successful second half of the season will mean Gavin Belth's Champion's League ambitions may yet still be realised in a few years, but there's a lot of football to be played before that. Justine Mitchell will be watching their progress closely, but only as a fan since she stepped down from her position at the club earlier this year. If DUWFC do succeed in gaining promotion this time around then they will come up against some established teams next season in SWPL2, all of whom will be equally intent on reaching SWPL1. If they continue to develop at their current rate it would be hard to bet against them. Perhaps their efforts will also help inspire the men's team...



Players and backroom staff after SWFL2 League Trophy presentation (Credit Justine Mitchell)



Women's and girls' football is clearly on an upward curve and the enthusiasm and commitment of everyone involved is infectious

Supporting a teammate during the first league game (Credit 'Scot Photography')

SWFL2 League Trophy (Credit 'Justine Mitchell')







# Linton Hotspur FC - New season, new challenges

**I**N CONTRAST to the youthful exploits of the Dundee United women's team, in West Linton there's an amateur football club approaching both its centenary and its 10th anniversary... all will become clear!

Linton Hotspur is one of the Borders' oldest amateur clubs with records dating it back to the 1920s. Locally known as 'The Hotspur', their history has seen them play at various venues in the village but, as with most amateur clubs, facilities and funding were always problematic. Nevertheless, The Hotspur always seemed to find a way to carry on but despite everyone's best efforts they were eventually forced to call it a day in 1971 after a particularly sobering 12-2 defeat to Ferranti Thistle, who later evolved into the current day SPFL Premiership side Livingston. Sliding doors? Perhaps...

Yet many locals, particularly those with family connections, remembered The Hotspur fondly and in 2008 a public meeting was called in The Gordon Arms Hotel to gauge the level of interest in resurrecting Linton Hotspur Football Club. The interest

was indeed substantial and genuine, so a new committee was formed and, spurred on by the traditions and history associated with both the village and club, The Hotspur has not looked back since.

Fundraising and sponsorship raised around £20,000, allowing the club to purchase changing facilities which were installed adjacent to the former school playing field at Dearfoot Road in West Linton. In 2009 the senior team was admitted into the Borders Amateur Football Association and played their first game since 1971 in front of around 350 local supporters. At the same time the previously informal youth set-up in West Linton was brought under one umbrella to create a 'community club' with playing opportunities from pre-school ages upwards. But once again there was a problem looming, in 2010 plans were announced for the new West Linton Primary School, and its impending construction on the school playing field would effectively render Linton Hotspur homeless...

Driven by a committee who saw this as a challenge rather than a problem, and having raised another £11,000, the club was able to relocate to a new and, hopefully, more permanent home at New Moor Road in 2012. They immediately set about moving their changing accommodation and constructing a new pitch – this was all made possible by the very generous assistance of local landowners, Mr & Mrs Jim Clark, who granted the club an annual rolling lease on one of their fields to create the pitch. Four years later, the club would be presented with the chance to set down permanent roots on this site.

Since then the club has continued to expand the football provision for locals by introducing a range of under-age boys' teams in addition to the senior side. Linton Hotspur U13s, will be playing competitive games next season in the South East Region Youth Football Division 3, while all of the other age groups will play non-competitive games in the Borders Football Development set-up. The club's Youth Section has achieved both 'SFA Community Club' status and the 'SFA

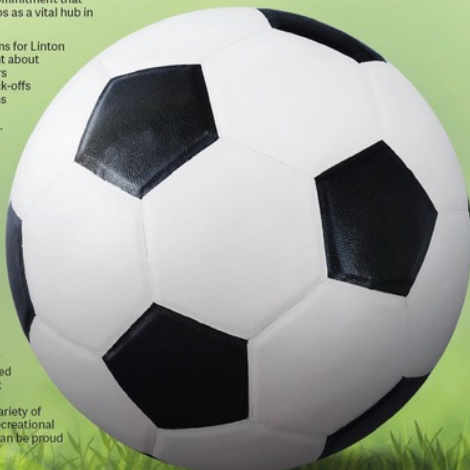
*Its impending construction on the school playing field would effectively render Linton Hotspur homeless...*

Quality Mark. It has fully qualified coaches at all levels along with formalised player development pathways. In terms of participation and community engagement then, Linton Hotspur is undoubtedly a success story providing sporting opportunities to over 100 boys, girls and men in the West Linton area, with plans under consideration to introduce specific girls teams too.

But there are always challenges in running a community organisation, particularly one which depends on herding 15 or 16 young, and not-so-young, men together for Saturday and midweek fixtures, not to mention training sessions on cold, dark, winter evenings! Everybody involved in amateur sport in Scotland will recognise the problems – can't get time off work, holiday commitments, illness and injury, domestic duties, childcare – and they're only the 'genuine' ones! Add in prima-donna behaviours – "I don't want to be a substitute", sleeping in, hard night before – and it's a wonder any games get played! Yet the clubs survive because enough people do take things seriously and are committed to providing opportunities for others in their community. And it's not just players, coaches and committee members – many other 'volunteers', often family members or significant others, are roped in to help with the myriad tasks that often go unseen but are absolutely essential. Strips have to be washed, refreshments supplied, the pitches and dressing-rooms have to be maintained – it's a 7-days a week commitment that demonstrates how people see these clubs as a vital hub in their community.

One of the specific, and genuine, problems for Linton Hotspur in recent years has been brought about by the difficulties of playing in the Borders League. Midweek games with 5.30pm kick-offs in Kelso or Galashiels, or wherever, means that players who work in Edinburgh, for instance, simply cannot get there in time. Having just endured a disappointing 2017/18 season, winning only four games and finishing second bottom of Borders Amateur Football League B, the club has reluctantly resigned from the Borders League and joined the Lothian and Edinburgh Amateur Football Association for 2018/19. This change will cut down significantly on travel times, make life easier for the existing players and also help widen the net in attracting players to the club.

Changing leagues in no way diminishes the club's commitment to its West Linton community, as evidenced by their ambitious plans to upgrade their New Moor Road home. The club has stated its vision as being to create a permanent base for football in West Linton, whilst providing a facility suitable for use by a variety of other local organisations for sport and recreational purposes that the club and community can be proud



Campbell Forsyth welcomes the community and Berwick Rangers FC to the official opening of the Hotspur Sports Pavilion







of. In 2014, the club was given the opportunity to buy the land previously leased from the Clark family. At this point, a local businessman generously stepped in to assist by buying the land and immediately leasing it back to the club for a period of 99 years. This meant that for the first time in the club's recent history they had the benefit of security of tenure, and the potential to develop their facilities further.

Club President Campbell Forsyth explains, "the club has been presented with an opportunity to put down permanent roots and improve the sporting provisions in West Linton. The committee and club members are driven, enthusiastic and excited about what the future may bring for the club and are eager for others to buy into our ambition. We would like to place on record our thanks for the assistance we have had in our journey to date, and hope that the village will share in our ambition for the future".

On securing their future at New Moor Road, the club immediately set about upgrading the site. A surplus modular building was secured from Scottish Borders Council and, alongside donations in kind which were estimated to be in the region of £70,000 through labour and material, the club raised another £30,000 to provide changing, shower, kitchen and communal facilities. New road access and car parking was also required and, realising that their future plans would continue to require serious money, the club embarked on their most ambitious fundraising project to date. A crowdfunding campaign raised around £11,000 over 2016 and more traditional methods, like dinners and a 24-hour cycling event, provided the confidence and additional resources to press on with their plans and achieve the ultimate objective of creating something the whole community can enjoy and be proud of. Vice-Chairman Ivan Mackenzie adds, "we also received some grants, but a lot of support came through the kindness of the local community, which we greatly appreciated". The new clubrooms, named the Hotspur Sports Pavilion, were formally opened on 22nd July 2017, marked by a children's fun day, sponsors day and a glamour friendly match with Berwick Rangers FC.

After a disappointing final year in the Borders Leagues, everyone connected with Linton Hotspur is eagerly looking forward to the 2018/19 season. Ivan explains, "we have a new manager in place and he has already brought in some new players. Everyone associated with the club is excited about the season ahead – it's another chapter in our long and proud history. Off the pitch we are continuing to review our plans and early discussions have taken place to explore ideas like building indoor training facilities at our ground, floodlighting and maybe also a 4G pitch. We have benefitted significantly from our connections in the local community and hope that the community will continue to support us in achieving our ambitions".

And that local community is certainly supportive. At the heart of the village is the newsagents J&R Bell where, incidentally, iScot Magazine regularly sells out! In his 'spare' time, owner



Shaz Ramzan player, treasurer, sponsor!

Engineering works at New Moor Road

A local businessman generously stepped in to assist by buying the land and immediately leasing it back to the club for a period of 99 years



Shaz Ramzan doubles as club treasurer and says, "I've been the owner of J&R Bell's for 12 years. The shop was started by a couple called Jocky and Rae Bell, who were a well-known farming family from this area, some of whom had played for The Hotspurs in the early days. So, my shop is an important part of the history of the club and it's used as a meeting point for away matches and also as a hub for fundraising events like the 24-hour cycle and various raffle draws. The community use me as a focal point of the club for any information required. I also get asked by the local primary school for help with young kids because I am part of The Hotspurs – it's like being a local celebrity! But seriously, being part of The Hotspurs has helped me greatly both with integrating into the community and developing my business. The Hotspurs play a massive part within the local community both on the pitch and off. Having previously played for the club and now having been treasurer for the last eight years, I am very proud to be associated with the club".

At the time of writing, the fixtures for the 2018/19 Lothian and Edinburgh Amateur League West Division have not yet been published but it is likely that Linton Hotspur will play their first game, under the new management team of Harry Connor and Adam Cursiter, in early August. The 10th anniversary celebrations of the reformed Linton Hotspur FC will take place in October, with a series of events planned. No doubt The Hotspurs will also start planning their centenary celebrations very soon!



The Hotspurs - past and future!



## After-match analysis...

The French existentialist philosopher Albert Camus famously said, "All that I know most surely about morality and obligations I owe to football". Jings! For those who would decry the beautiful game, that'll put their gas at a pee! Football is important in Scotland, us Scots having arguably invented the game, and the relevance of its contribution in our communities is often undervalued. The stories of the rise of Dundee United Women's FC and the resurrection of Linton Hotspur FC exemplify the kind of community spirit evident all over the country. Mrs Thatcher may have infamously said "there is no such thing as society" but initiatives such as these prove her manifestly wrong. When people want something enough, and believe it's the right thing to do, their resourcefulness knows no bounds. Nobody made the people behind DUWFC or The Hotspurs do what they did, and they didn't sit around waiting for anyone's permission, they just got on with it. That spirit is being harnessed all across Scotland on a daily basis for all kinds of projects, large and small, building the kind of society we can all believe in. *Here's tae us, wha's like us!*