

# Asians Can Play Football

Asians Can Play Football

ANOTHER WASTED DECADE

*September 2005*

*A report from the Asians in Football Forum*

**AFF**

Asians  
in Football  
Forum

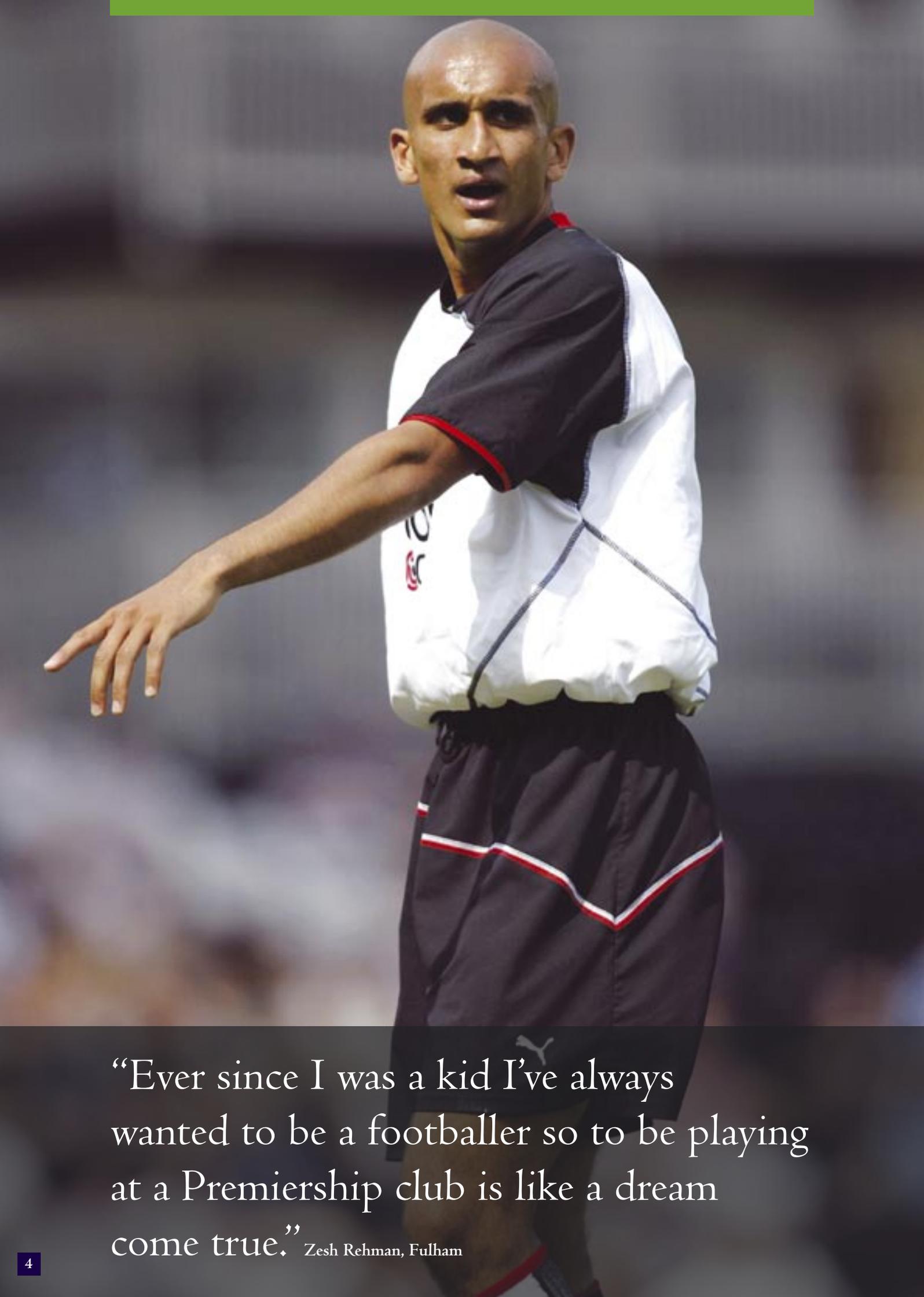
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GARCIA  
10

THE ROAD TO  
Istanbul  
LIVERPOOL V AC MILAN



“Ever since I was a kid I’ve always wanted to be a footballer so to be playing at a Premiership club is like a dream come true.” Zesh Rehman, Fulham

## Back to the Future: Asians Can't Play Football 1996

It is almost a decade since the publication of the ironically named study *Asians Can't Play Football* (1996). Much publicised in the media, this report was then seen as an important breakthrough in articulating both the frustrations and the aspirations of a section of the British community that seemed to be largely alienated by a sport that means so much to them.

The report set out a development plan containing specific recommendations aimed at the professional and amateur game in England, in schools and in the wider community. It argued for much-needed structural changes to address institutional barriers and it called for a pro-active approach in order to accelerate opportunities for Asians as both players and coaches in professional football.

Dialogue was sought with the Football Association hierarchy in 1996 in order to cost the proposals and to agree a list of priorities. Sadly, despite the warm welcome, to date the FA has made too few meaningful attempts to address, directly, the recommendations in the report or to produce a viable alternative strategy of a sort necessary for promoting real opportunities in the game for members of British Asian communities.

The initial response of the Football Association was to host an exploratory national football conference on Asians in football in Oldham (in October 1996) and, subsequently, to convene an Asians in Football working group, with members drawn from Asian communities around Britain. At the time, concerns were expressed among members of this new group about its real purpose and approach and, in particular, if and how its activities would ever feed directly into the governing structures within the Football Association.

Despite its good intentions, formally the group appeared to have had little status within the FA and, therefore, little influence on decision-making processes. Unfortunately, too, the wider impact of the working group has been very limited given the resources made available to it and, more recently, its work has been subsumed within the Football Association's newly established diversity framework.

## A Changing Game?

We accept, of course, that since 1996 the English game has changed dramatically. How could we say otherwise? We have seen the emergence of important new youth structures such as the introduction of Academies at clubs; the publication of Labour's Charter for Football and the government's Task Force; the FA's new Equity strategy; Race Equality Training and Race Equality Standards at Premier League clubs; community projects aimed at increasing Asian involvement; and the appointment of Directors of Football and other new specialist posts at a number of professional clubs.

New football development centres – some in inner city areas – have also had an impact on young player recruitment. The huge impact on the English game of globalisation and the recruitment of young foreign players has also influenced club recruitment policies and practices. We can even see a smattering of British Asian faces in many major English football stadia today – though it remains a smattering, even in towns and cities where British Asian communities show a very substantial presence.

It might be argued, especially given all the above, that some of the recommendations in *Asians Can't Play Football* have, to an extent at least, been overtaken by events. However, its core conclusions regarding the massive under-representation, lack of access and denial of opportunity for young Asian players, coaches and administrators in football in England, arguably, remains the same. What do we mean by this?

Firstly, change in the active fan base in England has been painfully slow and so, we must conclude, it seems to be a low priority – if a priority at all – for some in the English professional leagues. There are more Asian club fans and more Asian followers of the national team than in 1996, but we still need action in this area to increase numbers.

Secondly, very few people from ethnic minority communities – Asians, British blacks or other visible minorities – work in senior positions inside English clubs and the top leagues, which still seem to be a ‘closed shop’ at this level to people of colour. And this is despite the game’s very public ‘embracing’ these days of Equal Opportunities Policies.

Thirdly, what is also beyond dispute is the extremely poor representation of potential Asian professional footballers at English clubs, as reflected in a 2004 Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) report on football in England. The CRE noted the hugely disappointing low numbers of young Asians currently attached to club Centres of Excellence or Youth Academies. Back in 1996 we estimated the figure of young Asian players connected to English professional clubs to be a tiny 0.2%, but by late 2004 it had barely improved, rising only to 0.8% in Academies at Premier League Clubs.

No doubt the football authorities will respond to this report – as they do to any such intervention of this kind – by insisting that we have omitted mention of important new initiatives.

Our response, frankly, is: so what? It may feel like the game is changing, and initiatives in the sport may be multiplying, but all the evidence confirms that change in behaviour at the highest levels of the game still lags lamentably behind any real change in attitude or in stated policy. We have had nine years of ‘change’ in the game since *Asians Can’t Play Football*: but are things really that different?

Despite small pockets of good practice, often in difficult circumstances, in various parts of the country – e.g. in London, Leeds, Luton, Bradford and Leicester, etc. – our national sport, acknowledged to be hungrily ‘consumed’

‘NOT ENOUGH PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SINCE 1996. I THOUGHT MY REPORT ON ASIANS IN FOOTBALL WOULD SPARK CHANGE. BUT THE FOOTBALL AUTHORITIES HAVE WAITED FOR THINGS TO HAPPEN – WHERE IS THE LEADERSHIP WE NEED?’ JAS BAINS

in all its forms by the British Asian population, is still barely connecting at all with young British Asians interested in pursuing a career in professional football on either the playing and non-playing sides of the fence.

We believe, unequivocally, that this absence remains rooted in systemic failings and, in particular, in the structured inability of too many officials, scouts,

coaches and managers to look beyond the negative stereotypical images still held of British Asians, and the aversion of such staff to investigating alternative recruitment methods.

We might also add that it is no defence against charges of racism and exclusion for the game to point to the recruitment of more overseas players of colour if it is wilfully remaining disconnected from minorities at home.

#### A New Agenda

At the local levels of the sport it is sad to report that a few all-Asian local football leagues still exist in England, partly because of a lack of confidence in local FA decision makers to afford adequate protection against racism and partly because it remains a way in which the community seeks to fill the gap.

They exist, therefore, for a purpose - but we accept they are not the answer to the problem of Asian under-representation in the professional game.

The proliferation of clumsy promotional events and of occasional claims that we have unearthed the next Asian 'superstar', a role model for others to follow, is merely a distraction from the much more pressing need for structural change.

Our agenda, prompted by another decade of wasted opportunities, is to develop a strategic action plan that has a real chance of making some genuine progress. We seem to be decades away from a time when a Zesh Rehman or a Michael Chopra are more than 'novelty value' in the sport, or token Asian players who are wheeled out to demonstrate 'progress'. Instead, they should now be part of a production line, one which is churning out dozens of British Asian football wannabes every year.

All this means that after witnessing too many years of doing it 'your way' we now want to have a go at doing it 'our way'. In recent months we have been developing an action plan for British Asians in English football, one which is both radical and exciting, but it is also one which is largely complementary to the work of the Football Association. We think, after waiting forlornly for so long for change 'from the inside', that its time has now come.

### **Looking Forward – Not Back**

Ten years ago we sought a meaningful partnership with the FA and with the game at large. Our work was publicly warmly welcomed but, ultimately, our requests fell on deaf ears.

Whilst we remain frustrated, we prefer to look forward rather than back because of what is at stake. We owe it to new generations of young British Asian footballers and administrators in this country. The British game will remain the poorer without their vital contribution at the very top. Both the 'social inclusion' and business case arguments grow stronger as we, in the UK, undergo major demographic changes and, in particular, as many of the heavily urbanised sections of our towns and cities gravitate towards British minority ethnic majority status.

The English game – especially perhaps its technical staff and leaders - has too often shown itself to be reluctant, to engage effectively with 'outside' influences. Removing this barrier, once and for all, will be key to future success for all our sakes.

### **About This Document**

The aim of this document is three fold: firstly, to register our determination to chart a new course to increase opportunities in football for British Asians; secondly to report on some real progress on developing football within the community and sports projects around the UK; and, thirdly, to comment on some of the barriers that still restrict progress.

We do not underestimate for a moment the importance of progressing football for Asian women, but because our main concern in this document is the professional side of the game, we have focused here mainly on males in Asian projects.

We would argue that these successful local Asian initiatives have happened largely despite, and not because of, official responses to the effective exclusion of Asians from British football. More importantly, their work shows the huge sporting potential in Britain's Asian populations, potential that is yet to be in any way fully exploited and released.

Our view is that for every one of the projects that follows here, there are potentially dozens more that should have been kick-started in the past decade. But simply not enough has been done to promote opportunities for Asians at the local and professional levels of the sport. Our aim in focusing on these schemes is to offer support

**‘OUR MAIN MESSAGE IS THAT WE NOW NEED TO TAKE A VERY DIFFERENT ROUTE FROM THE ONE TRAVELLED SO SLOWLY THUS FAR TO MAKE THIS WORK WELL IN THE FUTURE.’ JAS BAINS**

and hope to people in British Asian communities everywhere that their sporting talents and ambitions can finally be fully realised. But our main message is that we now need to take a very different route from the one travelled so slowly thus far to make this work well in the future.

**Asians in Football Conference, November 2005**

This report marks the beginning of our wider campaign for an urgent new direction in British football. During November 2005 we are hosting at Leicester City a national conference on The Future for Asians in English Football. At this conference we will unveil our 2005 Agenda for Change for the English game.

This report marks the beginning of our wider

We want as many local Asian football clubs and projects as possible to attend the conference, which will also be open to the football authorities, professional clubs, local authorities and other agencies.

The conference will involve national decision makers in English sport, the people who can make real change happen.

**The Future**

There is so much still to do in advancing the claims of British Asians in the game. In making our case we also recognise other exclusions. The overall problem of a lack of representation in football is an issue that needs to be addressed at all levels of the sport.

Asians are being denied opportunities as players but former black players - who collectively have given so much to the game - are grossly under-represented as coaches and managers. A different problem but another area in which the game seems to be looking the other way when talented individuals come knocking.

Many community clubs, organisations and volunteers have taken the lead in their local areas, despite the barriers and frustrations they have faced. It is now time for a real Asian revolution in the British game, one which is led and powered from the very top of the professional game.

We must not be so dazzled by the impact of globalisation as to miss the really big story closer to home. British Asians are crying out for change. This time we must make things happen.

## Part 1: Some facts

### Numbers of Asians in the UK

| Asian or Asian British | Count     | % of total population |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Indian                 | 1,053,411 | 1.8                   |
| Pakistani              | 747,285   | 1.3                   |
| Bangladeshi            | 283,063   | 0.5                   |
| Other Asian            | 247,664   | 0.4                   |
| Total                  | 2,331,423 | 4.0                   |

According to the last census (2001) the South Asian population was 2.3 million, or 4 per cent of the total population of the UK.

Most communities of a minority ethnic background have a lower age profile than the general population due to higher birth rates. Statistics are hard to come by but sections of those defined as 'Asian' have amongst the highest numbers of under- 18's proportionately than from other communities.

#### Interest in football

An Eastern Eye survey in July 2004 found nearly a third of respondents were interested in becoming season ticket holders at professional clubs. Seventy- five percent supported England.

In 1991 a Manchester University survey found that young Asian males had amongst the highest rates of participation in football of any ethnic grouping. 60% of Bangladeshi boys played football, 43.1% of Pakistanis took part, 36.5% of Indians played the game. As a comparison the same survey found that 47% of young 'white' boys played regularly.

#### Numbers of young Asians in professional football

A survey conducted by the CRE in 2004 found a total of 10 Asian players at Premier League Academies. 0.8% of players at Premier League Academies.

Within administration the CRE said it was " increasingly concerned about the apparent lack of representation of people from ethnic minorities in the non-playing side".

#### Asians playing professional football Total number – 4

Michael Chopra – Newcastle United (Striker)

Zesh Rehman – Fulham (Defender)

Adnan Ahmed – Huddersfield Town (Midfielder)

Harpal Singh – Stockport County (Midfielder)

Semi- professional - Anwar Uddin (Defender)

## Part 2: Case studies for change

This report is not just a call for action. In this section we seek out the positive. We look at community clubs, projects and individuals who are moving forward by creating change in their own environments.

Asian led amateur clubs are going places. This season LONDON APSA and SPORTING BENGAL became the first Asian clubs to play in the FA Cup and we start by looking at the inspirational upwards trajectory of the Albion Sports Football Club from BRADFORD, perhaps Britain's most successful local Asian football club. Albion are still going places and will, surely, produce young Asian professionals for the future. Luton United FC are to the fore in the next chapter - and what a powerful story this is of Asian footballing and community success from LUTON.

In Chapter 3 Football League match official Mo Matadar reveals the huge steps taken forward in BLACKBURN to recruit new Asian referees. Criticism of the professional game is made within this report but we take a look at WEST HAM UNITED who have a scheme to work specifically with the huge Asian communities of east London.

Not to be outdone by the other amateur clubs here, too, are the exploits of the grassroots Leicester Nirvana club from LEICESTER, a football club that does amazing work with young Asians in disadvantaged communities and yet struggles for resources and its own facilities. Following on from this, Colin Moore explores the innovative new work of MANCHESTER COUNTY FA in better connecting Asian communities with football via local Mosques and Temples.

Chapter 7 examines a vibrant Positive Futures scheme in COVENTRY which shows how football can make important and meaningful social interventions into Asian communities. The good work of Football Unites, Racism Divides (FURD) in SHEFFIELD and its championing and support for the terrific new Sharrow United FC. We conclude with a chapter by Kash Taank on the important work going on for Asians and football in



# Chapter 1: Albion Sports Juniors from Bradford

## Background and Brief History



In 1974, a group of young customers from the Albion Sports public house in Bradford got together and decided they wanted to enter a football team into a local league tournament. This was an all too familiar story – but with a twist. The young men involved were British Asians. The Albion Sports landlord agreed to pay their £5 entrance fee and, in return, the team was named Albion Sports FC.

The new club joined the Bradford Amateur Sunday League and were champions of Division Four in their first season. A string of honours followed before Albion Sports became Bradford Sunday Alliance Premier Division champions for the first time in 1995-1996 and also won the Bradford & District Sunday Cup in the same season.

Albion's greatest achievements, however, have been in winning the British Asian Cup at both Celtic Park and the Ibrox Stadium in Glasgow in 2000, 2001 & 2004. These successes have led to three civic receptions for the club hosted by the City of Bradford.

In 2000 Albion Sports were also the first ever side from Bradford – and the first Asian club - to reach the final of the national FA Sunday Cup. In 2005 the club reached the final of this prestigious national competition once again, as well as the finals of the Bradford Senior League Cup and the Bradford & District Cup. Albion Sports have become a major force in local football, not only within the Bradford District, but are also well recognised and well supported both regionally and nationally.

## Coaching and youth development

In June 2001 the Albion Sports Management Committee decided to set up a Friday night coaching session for local youngsters. The aim was to develop a junior section within the club, offering quality coaching and football opportunities to provide player pathways for Asian kids and other youngsters in the local area.

The coaching sessions moved on with the introduction, as coaches, of a group of Albion first team players, all of whom have all obtained UEFA/ FA coaching qualifications. Each coach works alongside the team managers and assistants who have also obtained level I coaching qualifications.

“We had to struggle right from the start. It was always one step forward, two steps back. I think we have moved on because of our own efforts, not because the game has really changed for Asian people.” Pav Singh

The coaches provide quality sessions, but with the emphasis on fun and enjoyment for players who live in a variety of communities within the Bradford district. Players of all ages and from different ethnic backgrounds have joined the junior set up from places such as Bradford Moor, Undercliffe, Thornbury, Manningham, West Bowling, Buttershaw and Pudsey.

The key aims for the Friday coaching sessions are to provide young people in the community with an opportunity to receive coaching from FA-qualified coaches. It is hoped that boys and girls will reach a standard of play sufficient for organised league matches. The Albion Sports club is committed to as many children as possible enjoying the football experience regardless of age, gender, race and ability. It is very proud of its achievements in this area and Albion Sports wishes to maintain the ‘family friendly’ atmosphere that runs throughout the club.

## Current & Future Coaching and Playing Developments

The Albion coaching sessions are beginning to expand with girls' coaching sessions planned for the near future. Albion Sports has also linked up with local secondary school Carlton Bolling, which is based in the heart of inner city Bradford, to establish a base for junior players and to attract more youngsters to the club. The school

is acquiring a new astro turf facility which will mean all junior coaching sessions and holiday courses at Carlton Bolling will be run by Albion Sports.

Another site near Carlton Bolling School is undergoing a major redevelopment in the next few years in association with funding from the Football Foundation and Bradford Council Sport & Leisure Department. It seems likely that all Albion first team and junior teams will have access to the new high quality pitches at this site. Albion Sports looks set for a bright future.

In addition:

- The club has already successfully gained the FA Charter Standard Award, the quality mark for senior local football clubs in this country.
- Friday coaching sessions are now delivered by three FA Level 2 coaches and are mentored and overlooked by Level 3 B licence coaches.
- Qualified coaches also organise training sessions for children aged 6-16, both boys and girls.
- Albion Sports has now set up a number of junior teams (Under 8, Under 10, Under 12 A & B teams and Under 14s), with two age group teams playing organized football in Affiliated Leagues.
- The Albion Sports adult first team are planning a transfer from the Bradford Sunday Alliance Premier to a Saturday League, where the club already fields second & third teams.

### The New Link With Leeds United

The club has formed an exciting new link with Leeds United. Dave Harrison (head of player recruitment at Leeds) has agreed to use Albion Sports coaches to set up an Inner City Football Development Centre in Bradford. Two Albion coaches are also coaching at the Leeds United Football Development Centre. The Albion

“OUR LINK WITH LEEDS UNITED HAS REALLY SPURRED US ON. BUT MORE PROFESSIONAL CLUBS NEED TO START DOING SOMETHING WITH LOCAL ASIAN CLUBS. WE ARE A REAL EXCEPTION.” PAV SINGH

coaches attend in-service training delivered at the Leeds United Training ground at Thorp Arch.

Some of the club's junior players have been channelled into the Leeds United Development Centre, which has attracted a mix of quality players from across the Bradford and Leeds District. Albion Sports are now looking at the possibility of progressing these players into Leeds United junior 'shadow' squads and then into the Academy itself. Two adult players have become official scouts for Leeds United as Albion Sports and Leeds United together are showing the way for young Asians into the professional game.

“I think we have moved on because of our own efforts, not because the game has really changed for Asian people.”

Pav Singh, Albion Sports, Bradford.



## Chapter 2: Luton United: an Asian Success Story

### History and Background



Luton United FC was formed in June 2000, as Luton Asians FC. This was a direct attempt to get more Asians playing organised football in the Luton area. After two years the club made the decision to change its name to Luton United, and LUFC has since established itself in the Chiltern Youth League in Bedfordshire and currently runs four different age group teams at: u9s u13s u14s and u16s. In 2006 the club hopes for a further expansion by adding two more teams, at U 12 and U 8 levels.

The key to the club's success has been simple: a clear plan with realistic aims and objectives that, over the years, have been reassessed and re-evaluated. From the outset, the club has been about delivering equity and it continues to pave the way for others to follow in its attempt to open up the game to everyone, regardless of gender, age, creed or colour.

LUFC was awarded the National Development Award for its work with ethnic minorities in 2003, especially for its outstanding contribution to addressing the issue of the under-representation of Asians in football in Luton. The formation of the first 'Asian' youth football team in Bedfordshire has created an environment for others to follow and two other clubs at this age range have since been formed. LUFC has also been short-listed in 2005 for the Queens Award for voluntary service winners. Nomination for this award, once again bears testament to the ground-breaking work still being undertaken in Luton.

### Challenging Stereotypes

The Luton United club is unique because in many ways it has completely challenged the negative stereotype about Asian footballers. Its success on the field has sent a strong and clear message to all in football that Asians are not only now playing the game but they are competing and winning and are ambitious to move forward in the game.

However the club's greatest success is its holistic approach to the players and members that join. The aim is not only to enable individuals to gain interpersonal skills, but also an opportunity when the players reach 15 years

**“LUTON UNITED HAS WORKED INCREDIBLY HARD TO GET WHERE WE ARE TODAY – MUCH HARDER THAN MANY WHITE CLUBS. WE HAVE HAD TO WORK THIS WAY SIMPLY TO OVERCOME PREJUDICE.” BUTCH FAZAL**

of age to gain an FA coaching award, which will enable them to return to the club and coach the younger teams. If the player continues to show the right level of commitment the club aims to contin-

ue to support the player's acceleration on the coaching pathway by sponsoring them to the next coaching qualification. This extensive coach education programme is boosted by qualified FA tutors, who work for LUFC.

### A Charter Club and a Community Club

LUFC's status as an FA Charter standard club has also enabled the club to develop its mini soccer programme. A current funding bid is in place with the Football Foundation, and if it is successful it will go along way to nurturing local Asian talent from a younger age in Luton. This will not only encourage more parental involvement, but it will also allow the community to take greater ownership of the club.

Over the past four years LUFC has, through its various age group teams, won promotion three times and has won two league titles, with another almost certainly on the way in 2005. This playing success has empowered and instilled a new confidence in a community that, in the past, was always viewed negatively by the authorities and by other communities. The club's future has also been secured with a new sponsorship deal, one which will enable Luton United to continue to move forward with its plans to grow and develop.





“I want to win the World Cup for England and I want to win the Premiership for Newcastle.”

Michael Chopra, Newcastle United

# Mo Matadar

## Chapter 3: The Men in Black: An Asian Refereeing Success

### Background

One aspect of football in which Asians have made significant progress in the East Lancashire area, is in refereeing the game. At a time when recruiting new referees, and more importantly successfully retaining new recruits is proving almost impossible in some areas of local football, increasing numbers of Asians in Blackburn have taken up the whistle.

The Blackburn Referees Association has recruited a very healthy figure of 25 Asian referees to their membership - and numbers seem to be growing all the time. Most local leagues and County FAs up and down the country are crying out for new officials – especially from under-represented ethnic minority communities and from women. The latter is especially needed given the rapid growth in girls and women’s football at the grassroots.

### Asian Refereeing Success

Thanks, largely, to the work of the Blackburn Referees Association’s Development Officer, Ismail Esat and his colleagues, youth and amateur games are now regularly officiated in Blackburn and in its surrounding areas by

“RECRUITING MORE ASIAN MATCH OFFICIALS MIGHT MEAN THAT ASIANS IN LOCAL FOOTBALL WILL FEEL MORE CONFIDENT THAT THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT RACISM AND ABUSE WILL BE TREATED SERIOUSLY.” MO MATADAR

young Asian recruits. Nationally, The Football Association estimates that 20% of all local club matches are played without a qualified match referee – a situation certainly not familiar in Blackburn. Nearly all games in Blackburn are officiated by qualified match officials, many of whom are drawn, increasingly, from local Asian communities.

Why the success in recruiting Asian referees in Blackburn? The reasons are complex, but one factor is definitely the promotion and impact made by myself as a senior level referee of Asian heritage. I am a Level 2 referee who now officiates regularly in the Football League.

### Changing the image of refs

My feeling is that my own promotion through the ranks has given many young Asian boys in Blackburn the desire to make a real impact in the game, perhaps as a match official. Both myself and Jarnail Singh, a Level 1 referee from Middlesex, are now on the National List for match officials and our presence there is testimony to the advances now possible for ambitious young Asian officials, even at the highest levels of the sport.

Ismail Esat puts the Blackburn success down to challenging aspects of the traditional image of referees and to a hard working local ethos, tied to a will to see through tough and demanding games. Certainly, recruiting more Asian match officials might mean that Asians in local football will feel more confident that their concerns about racism and abuse will be treated seriously.

### Time for a Change?

With the future looking bright for young Asian referees from this Lancashire area, surely the time is ripe for breakthroughs to be made elsewhere in the UK. I believe in well thought out and targeted initiatives to nurture Asians into refereeing at local levels and on the National List.

\* Mo Matador has refereed in professional football, mainly in the Football League, for 4 years, taking charge of approximately 250 matches. For more information about refereeing and the rise of Asian referees in Blackburn, contact Ismail Esat on: 01254 680012.

# Chapter 4: West Ham United Asians in Football Project

A brief summary of the Project's progress to date. 2005

## Introduction & overview

The West Ham United Asians in Football Project operates in partnership with the Football Foundation, Sport England, London Boroughs of Newham, Tower Hamlets, Enfield and the FA to provide a comprehensive range of activities across defined areas of the 3 boroughs. Initially the programme was set up in 1998 to encourage Asian participation in football at all levels with a specific remit to address the following core areas of under representation;-

- a) increasing opportunities for Asian young people to attend coaching sessions in schools and at various locations during holiday periods;
- b) increasing participation by Asian girls/young women
- c) encouraging young people with talent to attend performance squads and ultimately the Football Academy at West Ham United and
- d) Supporting Asian adults to obtain coaching qualifications (in order that they can be employed within the project).

School based PE work continues to meet National Curriculum PE Key Stage 2 levels of attainment. In order to achieve sustainability FA Top sport/Teacher training courses are delivered to Newham and Tower Hamlets Teachers.

All participating Schools take part in the Healthy Living programme, which is delivered at Mile End Stadium and Upton Park Stadium. This involves Fitness sessions related to football in terms of exercise ,balance, coordination and flexibility. This aspect of kinaesthetic learning is carried out on the playing pitch and athletics track along with a skills technical session.

To complement the process this work is consolidated by lectures/discussions on diet, nutrition and exploring dealing with the effects and impact of racism in a multi cultural society.

Holiday courses are currently offered at the Club Development (Langdon Sports College, Lister Community School, Little Ilford School, Ponders End Youth Centre (Enfield), Ocean Estate New Deal for Community (Mile End Stadium) and are deemed to be highly effective by participants, parents and Teachers. In excess of 100 young people attend the courses at no cost.

## **Club Development is the projects most significant area of expansion.**

All activities are coordinated to be integral to our Club Development strategies.

This involves linking PE curriculum work with School Team FA Mini-Soccer Leagues to form the main transition route from education to be part of the Club Development process. The continuum is implemented at 5 designated Club Development Centres.

Academy Links are both positive and effective. Each Centre also hosts an Under 8s Pre Academy Development Centre which operates in direct partnership with the Club's Academy. The Centres provide a local reference point of opportunity to enable young people to work with enthusiasm towards achieving their collective potential and individual level of ability.

In addition to establishing the Pre Academy Development Centres, across the 3 boroughs, the Academy player recruitment officers monitor the progress of all players who we recommend of all relevant age ranges. In the past year 7 Asian players were referred, 3 of whom represented the academy teams. As an interesting aside one of the players came from Canada and 2 from Scotland. It must also be acknowledged that the integrated nature of the structure has also provided Academy opportunity for 3 young black players and 1 white player.

Exit Strategies are in place for players, who demonstrate enthusiasm, aptitude and ability, which are referred from School Team games, are assembled and formed into self-contained local clubs. Each centre has its own representative Team that competes against the other Centres across the three boroughs and thus form the basis of a functional league structure. This provides the opportunity for players to play competitively at safe environments on a regular basis as part of their football educative process.

A rapidly expanding Girls Development Programme is in operation across 3 targeted areas of Newham which attracts in excess of 150 girls per week across the 3 sites.

### **Football at Mile End (FAME)**

This exciting new aspect of the project was launched in April 2005 and represents significant opportunities for young players in the following aspects:-

Access to 7 third generation synthetic pitches (6 full days & 5 evenings per week throughout the year)

Education Programme, 2 local Schools (in excess of 400 young people) travel to the Stadium throughout the week for Key stage 2 PE curriculum sessions.

Club Development sessions are provided on 5 evenings & Saturdays per week. The project currently provides a weekly session for 17 autonomous clubs (the sessions attract 275 young players, per week)

Coach Education is a vital element of the scheme. Asians in Football organise & deliver FA Level 1 & 2 courses. Asians in Football Coach Educators also provide mentoring for all candidates after they complete the course.



## Chapter 5: Leicester Nirvana Fighting For a Better Future

### Background

Nirvana FC began its activities in Leicester in the mid-1980s growing out of the Red Star youth group in the city. The club has always had a strong Asian core but is a real local community club for the whole city, especially for parents and their children from multi-racial inner city backgrounds. Nirvana FC has also always stood by players who have suffered problems elsewhere. It is a welcome home for the otherwise excluded and isolated – a true local melting pot around the integrative sport of football.

Starting on Victoria Park in south Leicester in the local Mutual League, Nirvana struggled against racism and disadvantage in the local setting. Lacking even the resources and the facilities demanded by the local football pyramid in 1989 the club's senior adult side moved out of Leicestershire football to join the Central Midlands League. But in the early 1990s, frustrated with a lack of progress and access to resources in adult football, club members began to think about a very different sort of club – a new start for Nirvana focusing on youngsters only. In 1994 Leicester Nirvana was born.

### A Successful Club

As football for children really took off in Leicester in the 1990s so Nirvana grew, a positive haven for inner city kids, and for Leicester children from wider afield. Because of its enthusiasm and care the club recruited some of the most talented young players in the city, players who had escaped below the radar of the local 'excellence' scouting net. They even beat the Leicester City Academy elite!

Today the Nirvana club nurtures junior talent right down to under-6 level and works with literally hundreds of children drawn mainly from the poorer Highfields, Evington, St. Matthews and Belgrave areas of the city, win-

**“EVERYONE HERE SAYS THEY ADMIRE WHAT WE DO FOR YOUNG INNER-CITY KIDS IN LEICESTER. BUT THEN WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO FACILITIES, WE ARE ALWAYS PUSHED TO THE VERY BACK OF THE QUEUE. THINGS HAVE GOT TO CHANGE.”** DILIP CHAUHAN, NIRVANA FC

ning local league and cup competitions as an annual event. It now also has very close new links with Leicester City FC. The professional club, finally, sees Leicester Nirvana as an important local development club: one that is likely to provide

plenty of young local talent as future professionals. Only now, when the City club is struggling a little financially, are local Asians just beginning to emerge in the Leicester City Academy.

### Problems and the Future

Racism remains a problem for Leicester Nirvana, of course, as it does for all similar local clubs. The club has often stood up to the challenge of racism in the past and has refused to be bullied or intimidated by racists, sometimes to its cost in terms of connected disciplinary issues. Facilities are a real problem too, as the club tries to plan for a better future. Its current base – a public park at Martin Street in the heart of the city – is ideal for its location, but it is lamentable for what it can offer it terms of growth and the possibility of matching the club's ambitions.

In 2004 Leicester Nirvana won the Foxes Against Racism Award for work in sport in local communities in Leicester, but the club may struggle to make further progress if the local authorities in the city cannot come up with an adequate new site where Leicester Nirvana can expand and improve upon what it already offers to some of the least advantaged – and the most talented – young people in the city.

This is a battle that is now being fought with all the energy and dynamism that Leicester Nirvana has brought to all of its football activities. But there are no clear signs yet that it will ultimately be won – and so this extraordinary local club in Leicester, this crucial community resource, struggles on against the odds. It mirrors the problems still faced by many successful and ambitious local Asian clubs around Britain.



“I’ve always known it’s going to be different with me being Asian but I’m proud to be Asian and don’t see that as a problem. It makes me more determined to make it.” Harpal Singh, Stockport County

# Chapter 6: New Opportunities for Asian Footballers in Manchester

## Background

Manchester County FA is working on several important new initiatives to develop links and promote more footballing opportunities within the local Asian community.

The first step we have taken is to undertake ethnic monitoring of local players to gauge the levels at which different communities are currently playing football within the Greater Manchester area. As part of the affiliation process all players at local clubs in Manchester will now complete a form that will record their self-allocated ethnicity. The results of this new type of registration process will enable us to report accurately, for the first time, on exactly which communities in the area are playing football and which are under-represented. Manchester is the first County FA in the country to undertake this crucial exercise.

## A New League

The Manchester County FA is also currently involved in setting up a 'community' 6-a-side league in the Cheetham Hill and Longsight areas of Manchester. These areas host large Asian communities but no affiliated football clubs. The new league will have 24 clubs and is targeted mainly at adult males within the Asian community. Every player will be offered the opportunity to become a qualified coach or referee. We are looking to use the League to promote coaching opportunities and to help develop 11 a side clubs for future competition.

“WE ARE ONLY JUST BEGINNING TO GRASP THE ISSUE OF ENGAGING WITH ASIAN COMMUNITIES THROUGH FOOTBALL IN MANCHESTER. WE MAY HAVE LOST TIME, AND PERHAPS EVEN THE TRUST OF SOME LOCAL ASIANS.”

## COLIN MOORE

As part of the League's future development it will eventually move on from small-sided football to 11-a-side play. It will also generate junior football down to mini-soccer levels. Finally, the FA Committee in Manchester will link with the few Asians currently involved in local football in order to discuss the development of the grass-roots game within Greater Manchester's Asian communities. As an affiliated league, the Manchester FA will seek representation for the new developments in Cheetham Hill and Longsight on the local FA Council.

## Football and Religion

Secondly, we have identified that the cornerstone of the social and cultural activities of many Asian communities in our area is the temple or mosque. We realised that many temples and mosques provide more than just a place to worship: they also look to promote many other activities for their communities. We contacted over 60 places of worship in Greater Manchester and we are working with three centres in 2005 to develop coaching and playing opportunities for everyone in the area.

### Future Developments

Other initiatives we have ongoing in the Manchester area include:

- Developing links with the local Asian news media to promote football opportunities for people of Asian heritage.
- The creation of a sub-group to look at issues facing different ethnic minority communities in terms of barriers to playing football.
- A Level I FA coaching course to be held in July 2005 which will be used to train 20 new coaches from within the Asian and other ethnic minority communities in the Manchester area.
- Working with volunteers to develop Mini Soccer for young people within Asian communities in Manchester.
- Work with existing Asian football clubs to develop funding opportunities to enable their expansion and to attain Charter Standard.

We may have lost some time and, possibly, some of the trust of Asians in Manchester, but we are beginning to move things on in this part of the North West. We hope for a brighter future ahead in local football in Manchester.



# Chapter 7: Asians in Sports-based Social Inclusion programmes: Positive Futures in Coventry

## Background

Positive Futures is a national sports-based social inclusion programme managed within The Home Office Drugs Strategy Directorate. It has a broad range of representatives on its advisory group, which includes The Football Foundation, Sport England and The Youth Justice Board.

Positive Futures is a relationship strategy based on the principal that engagement through sport and the building of mutual respect and trust can provide cultural 'gateways' to alternative lifestyles.

Football is a key activity here: it is widely used to engage young people within the programmes. In a recent Positive Futures Impact Report, 98 projects showed that they each have an average of 175 young people participating in football, a total of 17,168 young people who are recorded as playing organised football through the auspices of the projects.

## Asian Involvement

In terms of overall 'Asian' participation in Positive Futures, there were 991 such recorded participants up to February 2004, and 87 from what are described as 'Mixed Asian' backgrounds. This is the best available information to date, but it still probably under-represents the true involvement of young Asians in Positive Futures schemes.

The Coventry Positive Futures project has a strong football element, with sessions running six days of the week. The young people who participate have mixed abilities and are catered for using a range of models including:

- 'Drop-in' programmes, which are very flexible and are centred around basic skills and participation;
- 'Academy' sessions, which have the input of F.A. Level 2 and upward qualified coaches who deliver a more technical coaching programme.

The projects have links to local clubs; so young people have suitable exit-routes to further their participation and interest. We have also set up a partnership with Coventry City Football Club, which gives young players from Positive Futures the opportunity to attend matches.

**"MORE ASIAN COACHES COULD MAKE A HUGE DIFFERENCE TO SOCIAL PROJECTS LIKE OURS IN COVENTRY. MORE BACKING AND MORE RESOURCES FOR ASIAN INITIATIVES ARE CRUCIAL HERE TO TAKE THE NEXT STEP."  
RASHID BHAYAT**

in young people taking a lead, in terms of planning, delivering and evaluating all of our programmes. As a result of this, we now have 11 coaches from Asian backgrounds in Coventry and five Asian volunteers who are also actively involved in the football projects.

These young people are seen very much as positive role models who can raise the aspirations of younger participants. This is because the coaches are 'one of us', not only in terms of 'race' and culture, but more importantly, in terms of where they come from geographically. The fact that we now have Asian coaches who have a good knowledge of the game is breaking down many barriers in the community.

Positive Futures projects are usually based in inner-city areas which are blessed with families from a wide array of cultural backgrounds. We have seen the bonding of different communities clearly evident through the projects. This model is not unique to Coventry. One of the projects we work very closely with is the Leyton Orient

One of the most encouraging aspects of the Coventry project has been the development of local young people from being participants on the schemes, who go to develop into key members of the scheme's delivery staff. We place a strong emphasis

## Chapter 7: Asians in Sports-based Social Inclusion programmes: Positive Futures in Coventry

Community Sports Programme, headed by Sabir Bham. Sab's story is a common one amongst Asian coaches in England. As a local boy he has earned the respect of the community through his work and is seen as a role model, not just for Asians, but also for most young people who come into contact with the projects.

### What next?

Although projects such as Positive Futures are using football to address social exclusion and are indirectly supporting the development of Asians in football, there is still much work to do.

One of the biggest issues for young people of all races coming through community programmes is the lack of opportunities to participate in the sort of football which is deemed by professional clubs to be of 'good' standard and so likely to produce potential professionals. We must be able to work closer with the professional game to enable young people from socially deprived areas access to high quality provision and facilities.



## Chapter 8: Winning Ways

# The Rise of Sharrow United in Sheffield

### The Beginning

There are plenty of young Asian footballers in the part of Sheffield where the 'Football Unites, Racism Divides' (FURD) project is based. Jumpers for goalposts, five-a-side youth club games - but that was about as far as it got, until the summer of 2000. Then three teenage footballers strolled into the FURD office and announced they wanted to form a team and enter an affiliated eleven-a-side Sunday league.

FURD staff sat down with the three friends and went through what it would entail. The list was long, daunting even, but the boys' enthusiasm won the day and their team, Sharrow United, applied to join the Sheffield Regional Alliance Sunday League, Division Two for the 2000-1 season.

### Open hostility

Sharrow soon experienced an open hostility towards Asian players by some opposing sides. Playing mainly against pub teams in the lower divisions, the speed, skill and athleticism of the young Sharrow players meant that opponents resorted to kicking, tripping and punching in a desperate attempt to compete. When the Sharrow players responded, racial abuse often followed – rarely heard by the referee – from both players and spectators. Scuffles normally resulted, and on three occasions referees abandoned games as they lost control.

It was as if the Sharrow players' refusal to take the violence and intimidation lying down, preferring instead to fight back, was both unexpected and resented. Such experiences led inevitably to disciplinary charges and members and officials of the team were frequent visitors to the county FA offices.

But they survived, the quality of the football played overcoming the unpleasantness, and providing genuine satisfaction that the racists had been beaten – at least at football. When the players collected their runners-up medals “**SOMETHING IS CHANGING IN LOCAL FOOTBALL IN SHEFFIELD BECAUSE OF THE COURAGE AND DETERMINATION OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE THEIR OWN FOOTBALL DREAMS..**” **HOWARD HOLMES** at the league's Presentation Night in May 2001 it was clear from the applause and comments that respect had been won.

### Changing area, changing team

The leading goalscorer in the first season was an African asylum-seeker, and players in similar circumstances soon followed – from Togo, Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia, Iraq and Morocco along with a sprinkling of white players – the team reflecting the changes in the demographic make-up of the local area.

Four summers and two promotions later, and after lifting the league cup in 2004, Sharrow have finished their first season in the top local league, the Meadowhall Sunday League. In the meantime FURD has helped a Bengali side, Sharrow Athletic, the Somali team Porter United, and the brilliantly named African Dream Team enjoy their first seasons in the Regional Alliance League.

Something is changing in local football in Sheffield and it is happening because of the courage, determination and commitment of these young people who have their own football dreams.

### A couple of tips to anyone starting up a club in affiliated football:

- Think about how you can foster good team spirit. Sometimes it seems harder for an Asian team to bond – they probably won't go back to the pub after the game, like most white teams, who are often sponsored by a local boozier.
- Log all racist incidents, seek out witnesses, and write reports to both the league and county FA. The FA's own rules allow for anyone to make a complaint of racist behaviour, even a spectator, which they must then investigate. The longer you leave it, the less chance that it will be taken seriously.



## Chapter 9: Scottish Ethnic Minority Sports Association (SEMSA): A New Dawn?

### Background

The Scottish Ethnic Minority Sports Association (SEMSA), formerly known as the Scottish Asian Sports Association (SASA), was established in 1990 to provide sporting opportunities to the Asian community of Glasgow. Uniquely, key players in the start up were leading Asian Scottish business leaders.

The need to set up such an organisation was precipitated by the lack of sporting opportunities available and a rather lacklustre approach to service provision for the Asian community from the statutory sector.

The early years proved to be a struggle, however, the resolve of the organisation's volunteer staff did not crumble. The journey commenced by the introduction of the infamous 'Annual games', an action packed weekend of sports activities including football, athletics, kabaddi, hockey, badminton and netball.

### Football Fever

It soon became abundantly clear that the need to embrace football as a competitive sport had arrived. Asian sporting gatherings in Scotland were receiving entries of up to sixty football teams over two age groups. This level of demand led to the formation of SASA FC.

The team began in the lower leagues of the Glasgow Sunday league, in which the novelty to kick, abuse and generally lament Asian players was prevalent.

After much racism and harassment SASA FC began to show a talent, both technical and organisational, that the indigenous teams were compelled to respect. In 1998, SASA FC enhanced their status by gaining entry to the Saturday Glasgow Central League. Since joining this league, and proving that Asians can play football, they have been able to roll out a team competing in the Scottish Unity League as well as providing the necessary structures for the provision of youth football for Asians in Glasgow.

### Stimulating Debate

Much progress had been achieved in Glasgow. But there remained the need to both challenge and influence institutional change if aspirations for greater equity were to be realised. 1999 saw the birth of the UK Asian Football Championships. This event was designed to stimulate debate within Scotland about the lack of Asian footballers, both in the professional game as well as in the local amateur leagues.

Celtic Football Club was to play host to the first UK final, and did so with much enthusiasm. Subsequently the event, now in its seventh year, has been alternated between Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs. Support from the statutory agencies has been at its best significant and at its worst tokenistic. The general lack of awareness and the apathy shown towards issues of race equality in sport in Scotland by some agencies and institutions remains. The rhetoric is good, of course. But implementation often leaves a lot to be desired.

### The future

With Glasgow City Council's Cultural and Leisure Department, SEMSA has embarked upon a process to develop strategic links to help shape sporting provision for minority ethnic communities in the city. A series of planning days have been scheduled at which the Director and President of the respective organisations will be present. Frustrated by a lack of institutional change as well as by issues concerning transparency and accountability, SEMSA launched The Racial Equality Charter For Sport: An Agenda for Change in June 2005 at Celtic Park.

## Chapter 9: Scottish Ethnic Minority Sports Association (SEMSA): A New Dawn?

The charter is a public pledge, signed by the leaders of sport, committing them to use their influence to create an environment for sport to flourish in Glasgow in which all people can take part without facing racial discrimination of any kind.

“THE GENERAL LACK OF AWARENESS AND THE APATHY SHOWN TOWARDS ISSUES OF RACE EQUALITY IN SPORT IN SCOTLAND, BY SOME AGENCIES AND INSTITUTIONS, REMAINS.” KASH TAANK

to date when we meet to review its impact in twelve months time. This, in itself, represents a new and creative discourse in Scottish sport in which accountability, finally, is measured.

So hope for the future in Scotland has come through self-organisation. The community is funding itself to drive forward a change agenda with statutory bodies. Whether that results in long term change remains to be seen.

### A new dawn?

The Racial Equality Charter for Sport: An Agenda for Change originates from the Racial Equality Charter for Sport, first devised by Sporting Equals, based in England.

The signatories will be required to provide evidence of progress and challenges



## Chapter 10: About the Asians in Football Forum

The Asians in Football Forum are a group of individuals who are working with Asian communities and football or sports development across the UK. The following have attended meetings over the past year:

|                   |                 |
|-------------------|-----------------|
| JAS BAINS (CHAIR) | PIARA POWAR     |
| RASHID BHAYAT     | KULJIT RANDHAWA |
| BRIAN BOOI        | PAV SINGH       |
| TAJ BUTT          | KULWINDER SINGH |
| IKRAM BUTT        | KASH TAANK      |
| BUTCH FAZAL       | ALISON VAUGHAN  |
| HOWARD HOLMES     | STEVE WHITE     |
| ANDY KIWOMYA      | JOHN WILLIAMS   |
| COLIN MOORE       |                 |

The group have been given organisational support by Kick It Out and the Foxes Against Racism partnership in Leicester.

For further information about the group or to address the Chair please contact Alison Vaughan ([alison@kickitout.org](mailto:alison@kickitout.org) or 020 7684 4884)

### **Acknowledgements**

Designed and Printed by Northstar Design. [www.northstardesign.co.uk](http://www.northstardesign.co.uk)

Acknowledgements for the kind use of pictures to Empics and community projects across the UK



“Now I have got a regular spot it could hopefully encourage more Asian fans to come to Town games.” Adnan Ahmed, Huddersfield Town

