

## **SWCFC AGM Co-Chair Report**

Last month's excellently contested Josh Bysouth Memorial Cup match between Saffron Walden Community FC (SWCFC) and Plantation U14s brought the curtain down on the inaugural season of SWCFC. When we formed the club a year ago from Saffron Walden Youth FC and Spartak the aim was to create a new club which could pool resources and provide the best possible conditions for wide participation and player development. One year on and - thanks to the great efforts of our young players (and parents) and the fantastic work of our volunteers - we can look back with satisfaction on the first season.

We now have over 100 qualified coaches, running around 40 league teams, plus the Mini Soccer School, with over 600 registered players in total. Including PSG (our partner Girls' football club), these numbers rise to around 750. We have also entered a Saffron Walden team into the prestigious Eastern Junior Alliance (EJA) for the first time, and intend to have EJA teams at two age groups next season. This will help build our links into our excellent u18s and senior club set up in the town. We estimate our volunteers contributed around 20,000 hours of unpaid time to deliver the coaching and associated work in the last year. Each person deserves a huge thanks for that, as do all our many sponsors among local business and individuals.

Although it is impossible to thank every individual who has supported us I do want to make special mention of a few people in particular. Katja Sturgeon, our Club Welfare Officer, is stepping down after more than a decade with Spartak and SWCFC. Kat's work has helped ensure that SWCFC recently gained the FA Chartered Standard Community Award, the highest available accreditation for any youth club, putting us in the top bracket of clubs in the East of England. A special mention is also due to Mark Hannigan who, in addition to coaching duties, refereed 35 matches this season, the highest number of any of our volunteers. Finally, our Club Secretary Keith Mullins deserves special mention for his incredible contribution across a range of areas, supporting not just SWCFC but also Plantation and PSG in areas like pitch allocations.

Plans are already well underway for season 2018-19. We expect to have record player numbers, and enter additional teams. This will allow us to promote both football for all and excellence in development. We are also actively looking for new training and playing facilities. Disappointingly at present that means looking outside of Saffron Walden, although it remains our hope that, with the support of the local authorities and the FA, new facilities including a 4G artificial pitch, can be delivered within the town in the near future. This would also aid us in delivering disability football to the town. Talks on that with the FA are ongoing, following the International deaf match between England and the Czech Republic at Catons Lane last in April, with both teams training at Herbert's Farm. We will be pushing hard on both 4G and disability football in the months ahead, while also remaining committed to the highest standards of welfare and coaching accreditation. Please keep supporting us and thanks again to our volunteers for their amazing work.

Martin Johnson  
Co-Chair  
Saffron Walden Community  
Football Club (SWCFC)



The 2017/18 has been a year of milestones and steep progress. The positives have included the undoubted success of the merger between Spartak 78 YSC and SWTYFC, the unprecedented growth of the club in terms of participant numbers, the number of coaches and volunteers involved and qualified or on the pathway and the progress made building relationships with people responsible for various venues.

Without wishing to repeat too much of what Martin Johnson has placed on record in his own report, my primary wish is to thank the coaches and managers and other assistants who contribute so much to the Club in terms of unpaid (and often unrewarded in any sense!) volunteering hours – all to enable mass participation in Youth Football. This is why we are all here, after all.

There have been some “bumps in the road” following the merger – but not many, and certainly none that make me feel in any way that it has been anything other than a very worthwhile exercise. In fact, more than that, it has been a huge success, there is no doubt. One of the perceived “barriers” to merging was the “loss of the Spartak name”. Not one person has said to me since September that this has been an issue. I really get the sense that everyone has embraced it and moved on, which we thought is what would happen.

A very pleasing by-product of the merger is that it enabled us to participate in EJA football – starting with Shane’s U15 team and next season they’re joined by Brian and Martin’s team, after huge efforts from Martin and Keith in particular, to press our case. The standard of football displayed has been very impressive. I said at the Spartak EGM when we voted on merging that we should not be ashamed to promote football for every ability level, and that we should also not be embarrassed about trying to raise the bar and both retain and attract talented local players instead of seeing them all fulfil their ambition elsewhere.

But we did also say that we must not lose sight of our promise to retain our commitment to footballers at every ability level. This remains our primary focus, and I was particularly pleased to see the emergence of “development” groups of players this year, i.e. children who the coaches felt weren’t quite ready for league football. This is a model, which we’ll use again.

One of the biggest challenges we faced during the year was the military exercise of retaining our Charter Standard Community Club status. Numerous Emergency Aid, and Safeguarding Children courses were organised (thanks Vince) and attended (thanks participants). We hosted another L1 Coaching course and will run another in September.

Special praise in particular must be given to Kat Sturgeon for dealing with (literally) dozens of DBS checks – both new and renewals. The size of this task should not be underplayed – it was a huge exercise and one which Kat discharged with her usual efficiency and humour, which was often tested. Her loss to the Club will be significant; we’re very sorry to see her go but we have to recognise that she’s very certainly “served her time” with Spartak 78 and SWCFC and deserves the chance to put her feet up. Thank you, Kat, for everything you (and Billy) have contributed to our Club over the last near decade.

The number of Referees we were able to allocate to our matches is remarkable. Co-ordinated by Keith, along with the incredibly complex pitch allocations, the standard of refereeing has been superb, and the average age of our Referee cohort is astoundingly low. This bodes well for the future – but we do need more.

There have been some negatives – despite the seemingly daily issues reported in the press about child abuse in football, there has been resistance (from a very small minority) to the notion that nobody coaches before they get DBS clearance. Kat had to work harder than she should’ve done.

Some of the positives around the referee success is countered by the lack of respect shown to them, especially to minors. It is very disappointing that some, albeit a minority, have needed to be reminded of their responsibilities and the behaviour standards required. We do not want this to be repeated next season.

I will end with some “looking forward” thoughts. I’d hoped to be able to say more about our mission to deliver a 3G AGP in Saffron Walden but I can’t at the moment. News is imminent, we hope, and Martin and I are going to throw some time and effort at this in the next month. We have much of the funding but there’ll be a big push needed.

We are close to being ready to launch Disability Football with the Club – an announcement on this is imminent. It is a collaboration with SWCHS, Lord Butler Leisure Centre and Essex FA. The intention is that we are used as a “blueprint” for other Clubs to follow and this is indeed an honour. This (and the 3G project) will be my focus for the next 12 months.

Our Mini Soccer School has never been better. We’ve got the largest cohort we’ve ever had, and a quite superb group of coaches. We’ve had sessions at Catons Lane, Herbert’s Farm and Carver Barracks. We will be feeding three U7 teams (possibly more) into Mini Soccer next season and already have around 35 children who will sign up next season for Mini Soccer School.

In my “Utopia” for the future, we’d have many more volunteers, more fund raisers, more referees, more EJA teams, Disability Football, at least one 3G pitch and everyone thinking “Club” rather than team.

Finally, it has been an honour and privilege to serve as Chairman of this great Club through the merger, and I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Martin as Co-Chairman. But the time has come for me to step down and for Martin to lead us forwards as Chairman. I will retain some involvement, specifically on the 3G and Disability Football projects next season and I look forward to getting your support for that.

Matt Clare  
Co-Chair  
Saffron Walden Community  
Football Club

