NOVEMBER 2026

DDSL INTOUCH

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DUBLIN AND DISTRICT SCHOOLBOYS' / GIRLS' LEAGUE

THE FOOTBALL ROUND-UP MAGAZINE



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LIFESTYLE SPORTS BOOT COMPETITION WINNERS 20

LIFESTYLE HEROES AWARDS

THEY DON'T DO IT FOR THE APPLAUSE.

THIS CHRISTMAS, THEY'RE GETTING IT ANYWAY.

Every club has them.

The person opening the gates. Finding the spare kit. Making sure a child feels welcome when they're not quite sure they belong.

They rarely make the headlines. But without them, grassroots football would look very different.

The Lifestyle Heroes Awards put those people centre stage.

With Q102 helping spread the word on the radio and the football community getting involved through nominations and voting, this year's search for our local heroes has now closed.

Next stop? Our Christmas Lunch, where the winners will be announced.

A PLACE FOR EVERY CHILD

Last year's winner Rachel Starrs of Finglas United shows exactly what these awards celebrate.

Rachel helped establish the club's inclusive Football For All programme, which has grown to welcome more than 40 children with a wide range of abilities. Alongside her fellow volunteers, she helps create somewhere children can play, express themselves and feel they belong.

Her ambition is simple: every club should have an inclusive team.

That's the difference a local hero can make.

THE NOMINATIONS ARE IN. THE THANK-YOU IS COMING.

To everyone who nominated someone or voted — thank you for helping recognise the people who give so much.

And to the nominees: enjoy letting someone else make a fuss of you for a change.

You've earned it.

DDSL CHRISTMAS LUNCH 4TH DECEMBER 2026





LEAGUE UPDATES

BEFORE THE BOOTS GO UNDER THE TREE...

A FEW IMPORTANT DATES FOR THE CLUB DIARY.

There's still football to be played before the Christmas break. And for anyone looking after a DDSL trophy, there's one important delivery to make first.

GREAT MEMORIES. NOW, ABOUT THAT CUP...

All clubs holding DDSL League Cups and Cup Final Trophies must return them to the League before 1 December 2026. Please arrange their return in good time.

DDSL rules provide for financial penalties where trophies are not returned by the deadline.

THE CHRISTMAS FOOTBALL COUNTDOWN

Age group	Final DDSL fixture weekend
Small-sided games, boys and girls, up to and including U11	Saturday 5–Sunday 6 December 2026
U12–U18	Friday 11–Sunday 13 December 2026

STILL IN THE SFAI CUP? KEEP THE BOOTS HANDY.

The DDSL Christmas break doesn't necessarily mean your team's fixtures are finished. SFAI Cup and Trophy games are scheduled across these designated playing dates:

Dates	Competitions
Friday 18–Sunday 20 December 2026	SFAI Cup / Trophy
Saturday 2–Sunday 3 January 2027	SFAI Cup / Trophy
Friday 8–Sunday 10 January 2027	SFAI Cup / Trophy

Clubs should ensure managers, players and families still involved in these competitions know about these dates before making Christmas plans. Check your team's confirmed fixture details and contact the relevant DDSL Fixture Secretary with any queries.

FIRST WHISTLE OF 2027?

We're awaiting confirmation of pitch reopening dates from the local councils before confirming the return of DDSL fixtures.

Please note

All SSG teams from U8's to U11's inclusive will finish games the weekend of the 5th/6th December and resume the weekend of the 23rd/24th January 2027.

All other Teams from under 12's to U18's will finish all DDSL League games the weekend of 12th/13th December and resume the weekend of 16th/17th January 2027.

BE ADVISED – Clubs involved in (Non-DDSL Competitions) SFAI, LFA & FAI competitions may have games in this period over the break.

The League offices will be closed from Tuesday 22nd December to Monday 4th January 2027.

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

BEFORE WE CALL IT A YEAR...

A Christmas message from DDSL Chairman Niall

Somewhere this season, a child pulled on a club jersey for the first time.

Another made a new friend. A young referee found the confidence to blow that first whistle. A volunteer stepped forward and discovered just how much goes into keeping a team on the pitch.

Across a league serving more than 55,000 players, those moments add up.

Since the start of the season, our clubs and the DDSL team have continued working to give children opportunities to play, learn and belong. Through weekly football, coach education, school visits and support for clubs, there is so much happening across our football community.

And behind every part of it are people giving their time.

To our club committees, coaches, referees, volunteers, staff and families — ***thank you.*** We know the early starts, the wet evenings and the jobs that somehow always need doing. Your commitment makes a difference to children every week.

To our players, ***thank you*** for reminding us why we do it. Your enthusiasm, effort and enjoyment remain the best part of the game.

There's plenty to look forward to in the new year. For now, I hope you get the chance to rest, spend time with the people who matter to you and enjoy the Christmas break.

Stay safe, look after one another and have a very happy Christmas.

See you beside a pitch in the new year.

Niall

Chairman, DDSL

FOOTBALL FOR ALL

THREE INDOOR BLITZES, A CHANCE FOR PLAYERS TO BECOME COACHES AND A DAY WHEN UP TO 90 FOOTBALLERS TOOK TO THE DANCE FLOOR.

THREE SUNDAYS OF INDOOR FOOTBALL

The DDSL has organised three Football for All blitzes at the indoor astro at Sport Ireland Campus, Abbotstown. The blitzes give players a chance to keep playing through the winter and meet teams of a similar age and playing level.

Date	Time	What's happening
Sunday 20 December 2026	10am–12.30pm	Christmas blitz with Santa
Sunday 31 January 2027	10am–12.30pm	Indoor blitz
Sunday 28 February 2027	10am–12.30pm	Indoor blitz

More details will be shared with clubs.

FROM PLAYING TO COACHING

17 Football for All players and 22 parents and coaches have already expressed interest in taking a coaching course. It's a chance for players to take what they've learned on the pitch and use it to help others enjoy the game. The DDSL hopes to run the course in Abbotstown in January 2027. Participants will need to complete Garda vetting and safeguarding requirements. The DDSL hopes to invite a government minister to present certificates once the course is complete. To register your interest, contact Mick Kennedy at gm@ddsl.ie

A DAY ON THE DANCE FLOOR

Up to 90 players joined family and friends at a disco and live music event organised by Knocklyon United and other local clubs. Players danced, sang and took turns playing instruments on stage, with Equal Vibes from Kilkenny keeping the music going for nearly three hours.

The DDSL has shared the idea with its Football for All clubs and would love to see clubs team up for an annual mini sports day followed by a disco or live music.

BRING FOOTBALL FOR ALL TO YOUR CLUB

If your club would like to start a Football for All section, or you're a parent looking for a team for your child, get in touch with Mick Kennedy, DDSL General Manager, on 086 058 0332 or gm@ddsl.ie.



COACHES CORNER

DIFFERENT STARTING ROLES. SAME TEAM.

DDSL U18s open with a win — and contributions from across the squad.

Every substitute waits for their moment. Then comes the call. Get ready. You're going on.



For the DDSL U18 Emerging Talent team, the players coming into the game helped make the difference in a 3–0 opening win against the Wexford League. A big thank-you to Crumlin United FC for hosting a great evening of football.

Cesare Collins of Cabinteely opened the scoring in the 52nd minute, before Fionn Dutton of Greystones United AFC added goals in the 76th and 85th minutes.

Three goals. A clean sheet. A strong start.

But what impressed manager Alan Murphy was the team performance, particularly the impact of the substitutes. Players entered the game ready to contribute and helped the team finish the job.

With a panel of nearly 30 players, that collective approach matters. Everyone has a part to play — in training, in preparation and when their opportunity comes.



BEFORE THE AVIVA... CAN YOU SPOT THEM?

This **2008 Gaynor Cup-winning team** features two players from the current Ireland Women's senior squad.

They're preparing to face **Poland at the Aviva Stadium on Saturday 5 December**

— But can you find them in this photo?



CLUB FOCUS

BLESSINGTON FC

SMALL BEGINNINGS. BIG AMBITIONS.

From one team in 1968 to a club with around 450 members, Blessington AFC has plenty to be proud of and more planned. We caught up with Chairperson John Hardy to talk first-day nerves, dedicated volunteers and building a club for life.

1. Tell us a bit about the club.

Blessington AFC is a proud, community-based football club founded in 1968. What began as a small group of local lads with a shared love of football has grown into one of the most important sporting organisations in Blessington and the wider West Wicklow community.

Over the years, the club has developed considerably, providing opportunities for boys and girls of all ages and abilities to enjoy football, develop their skills and build friendships that can last a lifetime.

Today, Blessington AFC is about much more than football. We are a club built on community spirit, inclusion and a shared commitment to providing a positive sporting environment for everyone involved.

Our motto, "Together Everyone Achieves More," reflects the values that have guided the club throughout its history and continue to shape its future.

2. Tell us about the committee members, coaches and volunteers in the club.

Like every successful grassroots football club, Blessington AFC is built on the dedication and generosity of its volunteers.

Behind every match, training session and club event is a group of people giving freely of their time to ensure that our players have the best possible football experience.

Our Executive Committee oversees the running and continued development of the club, supported by a fantastic network of coaches, team managers, parents and volunteers who contribute in countless ways throughout the season.

Our coaches play a particularly important role. Beyond developing footballing ability, they help young players build confidence, resilience, teamwork and respect. Many have remained with the same groups of players since their earliest days in our Academy, demonstrating an extraordinary level of commitment to grassroots football.

Running a club of our size requires considerable organisation, from safeguarding and administration to maintaining facilities, fundraising, securing sponsorship and planning for future growth.

We are extremely fortunate to have people willing to take on these responsibilities, often while balancing their own work and family commitments.

Their contribution is the foundation upon which Blessington AFC continues to grow, and we are enormously grateful to every individual who plays a part.

3. What is it like for a child joining the club for the first time?

We want every child joining Blessington AFC to feel welcome from the moment they walk through the gates.

For many, joining our Academy is their very first experience of organised football. Some arrive full of confidence, while others are understandably a little nervous.

Regardless of ability or previous experience, our aim is to provide a fun, supportive and inclusive environment where every child feels comfortable learning at their own pace.

At Academy level, the emphasis is very much on enjoyment, participation, developing fundamental skills and making friends.

There is nothing more rewarding than seeing a child arrive for their first training session feeling unsure, only to leave an hour later with a big smile, new friendships and an eagerness to return the following week.

As players progress through the age groups, we aim to support their development both on and off the pitch, helping them grow in confidence, learn the importance of teamwork and develop a lasting love for the game.

For us, that is the essence of grassroots football. We want every child to feel they belong, enjoy their football and create memories and friendships that stay with them long after their playing days.

4. What has your club been proudest of recently?



Without question, one of our greatest achievements has been the continued growth and development of Blessington AFC.

From humble beginnings with a single senior team in 1968, the club has grown into an organisation with approximately 450 members, an Academy catering for around 90 children and 17 under-age teams competing in the DDSL.

Alongside our under-age section, we have a senior men's team competing in the Leinster Senior League Premier Sunday Division and an Over-35s team, providing opportunities for players to remain involved in competitive football as they progress through different stages of their lives.

This reflects an important ambition for the club: to provide a genuine football pathway, beginning in our Academy, progressing through under-age and senior football and continuing into our Over-35s team.

We want players who begin their football journey with Blessington AFC as young children to have the opportunity to remain part of the club for decades.

Another area of particular pride has been the development of girls' football.

We currently have three girls' teams competing in the DDSL, and we are determined to build on that progress. One of our longer-term ambitions is to establish a pathway into senior women's football, ensuring that girls who begin playing with Blessington AFC have the opportunity to continue representing their local club into adulthood.

Our participation in the DDSL has been an important part of the development of our under-age section, providing structured and competitive football that helps our young players and coaches continue to progress.

We are also incredibly proud of the support we receive from the wider community. Local families, businesses, sponsors and volunteers have played an enormous role in helping the club reach this point. Of course, continued growth brings challenges, particularly around facilities and playing space. However, these are challenges that reflect the strength of the club and the increasing demand for grassroots football in our community.

Above all, we are proud that Blessington AFC continues to be a place where hundreds of young people can enjoy football, develop friendships and feel part of something bigger than themselves.

5. What's next for your club?

The future is an exciting one for Blessington AFC.

Our ambition is to continue developing the club in a sustainable way, ensuring that our facilities and football structures keep pace with our growing membership.

One of our most significant priorities is the development of a dedicated all-weather training facility.

At present, we rely on renting facilities from other local sporting organisations to accommodate our training requirements. While we are grateful for that support, having our own Astro facility would represent a major step forward for Blessington AFC.

Our committee is actively progressing plans for this development, which would provide a valuable resource for our players, coaches and future generations of the club.

Alongside improving our facilities, we want to continue strengthening our under-age structures, supporting our coaches through education and development, and expanding opportunities for girls and boys to participate in football.

Developing a clear pathway from Academy football through to our senior teams remains an important objective, as does our ambition to establish senior women's football within the club.

We also recognise the importance of encouraging new volunteers and developing the next generation of coaches and club administrators. The long-term success of any grassroots club depends on people being willing to contribute, take responsibility and carry the club forward.

Ultimately, our ambition is to build on the tremendous work of those who established and developed Blessington AFC over almost six decades.

We are proud of our history, excited about our present and ambitious for our future.

Our goal is simple: to ensure that Blessington AFC remains at the heart of the community, providing opportunities for people to enjoy football, develop friendships and remain connected to their local club for generations to come.



CLUB FOCUS

BLESSINGTON FC

HARRY'S STORY

Harry was only six or seven when he volunteered to write for the Junior Hoops. His first piece was handwritten on a sheet of paper, spelling mistakes and all. Now 15, the Blessington FC player contributes to every issue of Hoops Scene, the Shamrock Rovers match day programme.

Harry tells us about the away trip with his dad that made him fall in love with football, why training with your mates is always a bit of craic, and what he'd ask Pep Guardiola if he ever got the chance.

GETTING TO KNOW HARRY

1. First of all, tell us a little bit about yourself. How old are you, what school do you go to, and what do you enjoy doing outside of football?

I'm 15 years old and I go to Blessington Community College. I watch a lot of football, along with playing the game itself, so it takes up a lot of my time. When I'm able to do my own thing, I enjoy playing the PlayStation and listening to music.

2. Where did your love of football begin? Can you remember when you first became interested in the game, and was there anyone who inspired you?

My love of football began when my dad brought me to a Shamrock Rovers game in 2017. It was an away one in Dundalk. I loved the trip up, and the fact that it was an experience I'd never lived through before made it very special. I was in the Blessington AFC academy as well, which I enjoyed every Sunday morning. So that's what made me fall in love with the game.

3. Who is your favourite football team and player, and what makes them special to you?

My favourite team is Shamrock Rovers. I've been going to matches since 2016, and regularly from the end of the 2017 season. It's so much better than supporting a team from England. You feel like a part of something supporting your local team, while people who only watch on TV really don't know what it's like. My favourite player is Graham Burke. He is absolutely the best player in the League of Ireland, an unbelievable dribbler of the ball and a player that makes you fall in love with the game.

YOUR FOOTBALL JOURNEY WITH BLESSINGTON FC

1. Tell us about your journey with Blessington FC. How long have you been playing there, and how did you first get involved?

I've been playing there ever since I began football. It started off with the academy before eventually moving up the levels in under-age football. I wasn't keen on it at the start, but I was soon invested in going every week, and that's how I got involved.

2. What's your favourite thing about being part of Blessington FC? What makes the club such a special place for you?

My favourite part about the club is how everyone is very welcoming. We all get on very well with each other, and it's a place where you're able to forget everything and just enjoy being around good people who love football.

3**. What do you enjoy most about playing football? Is it the matches, scoring goals, learning new skills, spending time with your teammates or something else?**

Of course, scoring goals is the best in football, but playing with your mates is also a great feeling. When you win, it's even better. It's always a bit of craic whenever we train, and having the banter is all part of it as well.

4. What's your favourite football memory so far? It could be a match, a goal, a trip away with your team or just a brilliant moment with your friends.

I have a lot of fond memories following Rovers. My dad and I were in Athens last year when we drew 1–1 with AEK, who are now in the Champions League league phase. The best feeling in football, in my opinion, is watching your team play away from home in Europe. Nothing compares to it. When Markus Poom equalised against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge in 2024, that was very special, obviously being there in the moment.



5. Has being involved in football taught you anything important about yourself, friendships or working as part of a team?

I've learned to be more patient with people. You obviously want the ball a lot, so when it's not passed to you, it's the skill of being patient and learning to keep going. It's a small one, but it transfers over to real life and helps you keep persevering with family and friends.

WRITING FOR SHAMROCK ROVERS

1. We heard you had the fantastic opportunity to write for the Shamrock Rovers match day magazine! Tell us how that came about. How did you get involved?

It came about when the Junior Hoops were looking for members to contribute a piece to the programme. I volunteered at around the age of six or seven and kept doing them every so often. After some time, I was offered the chance to write for every issue, and from there I've been doing it for every copy of Hoops Scene.

2. Have you always enjoyed writing about football, or was this something completely new that you decided to try?

As I was so young, I was open to doing anything really and didn't think about it too much. It was obviously new at the time, and it was something I was happy to give a go.

3. Tell us about the piece you wrote. What was it about, and how did you go about putting it together?

It was on a favourite game that I had been to. I wrote it on a piece of paper and it had many spelling mistakes A screen shot of the article was submitted, and that's what went into the programme. It was all done in the moment, me just writing what came to my head.

4. What was it like seeing your own work published in the Shamrock Rovers match day magazine? How did you feel, and what did your family and friends think?

It was a feeling of immense pride. My family were very impressed, and it was only when I was contributing regularly to the programme that I actually told my friends about my role.

5. What was the best part of the whole experience? Did it make you want to do more writing or get involved in other areas of football?

The best part was seeing my name in Hoops Scene. It made me want to do it more, to be recognised and feel that pride of being on a printed page for loads to see.

YOUR PERSONALITY AND AMBITIONS

1. You've already had a brilliant opportunity at such a young age. Are you someone who enjoys trying new things and putting yourself forward, or do you sometimes have to push yourself to give things a go?

I enjoy pushing myself and branching out. Doing different things is something I enjoy, and it's a good trait to have going forward for sure.

2. What's something you're really proud of achieving so far, either on or off the football pitch?

Off the pitch, I was recently invited into hospitality for the Ireland–Kosovo game because of a different volunteer role I have at Rovers. It was a very proud moment for me, and there have been other things I've done that I'm happy to say I've accomplished.

3. Football offers so many opportunities beyond playing. Could you see yourself working in football or sport when you're older? What would your dream job be?

I can see myself being involved in sports journalism when I'm older. Being a content creator is something I'd be interested in, or commentating on games. That's another side of football I really enjoy listening to.

4. If you could interview any footballer, manager or sporting personality in the world, who would it be, and what would you ask them?

I would love to interview Messi, of course. That's an obvious one. I think talking to Pep Guardiola would be fascinating. I'd ask him about how he comes up with his tactics, how long he spends on them and how much time he spends thinking about football.

5. What would you say to another young person your age who loves football and wants to try something new but might be nervous about giving it a go?

Do what you enjoy and try not to worry about what anybody thinks. Many a time I've factored in other people's thoughts when I shouldn't have, but if you block that out you'll enjoy life more. It's your life, your choices. Don't let other people's thoughts affect what you do.

FINALLY, A FEW FUN QUESTIONS

1. If you could play one match in any stadium in the world, where would it be and why?

The Bernabéu in a big Champions League game. It's a massive stadium and so many people would be watching, so it would be an incredible experience. Closer to home, playing at the Aviva for Ireland would be a dream, and so would playing at Tallaght Stadium for Shamrock Rovers.

2. If you could spend a day with any footballer, past or present, who would you choose?

Diego Maradona. With his lifestyle, he would be the choice. Football in the morning and partying at night was very common for him. He of course scored the most famous brace in football history as well at Mexico '86. As I write this, it's six years to the day since he died.

3**. Finally, Harry, if we were to interview you again in ten years' time, what would you love to be telling us about your life and football journey?**

That I've kept improving and got jobs in football where I can express myself and show what I can do. I'd hope to be in a fantastic position in life, and to be a good person who loves football as much as I do now!



IRELAND MEN AND WOMEN



THREE GOALS & PLENTY TO CHEER ABOUT. BEFORE THE AVIVA THERE WAS MALAHIDE.

Another familiar beginning behind an Ireland goalscorer.

Troy Parrott scored twice. Jack Moylan added the third. Ireland's 3–0 win over Kosovo had plenty for the DDSL community to celebrate.

We've followed Troy's journey from Belvedere. **But did you know Jack played his schoolboy football with Malahide United before joining Bohemians?**

Before the international jersey came the club jersey. Training evenings, weekend matches and people helping a young player find his feet.

Jack's journey is another reminder that development takes time. From Malahide through the League of Ireland and into professional football abroad, he has continued building towards nights like Tuesday.
For our young players, there's plenty of encouragement in that story. For grassroots coaches and volunteers, there's pride in knowing where it begins.

The next chapter might start at your club



THEIR JERSEYS. OUR HEROES.

LET'S GET BEHIND THE GIRLS IN GREEN.



Somewhere in the DDSL, a young girl is pulling on her boots, practising her first touch and pretending she's Katie McCabe, Abbie Larkin, Jessie Stapleton, Jamie Finn or Chloe Mustaki.

That's the power of seeing hero's lead the way.

For the 12,500 girls playing in the DDSL, captain Katie McCabe and her Ireland teammates show what's possible. They give young players heroes to look up to and plenty of reasons to keep chasing a ball around a muddy pitch.

Now it's our turn to support them.

Ireland face Poland at the Aviva Stadium on Saturday 5 December, with a place at the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup at stake.

It's a huge occasion for the team. And an opportunity for our football community to bring the noise.

Bring your teammates. Bring the family. Wear the green and give the players a crowd to remember.

From everyone across the DDSL, we wish the team the very best of luck.

You're inspiring our girls every week. This time, let them hear us cheering.





SHOWCASE GAMES

A DIFFERENT STAGE. THEIR GAME.

Showcase football at Abbottstown.





The kit bags are packed. The team is gathering. Someone is already asking which pitch they're on.

It's a familiar match-day scene — with a different setting.

Our showcase games give DDSL teams the opportunity to experience playing at Abbottstown, bringing players, coaches and families together for a special occasion.

The setting is part of the attraction. The environment we create around the games matters just as much.

We want players to feel excited about playing, confident enough to try things and comfortable making mistakes. Coaches can help by encouraging their teams and giving players room to make decisions. Parents can help make the occasion memorable with positive support from the sideline.

Good football deserves a good atmosphere.

FOUR GAMES. PLENTY OF STORIES.



U14 Girls Premier — Stepaside v Swords Celtic

Stepaside and Swords Celtic brought plenty of energy to the U14 Girls Premier showcase, giving everyone watching a game to get behind.

U14 Major — Portmarnock v Kilnamanagh

Portmarnock and Kilnamanagh kept the football flowing in the U14 Major match, with both teams contributing to a great game to watch.

U13 A2 Sunday — Sheriff YC v Sporting Greystones

Sheriff YC and Sporting Greystones served up an entertaining U13 A2 Sunday fixture, with plenty for both sets of supporters to cheer on.

U12 Major — Ardmore Rovers v Dunboyne FC

Ardmore Rovers and Dunboyne FC brought the same enthusiasm to the U12 Major game, rounding out a brilliant set of fixtures at Abbottstown.

A big thank-you to all eight clubs for being part of it, to the coaches who gave their players room to try things, and to the families who brought the encouragement from the sidelines. Most of all, thanks to the players for giving us four games worth watching.

A special place to play. Let's give them a day to remember.

OFFSIDE STORIES



FIVE YARDS AWAY. FIFTY OPINIONS.

Anthony Halpin on life behind the whistle.

During the week, I'm a project manager with Circet, a job I thoroughly enjoy. At the weekend, you'll find me in the middle of a football pitch.

My refereeing journey started with an in-house friendly at my club, Kilnamanagh. I gave it a go and got the buzz for it straight away.

Being in the middle gives you a completely different view of the game. You see things that coaches and parents don't always get to see from the sideline.

THE REASON I COME BACK

What I enjoy most is seeing the children develop week in, week out. There are so many good experiences at games, and those are what keep me coming back.

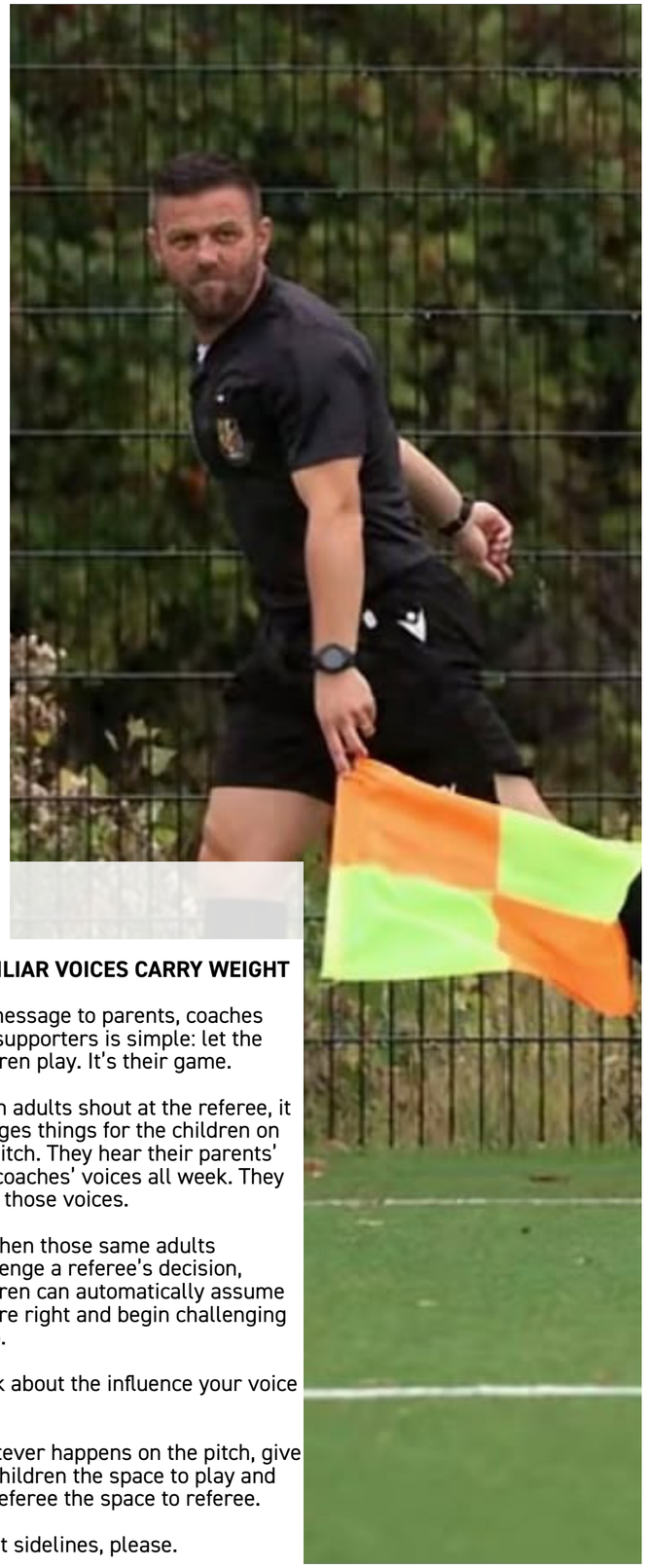
I'd love every coach and parent to have the chance to see a match through a referee's eyes. It might change their perspective on some of the decisions they're calling for.

Sometimes I'm five yards from an incident, while someone 50 yards away is convinced they've had the better view!

DISAGREEMENT IS PART OF FOOTBALL

Most of what I experience is the usual disagreement over decisions. That doesn't particularly affect me. I always explain my close decisions to the players — they're the most important people out there.

Thankfully, I haven't had an incident that I've taken home with me or that has played on my mind afterwards. Please God, for me and every other referee, it stays that way.



FAMILIAR VOICES CARRY WEIGHT

My message to parents, coaches and supporters is simple: let the children play. It's their game.

When adults shout at the referee, it changes things for the children on the pitch. They hear their parents' and coaches' voices all week. They trust those voices.

So when those same adults challenge a referee's decision, children can automatically assume they're right and begin challenging it too.

Think about the influence your voice has.

Whatever happens on the pitch, give the children the space to play and the referee the space to referee.

Silent sidelines, please.

Anthony Halpin — DDSL Referee

FOUNDATIONS PROGRAMME

355 CHILDREN. 32 SESSIONS. PLENTY OF REASONS TO SMILE.

The Foundations Programme is off and running.

A new place to play. New faces to meet. And a ball that everyone wants at their feet.

Since returning on 12 October, the DDSL Foundations Programme has welcomed 355 children across 32 sessions, with new coaches, clubs and players getting to experience the programme.

The numbers tell part of the story. The smiles tell the rest.
At Abbottstown, the focus is on giving children a positive football experience: plenty of touches, chances to try something new and games that keep them involved.

A skill might work first time. It might take another few attempts. Either way, there's encouragement to have a go, make decisions and enjoy learning.

Along the way, players meet children from other clubs, coaches share the experience and everyone gets the chance to see football in a different setting.

THANK YOU FOR BRINGING THE ENERGY

To every player, coach and club that has taken part so far — thank you. Your enthusiasm has helped make these sessions something to look forward to.

There's more to come, with the Foundations Programme back again in January.

We'll bring the footballs. You bring those smiles.









3X3 EVENTS

SMALL TEAMS. NON-STOP FOOTBALL.



51 teams. 250 players. Plenty of touches.

Receive it. Take someone on. Find a teammate. Have a shot.

Then do it all again.

Our recent 3v3 event brought 51 teams and 250 players to the Sport Ireland Indoor Pitches for a different kind of football experience.
With fewer players on the pitch, everyone is closer to the action. More touches of the ball. More chances to score. More decisions to make.

Do I pass or dribble? Where's the space? Can I win it back?

Those decisions belong to the children. The games give them opportunities to try things, make mistakes and find solutions — all in a fun environment that keeps them involved.

And with the action coming thick and fast, the next opportunity is never far away.

FOR THE FIRST TIME: EVERY LEAGUE IS INVITED.

Our next event takes place on Saturday 28 November, and for the first time, it's open to teams from all leagues.

New opponents. Different challenges. The same enjoyment of playing the game.

We're back on Sunday 3 January, also open to teams from every league.

Next events	Who can enter?
Sunday 3 January 2027	All teams from any leagues in Ireland

To book, search "3v3 Ireland" on Eventbrite.

Three a side. Everyone involved.



LIFESTYLE SPORTS BOOT WINNERS

TWO NEW SIGNINGS. SOME VERY HAPPY FEET.





A boot contract, a trip to Grafton Street and a moment to remember.

Signing your own football boot contract. That takes some beating.

For **Conor Briody** from **Shamrock Rovers FC** and **Maria Delsante** from **Clontarf FC** winning the Lifestyle Sports Boots for a Year competition came with a special trip to Grafton Street to put pen to paper.

Joining them for the occasion were the CEO of Lifestyle Sports Mark Stafford, DDSL Commercial Director Christopher Dodd and DDSL Director of Football Barry Ferguson, helping give our two winners a signing day of their own.

The boots will get plenty of use. The memory of signing that contract might last even longer.



Maria Delsante
Clontarf FC



Conor Briody
Shamrock Rovers FC



Left to Right

Mark Stafford - CEO Life Style Sports
Maria Delsante - Clontarf FC
Chris Dodd - DDSL Commercial Manager
Conor Briody - Shamrock Rovers FC
Barry Ferguson - DDSL Director of Football

BORN TO GROW

SMALL BOOTS. BIG FIRST STEPS

Born to Grow is helping children discover their game.

For some children, it's their first football session.

Their first chance to try a new skill. Their first little goal. Their first discovery that chasing a ball around with their friends is a pretty good way to spend a school morning.

That first experience matters.

Through Born to Grow, our coaches are helping children enjoy an introduction to football that's full of encouragement, activity and fun — giving them reasons to want to play again.

14 SCHOOLS. HUNDREDS OF NEW BEGINNINGS.

Working across Fingal and Dublin City Council areas, the programme has reached 14 schools so far.
Block One delivered 27 school sessions for 763 children. Block Two is expected to deliver 32 sessions, with a similar number of children projected to take part.

Behind those numbers are children discovering what they enjoy, growing in confidence and getting involved at their own pace.
Our coaches help set that tone. A friendly welcome. A simple challenge. Encouragement to have another go.

FROM THE SCHOOL YARD TO THE LOCAL CLUB

For some children, the football is already continuing beyond the school gates.

We've helped connect children with local clubs so they can keep playing in their own communities — building on that first experience and finding somewhere to take their next steps.

Want to hear how it's going? Visit our social media pages for interviews with the teachers seeing the programme in action.

Block Two finishes on 9 December, with Block Three beginning in January.

Thank you to the schools, teachers, coaches and council partners helping make it happen.

The first session is just the beginning.



THE PLAYERS AREN'T THE ONLY ONES LEARNING.



44 workshops. 1,047 coaches. Plenty of ideas to bring back to the pitch.

Sometimes, one simple idea is all you need.

A small change to a practice. A different question to ask. A way to get everyone playing instead of waiting for their turn.

Across 44 DDSL Coach Education workshops, 1,047 coaches have taken part, making time to learn, share experiences and find practical ideas for their teams.

Thank you to everyone who has come along, asked a question or given something new a try.

The challenge now? Bring that learning back to your players.

You don't have to change everything at once. Pick something useful, try it out and see how your group responds.

Keep learning. Keep it simple. Keep it fun.









A SAFE PAIR OF HANDS

Faults & Fixes with Dave Henderson

A SAFE PAIR OF HANDS

Faults & Fixes with Dave Henderson

I played my schoolboy football in Stella Maris before moving on to Shamrock Rovers as a full time professional in 1977 and played senior football for 22 season at Rovers Bohs Drogheda Home Farm & Pats winning various team honours and individual recognition at u21 Olympic and loi representative honours I also had 2 seasons in America NASL where at the time players like Pele Beckenbauer Best Cruyff Muller and some English household names like Peter Lorimer Trevor Francis Alan Ball etc played at the time.

Coaching goalkeepers stated with Brian Kerr under-age international teams that went on to win European championships

I then went into academy recruitment/scouting for Aston Villa for 10 years while also working for Shelbourne as a opposition analyst which started a very successful working relationship with Pat Fenlon that included Shels Bohs Rovers and Hibernian winning many trophies along the way

While at Rovers and Bohs I also had spells as first team goalkeeper coach and at Bohs I was also first team ladies goalie coach

My family background is very big in goalkeeping with my dad having played loi with Rovers and Drogheda along with my brother Stephen played and coached loi and younger brother Wayne who played senior international for Ireland both Wayne and Stephen sons are involved in English football as goalkeepers and Stephen jr is actually first team goalie coach at Charlton and I have a granddaughter that has somehow ended up in goal too

The purpose of the Goalkeepers Faults and Fixes Workshop is to give coaches/volunteers/ parents a understanding of the GK position and a improved ability to recognise fundamental faults as they happen understand why/how they happen and give them a guide to basic practices to help their young goalies fix their faults and ultimately improve their goalkeeping skills while increasing everyone's understanding of the goalkeeping position and ultimately the game itself

By attending the workshop we hope to give coaches a better insight to the goalkeeping position and understanding various scenarios that arise in games and training environments which may lead to errors/ bad habits,we can then show them the basic practices to improve the basic skill sets needed for those scenarios and ultimately the young goalies to gain confidence in their technique

We want the coaches parents etc to have a better basic understanding of what the position entails so that they can recognise a fault and come up with a relevant fix to help the young goalies, if particular faults go unrecognised they can and do become bad habits ,goalies lose confidence and ultimately give up,early intervention is what we are aiming for to encourage strong basis fundamentals catching diving set position etc, habits are very difficult to rectify as they get older

RECOGNISE A FAULT AND FIX IT BEFORE IT BECOMES A HABIT

Some of the most common faults we see are fixable, by not over complicating handling drills and monitoring the basic skills needed to compete a simple task a coach can give relevant feedback , there is no need for a ninja assault course before a young goalie makes a basic catch, faults such as poor set position,turning away from shots due to fear of the ball, diving off the wrong leg turning body in mid air and from the girls side they seem to have an issue with going back and up to overheads, all of which can be fixed with consistent good delivery in training practices leading to young goalies again gaining confidence in their abilities

On a personal note the delivery of these workshops has been very enjoyable with some great feedback from coaches at all levels of the game who seem really happy with the way we have taken the goalie coaching back to basics allowing them a better understanding of what they are actually looking at when it comes to the goalkeeping side of the game , ultimately we want them to know the fundamentals ,and the tools to coach them

- *Defend the goal*
- *Defend the space*
- *Distribution Control*
- *Crosses cutbacks communication*
- *To coach these fundamental practices properly the coach must understand*
- *What the practice is*
- *Why they are doing it*
- *How it will improve their goalie*



My biggest takeaway from the workshops is while we can give the goalies the technical skill sets to improve with solid consistent drills ,we also need to work harder at giving them a better understanding of the game and a better understanding of the mindset of the outfield players allowing them get on the front foot and improving their anticipation ,by reading the game quicker this allows them in the MOMENT to react quicker by DECIDING on the correct ACTION /save ,I believe this ability to READ/REACT is the biggest factor in the progression of young goalies

WICKLOW: THE STORY CONTINUES

DDSL V WICKLOW LEAGUE — MATCH POSTPONED

The DDSL U18s' match against the Wicklow League was postponed due to bad weather. Alan Murphy and his squad will face Wicklow on a rearranged date, with details to follow once the fixture is confirmed.

NEXT UP: KILKENNY AT HOME

The DDSL U18s welcome the Kilkenny League to Hartstown Huntstown FC on 9 December, with an 8pm kick-off.

Another challenge. Another chance for the squad to show what it can do together.

A big thank-you to Hartstown Huntstown FC for hosting. Come along and get behind the team!





DRIVING THE DDSL FORWARD

A NEW LOOK. THE SAME COMMITMENT TO GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL.

Welcoming Hyundai as a new sponsor, supporting grassroots football in Dublin.



HYUNDAI | PROUD SPONSOR OF THE DUBLIN AND DISTRICT SCHOOLBOYS LEAGUE

DDSL OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT



DDSL INTOUCH

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DUBLIN AND DISTRICT SCHOOLBOYS' / GIRLS' LEAGUE

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