



ENGLAND FOOTBALL COUNTY FA AWARD NOMINATION



**ENGLAND
FOOTBALL**

FOOTBALL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

LEISURE LEAGUES

LINCOLNSHIRE FA



WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM?

A data review and decline in traditional 11 v 11 open age football revealed that players who couldn't commit to traditional formats were getting their football fix through small sided, consistent, low admin, low commitment offers. If we could develop existing opportunities, we could better create a level of stability and improve both team and player retention.

Our objective was to ultimately get more of a grip and influence on the small sided market and have a trusted small-sided offer which we could signpost players from 11 v 11 football into. We wanted to create a fluid two-way transition system between the formats. Players didn't have to commit to one or the other, but it felt as though the tide was turning, and that the small-sided environment was tailored to better suit the lifestyle of the modern participant.

HOW WOULD WE SOLVE IT?

Our initial reaction was to set up our own County FA small sided league, but we quickly realised that those providers who had long standing, established offers held the monopoly of the market and we couldn't break that, we understood players are not always receptive to changing environments.

As a result we wanted to be innovative, we wanted to broker a partnership which was mutually beneficial with small sided providers, and we had an attitude that was prepared to work through any historical differences and start anew. We took time to understand how, as a County FA, we could add value to the existing offer of Leisure Leagues, and what we could do to improve their opportunities to better retain and grow participation.

During several meetings with local, regional and national representatives we outlined what was expected of LL from an affiliated, insurance and safeguarding perspective, and what we could offer in return, inclusive of referee support, discipline guidance, and equipment packs. Alongside our ability to market and advertise their opportunities across Lincolnshire, and support with Football Turf Pitches, we knew our value proposition was strong. Having this partnership in place would allow us to achieve our objective of having more an influence on the small sided market, and we would be able to signpost players between the two formats.



WHAT WAS THE RESULT?

All of the leagues managed by the regional representative responsible for Lincolnshire have been sanctioned by the Lincolnshire Football Association following the sign off of the competition rules. This has resulted in 6 different small-sided leagues affiliating, and 131 teams playing within Leisure Leagues have affiliated.

We have brand new Over 35 offerings in South Lincolnshire to complement existing offers in central and North Lincolnshire. We have also used Leisure Leagues as a delivery arm to co-create and deliver our first ever female only small-sided competitions, taking place in areas of high female activity which was a landmark achievement for both parties.

We have completed a 'player insight survey', completed by over 50 participants of Leisure Leagues, to understand where we need to invest time and resource to improve the matchday experience of players, linked to discipline, equipment, and satisfaction. We have supported local leagues in appointing FA registered officials to fixture nights at late notice, with some of those referees now permanent appointments. Leisure Leagues have signposted officials to Lincolnshire FA to enrol onto referee courses, again, creating a culture that is mutually beneficial.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The next step of our partnership is to ensure the findings of the player insight survey are continually reviewed and implemented where possible. It's of great importance to both Leisure Leagues and Lincolnshire FA that the modern participant has a voice that is valued and listened to.

Another important step, probably the most crucial of our partnership so far, is to ensure the recently introduced safeguarding operating standards for small sided football are adopted and in place for the new 2022/23 season.

If you, or somebody you know would like to be involved in the programme please don't hesitate to get in touch with jake.park@lincolnshirefa.com.

A BIG THANK YOU MUST GO TO OUR PROJECT PARTNERS:

- Michael Clarke
- Leisure Leagues



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