



DAN'S UCFC STORY

A Leads journey

WHY DID YOU JOIN UCFC?

At the start of 2024, I regularly saw the group advertised on Facebook and recognised a few of my friends/teammates from photos posted about the Camborne group. I asked my friends about it to see what it was like and then emailed Jack to find out more, attending my first session the following Monday. I have been attending weekly ever since!

I have always loved football, but I born was with a heart condition, so it has not always been accessible to me. Exercise was always encouraged by doctors, but I was limited in terms of competitive/contact sports. Due to my condition, I qualified to play in the Cornwall Disability League and did so throughout secondary school and when I moved back to Cornwall after university. I was training with a local team, but it got to the point where I wasn't finding football fulfilling, it felt like a chore and messed up my weekends. When affiliated to a team, you feel the expectation to give up a lot of your time, or you're letting the team down. UCFC isn't like that, you are free to drop in and play football as you please. The group offered an opportunity to play in the evenings on weekdays, in an environment where I didn't feel judged and could begin to enjoy my football again.

The weekly sessions are great fun, not too competitive with some lovely football being played. A big part of UCFC is our monthly friendlies against other social football teams. I'd have never dreamed of consistently playing 11-a-side football when I was younger, but now after few games, dodgy offside calls, and own goals, I can say I've done it and loved it. You get to see a completely different side of playing football without the pressure of winning or performing well (bragging rights aside).



BECOMING A LEAD

I decided to become a lead as the group was looking for someone to support Helston and Camborne sessions, which I attended weekly. The role also came with training and responsibilities that I thought would look good on my CV. The group is constantly growing, and I hope it will lead to more opportunities for me further down the line.

I wanted to do something to give back to the group that I enjoy being a part of and let my personality come through more in a lead role. I was particularly drawn to taking on a lead role at the Helston sessions as I believe that it's the group that embodies the spirit of UCFC the most. Everyone in the group is diverse, supportive, there are some amazing personalities that show up with some top tier banter. They are easy to manage and don't take themselves too seriously. We have a good team in Helston, with Jack, Damian and Alex all contributing to successful sessions. Information is always given in a timely and understandable way, so it can be shared with the rest of the group.

If you're not feeling up to leading one week, or if you're away, there is always somewhere there to fill in. It's enjoyable (when you're not getting moaned at) and really rewarding when someone comes up to you at the end, shakes your hand and says, "good session today mate". That's what it's all about!





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WHY UCFC?

As much as it may be cliché, attending UCFC is genuinely the highlight of my week. You get the opportunity to do something that you love, judgement free and has the nostalgic feeling of being back in the park with your mates. The guidelines that have been put in place ensure that each session is well-run, accessible and that everyone has a fair opportunity to provide feedback. I feel as though I have made some strong friendships and connections with some of the people who attend the sessions. I'd feel just as comfortable having a game of 5-a-side as I would meeting them for a pint, that's testament to the warming and social atmosphere at the sessions. It's an escape from daily pressures and the perfect space to uplift your mood if you're going through a hard time.

Also, for my mental and physical health I need my weekly football fix. I thrive off the banter and camaraderie, and have felt loads fitter and healthier since I started attending.

THE UCFC COMMUNITY

Without the connections made through UCFC, there is a chance I'd currently be without a job. People throughout the country are suffering with unemployment and it's particularly difficult for young people to find opportunities in Cornwall.

I attended a Helston session one Thursday; having been told I was being let go from my job earlier that day. I was obviously gutted but still attended the session as I thought it would lift my mood. Damian, one of the Project Officers, could see that I wasn't quite myself, and I explained the situation surrounding my job. Fortunately for me, Damian owns a few pubs near to me and was looking to hire a manager at one of his sites, he asked if I would be interested in applying. I took him up on the offer, interviewed well and started a couple of months later.

It goes to show, sometimes it's not what you know, it's who you know. People from all sorts of backgrounds come to our sessions and the more you get to know them, who knows what it might lead to? What I've really enjoyed about the time we spend around playing football is getting to know everyone as people. What they do for work, what their interests are outside of football, funny stories about their families or tales from their weekend out. It creates the foundation for a really strong support network, where people feel empowered to share their feelings. I believe that leaning into that has built such a sense of community that sets the group apart from anything similar.

I'm really grateful it exists, and my weeks wouldn't be the same without it, I'm sure I'm not alone in saying that.

