

#HERGAMETOO

This week we are putting a spotlight on the youngest football group based at FC Hartlepool.

Their ever-growing team is called FC Little Kickers.

The coaches are Jon Gould, Craig Linsel, Darren Thompson, Adam Garrington and Ben Goodwin.

The coaches told us:

"FC Little Kickers training sessions happen every Saturday morning. We run two sessions. Nursery and Reception aged children train from 09:00 till 09:45. Children in the academic age group Year 1 train after at 10:00 till 11:00. Both sessions take place at Grayfields on the astro turf pitch. We are always encouraging new children to come along and give it a try and all information can be found on FC Hartlepool's social media pages! It's amazing to see such young children come through the doors and most have never kicked a football before, and then you can see them develop and start to understand what they are doing.

As FC Little Kickers don't play in a league due to the ages of the children that we have coming along, the focus is on developing simple football skills as most who come along have never kicked a ball before. The children are very young so activities and games we do every Saturday morning is designed to keep them engaged but allowing them to have fun and make friends at the same time. We have a lovely little community and it's continuously growing



which is great to see. The club has massively grown over the past few years and there has been an increase in the amount of teams being added, whether that be boys or girls and a variety of ages in both. We have teams for boys and girls through most age groups and they are massively popular. All teams compete in their own leagues and there is a big sense of community

throughout the FC family. Notably, FC Hartlepool men's first team, just had a massively successful season last year, winning the Wearside Premier Division and becoming a Northern League team for the first time in its history, as well as winning the League Cup in a close final away to Gateshead Leam Rangers. Speaking from experience, it is really uplifting and encouraging to see the

younger teams come along to the men's first team games to support us and cheer us on. We've also had younger teams walk out and be mascots for us during the bigger games like cup games.

The reason why we got into coaching was to try and give the enjoyment of football to the children who would come along to a session. No matter how intense a football match can get, it is always a game at the end of the day, and a game is made to be enjoyed and have fun, so we want to see smiles on the faces of the children we coach.

It's also nice to see the enjoyment that the children get from playing football and see them get better at what they want to do. Women's football has progressed massively over the last few years, and we can see that as coaches because there is a lot more young girls coming through the doors wanting to start their journey in football. Women's football is now getting really good support from all over the world from grassroots teams, right through to international level which is really great to

see. There are a lot more opportunities for girls and women to get out there and play football now and there has been a massive shift in this even within the last five years. The publicity off the back of the recent success of the Lionesses Euro's win last year and their great World Cup run this summer has attracted new audiences to the game.

Her Game Too has really made a name for itself since it started a couple of years ago. We think it is important because it inspires women and young girls to give sport a go or even just encourage them to attend sporting events in person, with the reassurance that they are welcomed, and it is a safe place for them to do or watch what they enjoy. Her Game Too gives females the chance to be a part of football and other sports, when maybe others have thought that it wasn't for them or they have been discouraged. It shows that they don't even need to be playing football, and that there are other ways they can be involved, whether that be being a parent on the sidelines or being the coach.

A lot of women that play and/or support football and it is great to see that the sport makes them so happy and that they can go to matches and play matches and it feel like a second home to them. Even in recent years, women's football has been overlooked but it is really getting a name for itself and communities like Her Game Too are certainly contributing to this."

Huge thanks to the FC Little Kickers coaches for giving us an insight into the work they do. Last month saw the annual mascot race at Epsom take place. The event is held to raise money for the Childrens Trust. H'Angus returned to defend his title but was beaten into 2nd place by a lightning quick Epsom Ellie. However, he is still the quickest mascot in football! Her Game Too also had a mascot taking part with Debra the Zebra. The two mascots met up for a pre-race photo. Well done to all involved and all for a great cause.

We also continue to see more and more support from Poolies, with Jessica Durham joining us for a photo at our game at Chesterfield. Jessica and her family are devoted Pools fans and are regulars at home and away fixtures. Jessica also plays with Greatham FC's new girls team. Thanks for the continued support.

The HerGameToo HUFC team

