

#HERGAMETOO

Here we have Sam Andrews, the second of our newest advocates to join our team.

Sam talks about her favourite Pools memory and how football, both spectating and playing, really helps her mental health and is grateful for the opportunity to take part in HerGameToo.

"I've been coming to Pools since I was a child and sit in the Longbranch Homes Stand with my friends and family. I absolutely love the atmosphere. I'm autistic and Hartlepool United has always been one of my special interests. When I was at school, I would use any excuse to add Pools into my studies, shirt designing in art, topics of discussion in English, even for PE I'd wear my Pools training kit! My favourite ever Pools game would have to be when we won 8-1 against Crimsby back in 2003. My current favourite player is Mani Dieseruvwe, he's been a fantastic signing this season. My all-time favourite Pools player would have to be Micky Barron. What a player, what a captain!

I wasn't personally aware of



any 'all ability' female teams in Hartlepool until this year. A friend asked me if I was interested in joining some 'FA Just Play' training sessions at Pools Youth FC. The thing I asked was "would I be allowed?" It has always a dream to play football so to have to opportunity to take part without any expectations was a fantastic opportunity. The Just Play sessions have led to the formation of the Pools Youth Ladies Development team. I have joined a team that is fully inclusive, and I love it!

We compete in tournaments and in the Durham County FA Recreational League. It's amazing being around other females who have the same passion for football, very supportive and accepting. I never ever thought this would happen. Fellow Her Game Too advocates, Sarah Rowntree and Emma Martin, are also part of the playing squad. During the summer we had Matty Dolan come to one of our football training sessions, it was great to see

our Hartlepool United players support female football.

We all have our own hidden battles and I find that playing football and being part of a team is a massive boost to my mental and physical health. I also attend the Hartlepool United Community Sports Foundation FitFans sessions. I find this beneficial for the same reasons as being part of the football team.

I have three disabled children and they were kindly invited to the opening of Hartlepool United's sensory room this year by the wonderful Sarah Rowntree. It's a fantastic facility, and it shows that Pools are mindful of others who might find it overwhelming at games or need that safe space. I like to attend home games with fellow Parent Carers, it's a great opportunity to check in with each other, be that listening ear and enjoy the beautiful game we all love. That bit of respite can make so much difference. Hartlepool United kindly donate some season tickets to Hartlepool Carers. Each home game they can be used and shared among the group of carers, giving others that opportunity to enjoy the atmosphere at the Suit Direct Stadium.

Some of you will know Jill Simmonds is the Her Game Too Ambassador at Pools.

She sits in the Longbranch Homes Stand and has a lanyard to show who he is. I sit in the same stand in the A Block, you might see my bright yellow Her Game Too shirt standing out! When I first met Jill, it was during 'Just Play' training sessions. I was amazed to hear she was the Hartlepool United Her Game Too ambassador as I already followed them on social media and have been a supporter of all the work they are doing across the country. She does a lot to promote female football (and a wide range of sports) and equality in all aspects of the game, including men's football. She now has a team of advocates around her and I'm glad to be one of them.

Last Sunday I attended the first local derby game in the Durham County FA Development League between Seaton Carew Ladies and St Francis Women whom are both Her Game Too partners. Wow, what a game! The turnout was fantastic, a lot of people watching were from different local football teams too. It was brilliant to see so many spectators, men, women, boys and girls.

This time last year, both of these teams didn't exist, and to see the progress and noise they're making, well, it's impressive! Jill, Sarah and Courtney also attended, whilst one of our other advocates, Bethan was playing for Seaton Ladies. It was a great opportunity to promote both clubs and show how far female football development has come in the town."

Thanks to Sam for her thoughts on Pools and telling us how football is a huge part of her life. She will be a key part of our team given her experiences and knowledge of EDI.

A reminder that our HUFC x HGT Badges and keyrings are available in the Club Shop so if you're calling in for Christmas Gifts grab one for a stocking filler. Raffle tickets are also still on sale from the Club Shop to be in with a chance of winning our Victoria cuddly toy, £1 per strip. All proceeds will contribute to our HUFC x HGT dedicated match later this season.

