

#HERGAMETOO

This week we hear from Ellie Mason and her Dad, Paul. Ellie is currently training to be a football match official as is progressing well through her courses and gaining valuable experience week after week during the season.

Ellie said:

"I played football a little at primary school, but my real interest kicked in when I was about 12 years old - I'd gone to Greyfields for a kickabout and met Craig Bage (who's now manager of Hartlepool United Women) who was there with his daughter - we got talking and he invited me to come along to the

U14s team he was running for FC Hartlepool. After a year, the whole team moved to join Hartlepool United Women, and I played with HUUFC until last season in the U18s team where we won the league!

My Mam saw the match officiating courses offered by Durham County FA when I was 14, and we thought it would be a good way to earn some pocket money. As soon as I'd qualified and done my first few games, I knew I liked it and it's grown from there.

The first thing you need to do to become a match official is pass the FA Basic Referee course with your local FA. That allows you to

start refereeing at the right level. I started as a youth referee until I was 16, and then became Level 7 in the men's game and Level 4W in the women's game. I'm currently Level 6, and working towards my Level 5 promotion, as well as working towards my Level 3W women's promotion. I was lucky to be nominated by Durham County FA for the National FA Emerging Talent Programme for female referees, and after an assessment in Leeds last season, I was accepted onto that. This provides amazing support for developing referees, with a focus on promotion in the women's pathway.



This season, I was accepted on to the National CORE (Centre Of Refereeing Excellence), and this gives me additional training and coaching, as well as opening many opportunities - I was lucky enough to be selected as match official for England U15s at St Georges Park in December, which was a great experience.

Jill Scott is one of my favourite players - she is such a positive role model for younger female players. I was lucky enough to be an official at a charity match where Jill was playing! Leah Williamson taking charge of England as captain is another inspiration, and I'd love to referee her one day.

In refereeing, Rebecca Welch is amazing - not only leading in the women's game, but now taking charge of top-level male games. I was lucky enough to go to her first Premier League game at Fulham just before Christmas. I hope one day that I'll be following in her footsteps. My mam and my dad have been very supportive, being my taxi all over the North East every weekend, and standing at the side of the pitch, sometimes for three games back to back. I wouldn't have been able to get where I am without them.

Because I started playing in a girl's team, in a girl's league, I didn't realise quite how male dominated the wider football world is. Since starting refereeing, where most of my assigned games have been in the male game, it's really obvious how few females there are across the whole game. HerGameToo raises the profile of women in the sport - not only for players, but for officials, spectators, and fans. It's great to see more and more girls supporting their teams!"

Paul added:

"I have literally no footballing history! I didn't play, and I didn't follow a team, so I have no idea where Ellie got the bug from! I've started taking an interest because of her - first, watching her and

her team play, and more recently watching multiple teams across the North East each week when Ellie is refereeing or running the line.

I couldn't be prouder of her, but it's quite scary at times watching grown men swarm around and challenge her - but she has so much confidence and handles the game really well.

Good role models and good support is critical. Ellie watched the Lionesses in the World Cup last year and was so inspired by the whole event. Seeing women playing, officiating, and coaching at the top level just shows her what is possible in the future, and gives her something to aim for.

It's really important having campaigns like Her Game Too supporting females within football.

Locally, we've seen a huge growth in new female teams, and every team gets support and promotion by HerGameToo. We've seen dedicated days at Hartlepool United, and we've seen the HerGameToo team supporting many local fundraising events and driving publicity."

Thanks to both Ellie and Paul for sharing their story. Its important to see females working in all areas of the sport. The recent promotion of Rebecca Welsh to Premier League Referee is another historical breakthrough for females in Football. Its also worthy to note Rebecca started her officiating journey with Durham County FA, just like Ellie is now, here in the North East. Hopefully Rebecca and her fellow female match officials at the PGMOL will continue to inspire the next generation of girls into this area of the sport.

The Her Game Too HUFC Team