

Smells like team spirit

Unions involved with sport are teaming up to provide members with a sporting chance of finding work once their all too brief careers are over

Learning and education are not something most people associate with sport stars, but that is changing as trade unions tackle the industry's learning and skills gap – with the determination that made sport stars great.

And they don't pack a bigger punch than Barry McGuigan, the Clones Cyclone. Barry already has many strings to his bow, as a champion boxer, commentator, and now a unionlearn Skills for Life Advocate.

He received his award along with Gordon Taylor, CEO of the Professional Footballers Association and John Barnwell, CEO of the League Managers Association.

These organisations are working

to offer new opportunities for the tens of thousands of sport professionals whose careers are likely to last just a few years.

For many of these players the cost of devoting themselves to sport has meant their education suffered.

Barry has a fierce commitment to improving the lives of boxers and ex-boxers. He founded the Professional Boxers Association, which, after a merger with the GMB, became the British Boxers Association and sees education as a key part of the way boxers should prepare themselves for life after the ring.

He says: "Boxers have a lot of time when they are not fighting and we want to encourage them to

Education prepares sports people for retirement argues Barry McGuigan

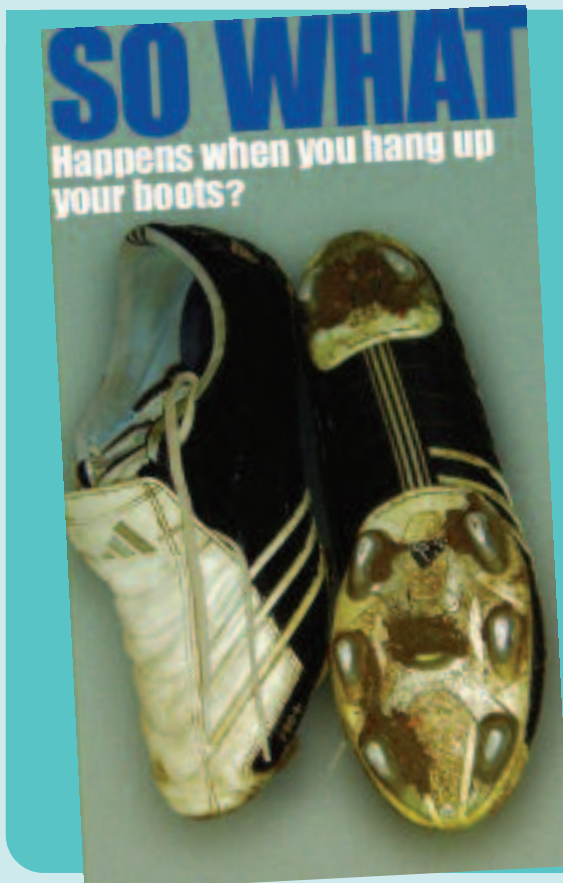


plan and develop other skills so that they have something to go to when they stop making a living from the sport. I feel as people who have been through our sport and really achieved something, it is incumbent upon us to help those coming through."

Meanwhile the PFA is midway through the first year of a pilot in which former professional footballer

Oshor Williams and the union's ULF project worker and education

adviser are encouraging players in clubs throughout the North West to consider their lifelong learning opportunities once their careers are finished.



Boots for brains

What happens when you hang up your boots? That's what PFA Education wants players to consider.

The organisation provides advice and guidance on educational and vocational courses in preparation for a second career for all registered and ex-registered Football League and FA Premier League players and members of the PFA.

Grant aid is available for a variety of courses, including:

- » FA coaching and medical courses
- » Degree courses in Physiotherapy, Sports Science and Business
- » Open University undergraduate courses
- » HGV, PSV Driving Instructor and other driving courses
- » trade/construction courses

- » Higher and Ordinary National Certificates in various subjects
- » hospitality and catering
- » AS/A2 and GCSE courses
- » leisure management courses, HNC and degree
- » teaching qualifications.

Chris Brass, currently with Bury Football Club, is pictured with a new friend made on the BSc in Physiotherapy course he's just started at the University of Salford, one of the PFA's supported courses.



Scoring after retirement

Player turned PFA education adviser Oshor Williams says his experience of professional football is typical of many players.

“It’s all about hope, ambition – and rejection!” recalls Oshor.

Having left school at 16 with three O Levels, Oshor was apprenticed at Middlesbrough but after two years not offered a professional contract – like 50 per cent of youth trainees, he says.

“Unlike other apprenticeships the technical skills learned in football are not explicitly transferable and my education had been derailed by my interest and focus on football,” he says.

Oshor was fortunate to be offered a professional contract at Manchester United and was a member of the Old Trafford reserve team.

“It was a fantastic experience but I wasn’t offered anything further when my contract ended. Outside of top-flight football the average for most professional players is a two-year contract!”

Further periods of work at Gateshead, Southampton, Stockport County and Preston followed. “There is an industry below the Premiership and leading Football League Championship clubs where the prospect of a short career in football sustaining you and your family for the rest of your life is nil,” says Oshor.



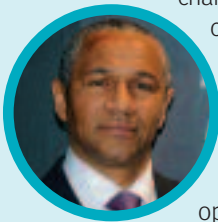
Student Matt Baker on Camera Two with one of the course tutors, Mich Pryce, at the launch of the new BA in Sports Journalism at Stafford University. Matt has played for MK Dons and Wrexham. Mitch produced BBC coverage of the World Cup.

Finally a serious knee injury put him out of the game at 29 and with a young family to support Oshor was faced with a career change.

“That was really my first adult experience of the prospect of career change and how frightening that can be. I had the knowledge and capability but had nothing to back it up.

“We are trying to encourage players to take advantage of the learning opportunities available, gain qualifications and set up a learning network that we hope will be self-supporting with players learning and, in turn, providing guidance to others who wish to learn.”

His new role brings him into touch with more senior players who are in the process of transition. “We want to encourage them to have aims and ambitions and increase awareness of the prospect of building a future which will inevitably be outside football – after all the biggest certainty for any footballer is that one day they will become an ex footballer,” adds Oshor.



The 2006 intake of PFA students on the BSc in Physiotherapy at the University of Salford.

Sports arena

The Educational Sports Forum is celebrating its first birthday with an excellent track record.

The forum involves sporting unions – the PFA, as well as professional cricketers, rugby and boxing associations, which meet regularly to discuss how best to address the learning agenda.

The forum offers the opportunity to pool experience and knowledge and a shared view of how best to promote learning and good practice in sport.

Alan Irwin, project manager of the PFA ULF project and secretary of the forum, says it has been extremely busy working with unions on transition to prepare players to leave their respective sports when they retire or are forced to give up through injury.

He says this includes work with Oxford Brookes University on business start-up courses for players who choose to set up their own businesses as well as organising IT training for union members.

The forum’s new website is at: www.educationalsportsforum.co.uk

It provides a comprehensive portal of information with areas designed for individual unions to give players maximum support.

