

Building a Seamless Football Pathway

SHAPE Brookfield and SHAPE Tupton Hall

Paul Ryan & India Hollingworth



Overview

Paul Ryan and India Hollingworth have revolutionised girls' football across Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire by co-creating a structured, inclusive, and developmental pathway from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 3. Through innovative programming, strategic partnerships, and equitable competition structures, they have removed barriers, engaged new participants, and laid the foundation for lifelong involvement in football.

Strategic Practice and Initiatives

1. Early Engagement Through KS1 Enrichment Festivals

In collaboration with Chesterfield FC Community Trust, the pair launched in-school enrichment sessions that:

- Embedded **fundamental movement skills** through football
- Removed barriers like transport and staffing logistics
- Trained teachers alongside delivery, with **97% reporting increased confidence**
- Reached **850 KS1** children across **15 schools**, offering an early and accessible entry point

2. Development-Focused Y3/4 & Y5/6 Festivals

To capture interest before girls reach competitive age groups, two new festivals were introduced:

- **Y3/4 Connect Festival** and **Y5/6 Think Football Festival**
- Built on Sport England's **Physical Literacy Consensus**
- Strategically designed to attract girls **not yet in grassroots football**
- Resulted in **93 new girls participating**

3. Equal Access Through Restructured Leagues

A major structural shift allowed **girls' and mixed teams to play at the same venues and times**, reducing logistical burdens for schools and increasing fairness. Key outcomes:

- **318 girls** in Years 5–6 represented their schools (up from 96 the year prior)
- **16 schools** participated (a 100% increase)
- **Wildcats coaches attended** matches, linking schools directly to community pathways

4. Community Engagement & Safe Spaces

Advocacy from both leads has led to:

- **Girls-only lunchtime sessions** in 6 schools
- **Girls-only football days** and **after-school clubs** in at least 5 schools
- Girls experiencing football in **supportive, judgment-free spaces**

5. Flagship Events to Inspire and Upskill

Their Biggest Ever Football Session (March 2025) served as a dual-impact event:

- 100% of participants were **new to football**
- Acted as **live teacher CPD**, modelling inclusive practice
- Delivered in partnership with CFCCT, Bolsover Active Schools, and local Wildcats centres

6. Transition Support Into Secondary School

To sustain participation beyond Year 6, they piloted a secondary school girls' league, aligned with existing primary venues and formats. The result:

- 8 new competition events for Y7–8 girls
- 82% of secondary schools engaged in 2024–25
- 337 secondary girls participated, a huge leap in retention

Impact and Outcomes

- **231% increase** in Y5–6 girls' competition participation
- **100% increase** in school engagement with structured competitions
- **93 new girls** brought into football through development-focused festivals
- **337 girls in secondary school** re-engaged through structured competition and transition alignment
- Teachers reported sustained CPD impact and student confidence increases

Conclusion

Through visionary leadership, community partnerships, and smart competition design, Paul Ryan and India Hollingworth have built a hugely comprehensive and inclusive girls' football system. Their work ensures equal access from the very start of primary school and supports a seamless transition into secondary football—creating a blueprint for long-term participation and progression.

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This Game