

# 2024 COACHING Conference

SATURDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER  
CROKE PARK

# COACHING FOR THE FUTURE



Gaelic Games  
**COACH  
PATHWAY**

Gaelic Games  
**PLAYER  
PATHWAY**

# The Retention Game #2: The Salisbury Rovers Story

Dr Debbie Sayers

Aaron Joseph

Keir Doherty



**GAELIC GAMES**  
**COACH**  
**PATHWAY**







# THE GAME BELONGS TO THE PLAYERS!

**SALISBURY ROVERS FC:  
A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO FOOTBALL**

Coaching CONFERENCE  
23 NOVEMBER 2024



# WE ARE SALISBURY ROVERS FC!

**Debbie Sayers, Aaron Joseph, Keir Doherty**

- Founded in 2016 in response to the state of the game
- We are an award-winning youth football club (coach adults too!)
- Community projects, club sessions, matches
- We adopt a **RIGHTS-BASED** approach to football







# SHARING OUR STORY.....!

**1. The beautiful game?**

**2. A rights-based approach to changing the game**

**3. Coaching for the future**

**4. Players' voices - Aaron & Keir**



# 1. THE BEAUTIFUL GAME?

No child was **heard** in the making of  
this system





# WE TOOK THE GAME FROM THE KIDS WHO PLAYED IT.....

"The World Cup wasn't won (1966) on the playing fields of England. It was won on the streets"



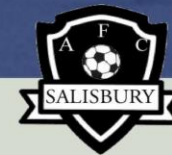
**Bobby Charlton**  
World Cup Winner, England 1966

#LetThemPlay



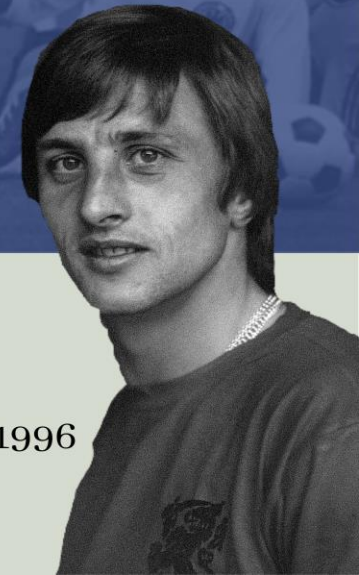
" I trained 3-4 hours a week at Ajax when I was little but played 3-4 hours a day on the street.

So where do you think I learnt football?"



**JOHAN CRYUFF**  
Barcelona Manager, 1988-1996

#LetThemPlay





# ....AND WE GAVE THEM THIS IN RETURN!

- Early selection & 'elite' teams of young children even at grassroots: **EXCLUSION**
- A coaching **INDUSTRY** with adult **CONTROL** & **DIRECTION**
- Language of **COMMODIFICATION** : 'PRODUCE' & 'DEVELOP' players



Clubs talent trawling for four-year olds in 'race to bottom'



UN Calls for a Crackdown on Human Trafficking in Sports



ARTICLE

## How to coach 4 to 6 year olds







# PEOPLE AS COMMODITIES: It's not just the children's game that needs to change.....!



Triestina boss Pep Clotet confronting player Raimonds Krollis after he was sent off during a Serie C match



## 2. A RIGHTS BASED APPROACH TO CHANGING THE GAME!

*“This is why I like it here....  
you can just be **free!**”*

**Barney, Rovers U16 player**





# A rights-based approach

- We put the person first & see the game through their eyes.
- By respecting rights, we prioritise the **DIGNITY** & **AUTONOMY** of the person.
- We **EMPOWER** people & create **SAFER** cultures.
- Respecting human rights can **CHANGE** the game!



A woman with curly hair, wearing a green t-shirt, is sitting in front of a tan teepee. She is playing a light blue acoustic guitar. Two young children are sitting on the grass in front of her. The child on the left is a girl with braided hair, wearing a pink dress, looking down at the guitar. The child on the right is a boy with blonde hair, wearing a brown shirt, looking towards the woman. The background is a lush green field with trees.

**“WINNING DOESN’T  
MATTER CHILDREN”**





# Children's rights guiding practice

- The **UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD** [UNCRC] guides our practice.
- The UNCRC
  - Protects all children and young people up to 18 (no matter how 'talented'!)
  - Provides special rights to help children reach their potential
  - Covers all aspects of a child's life
- Childhood is an individual journey & **BEING HEARD** is critical to the development of the person!



**CONVENTION**  
ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD



## ARTICLE 12 UNCRC:

# Right to be heard

- UNCRC recognises the importance of young people's right to be heard.
- Under international law, **ALL** children have:
  - i. a **RIGHT** to **FREELY EXPRESS THEIR VIEWS**, in all matters affecting them; and
  - ii. a **RIGHT** for those **VIEWS TO BE GIVEN DUE WEIGHT**, according to the child's age and maturity
- Essential for human dignity to be involved in decisions which affect us



**NOTHING  
ABOUT US  
WITHOUT US**

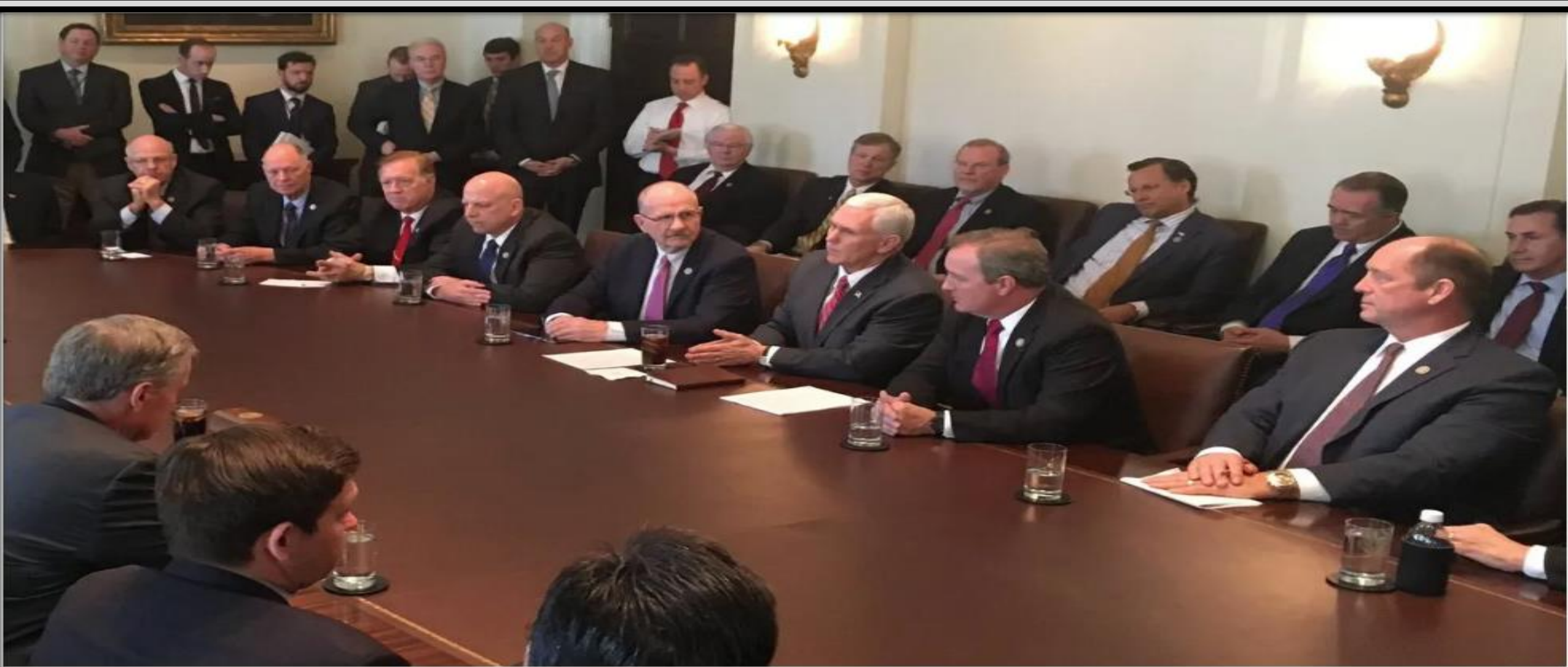


PHOTO: COURTESY OF TWITTER/[@MATTYGLESIAS](#)

Sexual Health + Identity

## Photo Shows Women's Health Issues in American Health Care Act Being Decided On by White Men

Oh, man.





**AT ROVERS, WE START BY TELLING CHILDREN THEY HAVE RIGHTS!**



**I HAVE  
A *Right*  
TO RELAX  
AND *Play***

Article 31 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



**I have the right to be listened to and taken seriously**

Article 12 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

**I have rights!**



**Right to be heard**

I have the right to an opinion and for it to be listened to and taken seriously.



**Right to play**

I have the right to play and relax by doing things I like, including sport.



**Right to develop**

I have the right to be safe, healthy, and to grow and develop.



**Right to fairness**

I have the right to be treated fairly and protected from discrimination.



# RIGHTS IN PRACTICE



# What shall we do today?





# RIGHTS IN PRACTICE



# Mixed age play: run your own game





# RIGHTS IN PRACTICE



# U16s prepare for league match



# BUT IT'S NOT JUST YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE A RIGHT TO BE HEARD!

Survey from 2023-24 season for  
adult men's team



18 responses

[View in Sheets](#)

Accepting responses

Summary

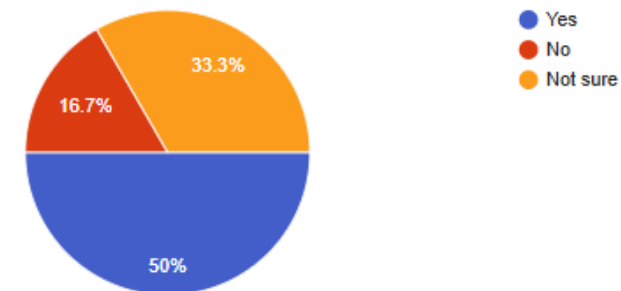
Question

Individual

Do you feel you have a voice in the team?

[Copy chart](#)

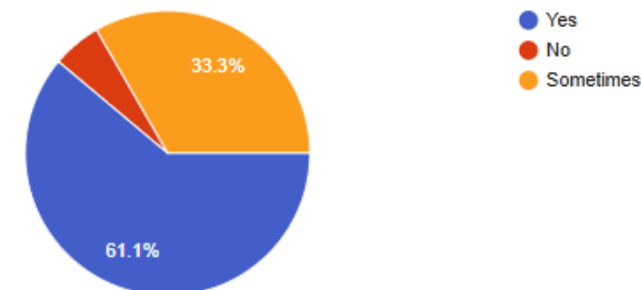
18 responses



Do you enjoy training?

[Copy chart](#)

18 responses



Is there anything you would change about training?

15 responses





# 3. 'COACHING' FOR THE FUTURE



**Nothing** about us without us!





## **Create the environment!**

***“The gardener cannot actually  
“grow” tomatoes, squash, or  
beans - she can only foster an  
environment in which the plants  
do so.”***



General Stanley McChrystal

# Environment Creators!

## How Do We Do This?

- Understand the whole person
- Establish trust & an ongoing dialogue
- Seek views, listen & act
- Design & deliver with those views in mind
- Be flexible and adaptable!
- Be approachable, honest, patient & kind!
- **NO EGOS!** Remember it's about **them** not us!





And remember.....



The game belongs  
to the **players!**





# 4. PLAYERS' VOICES



**Aaron Joseph & Keir Doherty**





**My name is Aaron Joseph**

# My footballing journey

- My footballing journey started off with me playing with my friends at lunch time in primary school. I was never really any good but if half the class was playing football at lunch you didn't want to seem the odd one out. Then some of my friends were playing football outside of school lunchtime at a local court not far from my primary school. What is now known as the ballcourt. We used to make up play silly games like Wembley, headers and volleys, smash, woodwork/crossbar challenge and used to spend hours helping.
- Then I went into secondary school and our family friend suggested on me joining in a team. I didn't really want to take anything seriously. Fortunately, I went to a taster session at Salisbury Rovers. And I loved it!! I enjoyed it because it brought me back to playing football with my friends at lunch time and having fun and enjoying the sport.
- Thanks to Debbie I have had many opportunities, with coaching on Saturdays and also going to professionally held events and presenting on the way that Salisbury Rovers coaches and run things.
- I have also had trials professionally for Southampton academy when I was 16. Unfortunately nothing came of them but I had an amazing experience and opportunity there.
- I have been with them since I was 12 and now I am 19. Time does really fly when your having fun.





# Good things that coaches do

- When they have friendly interactions with players when they say the small things like hello, how was your day? Etc..  
The small things
- Letting them play with a ball when they arrive a bit of social time.
- Understanding that not everyone in the team wants to play seriously and some might just want to play with their friends





# Bad things that coaches do

- Shouting/ screaming from touchline. This isn't champions league final. Or even in training there is no need. This make the player feel useless and sucks the fun out. Especially for children and teenagers.
- Focus on the result/score
- Players voice not being heard by this I mean that if a collective group of players don't like a certain practice which you have prepared for them do something else or change it.



# Top Tips

- Understanding after a long day of being in a classroom all day the last thing they want be doing is standing listening to a coach. By this I mean in some sessions you scrap your session plan and play a game for the whole session.
- Quality over quantity for sessions
- Asking what the players want to work on and train on
- Don't make it too competitive.
- Allowing players to have fun and enjoy the sport the play and keep them in the game





# Keir Doherty

## My Journey through Salisbury Rovers FC







# 1. Playing



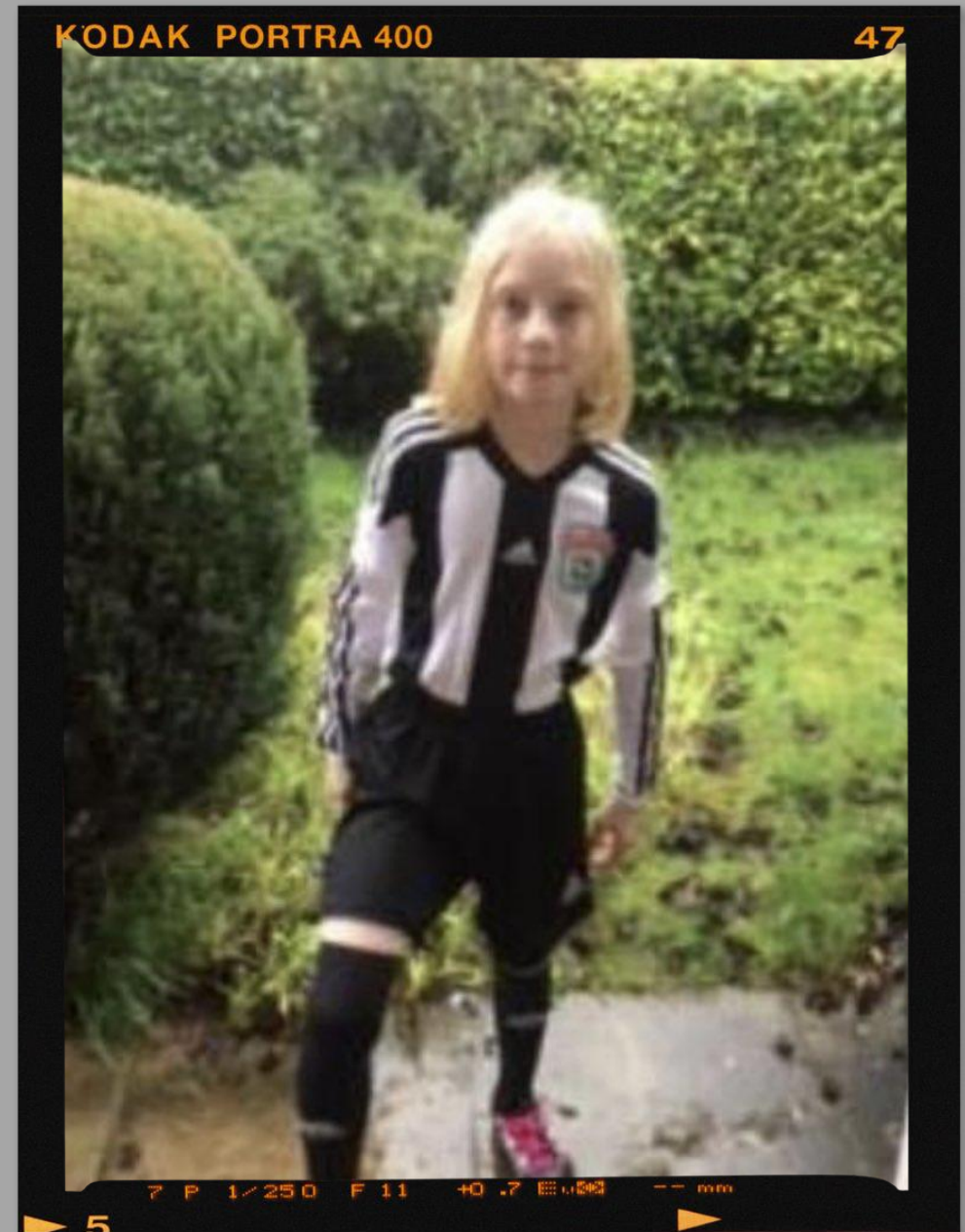


**I started as a Goalkeeper when I  
was 9**





**I became a founding member of  
Salisbury Rovers at 10**







**I started playing men's  
football at 16**





**I broke my leg at 17**







**And then started playing  
again outfield at 18**





**Here's how playing at Salisbury Rovers has developed me as a player**





- **Our right to be heard is respected**
- **We run our own teams**
- **This has made me independent & a leader on/off the pitch**





- **We're allowed to play in a safe environment**
- **This has helped me to stay in the game**







- **But we are also encouraged to move out of our comfort zones and to try different positions**
- **This has helped me to have a better understanding of the game**





- **We're allowed to make our own decisions and make mistakes along the way**
- **This has helped me become a more resilient and intelligent player**







- **Our right to play is respected**
- **We are encouraged to remember why we play football - for fun**
- **This helps me to love the game and pass on that love to the next generation of players**





- **We are encouraged to take advantage of opportunities, like this one!**
- **This helps us to understand the importance that sport has on community and our lives.**







# 2. Coaching





- **We respect the players right to be heard**
- **This has helped me to become a more understanding coach**







- **We make sure the children have a safe environment to play in**
- **This helps build a rapport with the players and encourages honesty**







**We encourage the next generation to go outside and play like we did**






### Some worrying cultural features

- Impact of Premier League 
- Too much adult control/direction
- 'Elite' teams & selection 'best with best' even at grassroots
- Pursuit of very young children
- Anxious parents & pressure on children



Clubs talent trawling for four-year olds is 'race to bottom'

*I prefer the Open Trials*



*Man United looking to hire a coach for six-year olds*

# 3. Speaking





- **Playing in a player-led environment has made me more confident to share my voice**
- **We shared what we do in Sweden in 2021**







- **At the UK coaching conference in 2022**





- **At the Open University  
FIFA Safeguarding Course in  
2023**







- **And at the Radical Football conference in Romania, this year**



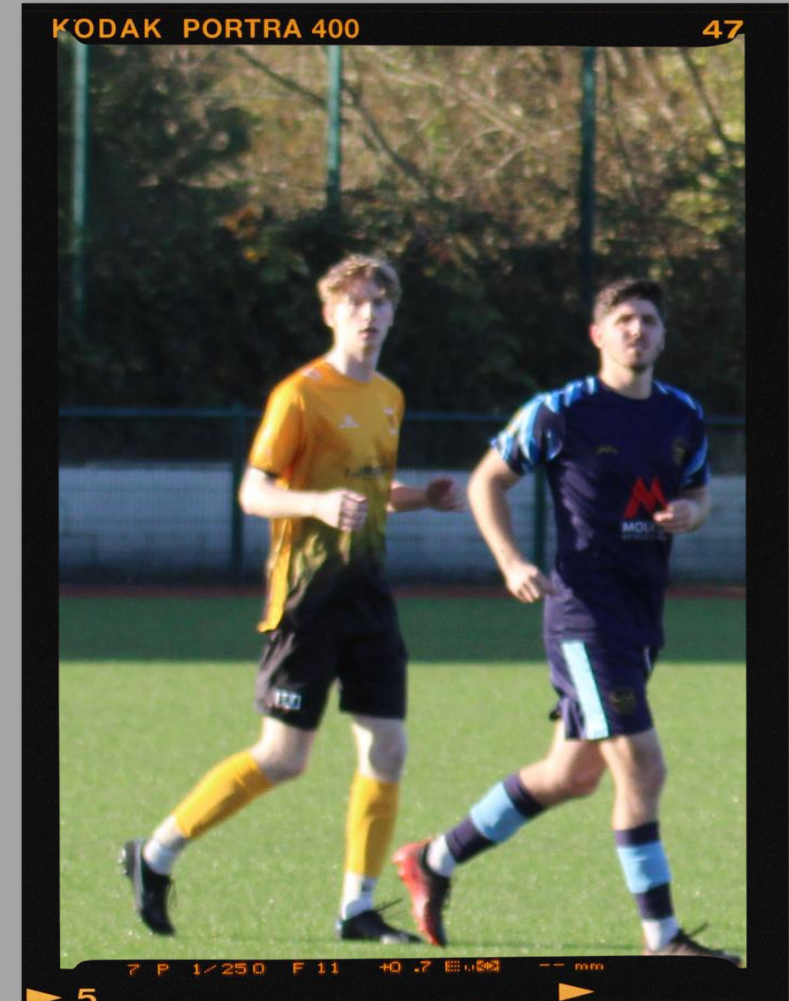


**What is the takeaway from my journey?**





- **Giving children a safe space allows them to flourish as players and as people**





# Thanks for listening!



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CAMPAIGN FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN FOOTBALL

