



## Enhancing Communication at the Cardiff City Academy

With a proven track record for producing both senior internationals and established Premier League players, the Cardiff City Academy can proudly claim to be one of professional football's leading centres for player development in the UK.

In addition to producing current Welsh stars Joe Ledley and Aaron Ramsey, the club can boast well over a dozen current youth internationals across their various Academy age groups, whose development is overseen by Academy Director Neal Ardley.

And in addition to regularly producing players going on to forge long-term professional careers on the pitch, Cardiff are one of a growing number of clubs embracing the new technology that is available within the game, with the objective of strengthening existing infrastructures and ensuring the management of all administration, communication and player development information remains at a high standard.

In the summer of 2008, the club introduced the Team Academy Pro system, the web-based application in place at a variety of youth departments at Premier League and Football League clubs.

Its initial implementation was supported by funding raised by supporters and having been used extensively in the past few seasons, the technology now plays an integral role in the way the Academy is run on a day-to-day basis, as Academy Secretary Anthony Redwood explains.

"Team Academy Pro has been in place here for two years now and in addition to the management of all player and staff information, the key functionality for us is the communication facility," says Redwood, who was once himself a player in the schoolboy system.

"It has streamlined the way we provide information to players, parents and officials.

"Previously, details of monthly coaching and match programmes would have had to be relayed to the various parties through mass mail merges. In the event of late cancellations, I would have needed to potentially make dozens of phone calls making them aware of the postponement and as you can imagine, this task alone could take up half of a single working day.

"Now all our correspondence is communicated through our online Team Academy Pro bulletin board and calendar, which is updated by Academy staff on a daily, sometimes hourly, basis.

"A recent example of how this facility has helped us immensely was when we had heavy snowfall in January, which resulted in the multiple cancellations of training sessions and matches. Any parent unsure of what was going on with these sessions got clarity by checking the bulletin board.

"In addition, as we can change the physical appearance of this bulletin board, we can use it to promote our own initiatives as well as the sponsors of the various age groups – so in many ways this home page is the online public face of the Academy, which is being used by everyone involved in different capacities."

Having spent many years using post and telephone correspondence for communicating with parents, players, part-time coaches and match officials on an almost daily basis, Cardiff made the bold decision at the start of this season to filter all official club information through the online public platform available through Team Academy Pro.

Although the move was not without its risks,

Redwood thinks the subtle change in approach to make the parents responsible for picking up information has paid huge dividends.

"When we first implemented the solution, we made the conscious decision that this was going to be the sole platform we were going to use to communicate information," he points out.

"Therefore at the start of the season, we had a meeting with all the parents where it was stressed that the Team Academy Pro calendar and bulletin board will be their point of reference for obtaining information from the club.

"It was a deliberate ploy to put the onus on the parents to be proactive in getting information, instead of reacting to a phone call from the club.

"In 2010, I cannot think there are going to be many scenarios where a family house is not going to have access to the internet and since we introduced the bulletin board for club communication, everything has worked perfectly – and there is no going back now."

Having already produced Aaron Ramsey, widely regarded as one of the brightest young Premier League prospects with Arsenal since joining in the summer of 2008, the 2009/10 season has seen another two Academy starlets break through into the first team squad in the form of full-back Adam Matthews and midfielder Aaron Wildig.

As these players continue to progress towards first team selection, Redwood believes that it is vital that their development at every stage of their Academy life is logged and archived centrally using Team Academy Pro.

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“We want to be in a position where if a player breaks into our first team through the Academy system, we have a full record of their progress from when they were first recruited into the club through to the present day.”

He explains: “We are keen to establish an audit throughout the club where we log each player’s development programme. This will result in all player assessment data and medical documentation being recording into Team Academy Pro throughout the year.

“We want to be in a position where if a player breaks into our first team through the Academy system, we have a full record of their progress from when they were first recruited into the club, through to the present day.

“So for example, if there was ever a period during their time at the Academy where they struggled, possibly physically, we can identify what approach was utilised by the club at the time to help them overcome the problem.

“As a club, this will be an important point of reference so in the event of a similar situation coming about with one of the current players, we can use our knowledge and past experience to help establish a specific strategy.

“It is all about identifying existing good practices and addressing those which could be potentially improved in the future, so we as an Academy can work as efficiently as possible.”

Having played a part in assisting the evolution of a number of working practices across the club’s Academy, Redwood has recommended the application to the club’s Football in the Community programme.

He believes that by addressing key administrative aspects of events organized throughout the year, Team Academy Pro could free up coaches of many time-consuming daily chores and empower them to spend more time working with players practically at the training facility.

“Our Football in the Community programme is interested using Team Academy Pro to manage the registration of all the kids that attend each event they organise throughout the year. This is good not only for auditing purposes, but also because it acts as a good facility to manage report data as part

of the club’s recruitment drive too,” says Redwood.

“It is also important to remember that when each FITC event takes place, the coach has to manage the registration of all attendees who turn up and collect their payments. Ideally we would like Team Academy Pro to act as a public portal for parents to register an interest in these events and also incorporate an online payment facility, to spare the coaches from handling cash on the day.

“This will not only make the process work far more efficiently, but also mean that all the details of each individual who goes through the scheme are logged and centralized within one system.”

With a thriving Academy set-up, utilizing state-of-the art technology and facilities within a brand new stadium complex, there can be little doubt that Cardiff City possess the necessary infrastructure to ensure that the next generation of scholars have every opportunity to emulate the past illustrious graduates for many years to come.

**team academy pro**

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