Professional Practice and Pastoral Care:

A Critical Analysis of the Manchester United Schoolboy Scholarship

2007 – 2012

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By

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ABSTRACT

The Manchester United Schoolboy Scholarship is a comprehensive football and education programme allied with residential provision. Education takes place at a local High School, and the boys are accommodated with families who are carefully selected by the Club. Thus, talented young players between the age of 12 and 16 receive fulltime coaching and education in preparation for a career in professional football. The research will critically evaluate and assess a football programme for gifted young footballers with a view to constructing an holistic model of player welfare which seeks to address their sporting (football), educational, physical, psychological emotional and spiritual needs. This research will also explore the relevant theological, social and child rights issues relating to this sphere of professional practice.

Oral data was assembled by conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with key personnel involved in the scholarship: players, coaches, teachers, parents and house-parents. The transcripts were then evaluated using the qualitative technique of thematic analysis from which five major themes emerged: leaving home, holistic development, life skills, mentoring and pastoral care. Thus the primary issues the thesis is concerned to explore unfold. This includes the sensitive nature of 'inside' research at a professional football club.

The research discloses evidence of 'best practice' and the subtle management of the players' physical, educational, emotional and spiritual needs. In short, the boys' progress at football was not to the detriment of their holistic development as human beings. However, the data also shows that the collaboration between the coaching and school staff could be further developed and improved for the mutual benefit of both parties.

Another important outcome of the research has been my personal and professional development as a reflective practitioner. The multi-disciplinary approach to this investigation has undoubtedly enhanced my knowledge and understanding of how concepts and themes from practical theology and other academic literature have informed my professional practice. The thesis also explores how a 'child centred' practical theology within youth sport contributes to the field of pastoral theology as a whole.

SUMMARY OF PORTFOLIO

The distinctive feature of the Professional Doctorate is that candidates are assessed via the submission of four assignments which constitute a research portfolio. This is designed to introduce the student to different stages of the doctoral journey, and develop the requisite skills and understanding to undertake a programme of advanced research in the form of a substantial thesis.

I commenced the Professional Doctorate in practical theology in 2008, because I had reached a stage of my professional career when I wished to reflect on the work I had been doing in the Academy at Manchester United since I joined the Youth Department in 1990. I had developed a deep interest in the pastoral care of the boys I was coaching, and the four components of my professional practice portfolio encapsulate my research interests in this important subject.

I used the year one *literature review* to explain how the power and authority in schoolboy football was transferred from the English Schools Football Association (ESFA) to the professional clubs. This raised many ethical issues regarding how this power was being used by the clubs to the possible detriment of the young players registered in the system. Thus, the paper provided the opportunity to ponder the ethics of this process, and how it impacted the pastoral care of elite schoolboy footballers. It considered issues such as what was considered to be 'best practice' for the club, and how staff should respond to this development?

My year two *publishable article* interrogated the Academy Games Programme to see the extent, it inculcated in the players the belief that their self-worth was only proportionate to how well they performed in match competition watched an assessed by coaches and parents. I argue that childhood should be a time for spontaneous play, experiential learning, excitement, joy and creativity. However, my research was showing that the games programme was curtailing these instincts through a regime which satisfied institutional or corporate objectives, rather than the social, emotional and spiritual needs of the players.

In year three, the *reflective practice* module allowed me to reflect on the various issues the course was presenting me in the area of pastoral care. Through this process, I became increasingly aware of the immense intellectual and professional development I was experiencing. The paper, therefore, captured this journey – the numerous footpaths I have trodden in order to further develop and improve my professional practice in the long term.

Finally, there has been limited research with regard to the care and welfare of talented schoolboy footballers in the United Kingdom. My *research proposal* identified a hitherto under-researched area of professional practice, thus creating an opportunity to make an original contribution to the discipline of practical theology via my final thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Research Rationale

This thesis is concerned to evaluate the ethical and developmental impact of the schoolboy scholarship scheme at Manchester United Football Club which was inaugurated in 2007. The scholarship has been an extremely significant development for the Club's youth department over the last few years both in terms of the staff devoted to the programme, and financial investment. Since its inception, there is no doubt it has raised a variety of pastoral care issues such as home-sickness, and the training and educational demands placed on the players which needed to be closely examined. Therefore, the primary question this research is seeking to answer is to what extent the schoolboy scholarship promotes or hinders the players' holistic development?

My professional role as Assistant Academy Manager since 2005, and as a former professional player, afforded me the opportunity to critically evaluate and assess a football initiative for gifted young footballers, with the aim of constructing an innovative holistic model of player welfare. This will seek to address the sporting (football), educational, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of young players in a pro-active way.

Furthermore, I was convinced that this research would have major benefits not only for Manchester United, but also the wider football community, especially those organisations who have young player's (U16) living in residential accommodation. This thesis is a quest to find 'best practice' when dealing with the pastoral care issues that arise when working with elite schoolboys living away from their family and friends. It is also an opportunity for me to make a contribution to practical theology in an area where there has been little or no research. This makes the project timely, and very important.

In this introductory chapter, and in order to place this research within its historical context, we need first to review the background of youth development in professional football in England since the beginning of the 20th century.

Schools Football

The English Schools Football Association (ESFA) has long been the guardian of schoolboy football through its comprehensive games programme and former control of the under fifteen national team. The ESFA was founded in 1904, although the sport was already well established in schools before that (Galligan, 2002). From the outset, the primary focus of the ESFA has been the mental, moral and physical development and improvement of students through the medium of association football (ESFA Handbook, 2011 – 2012). It is notable that pastoral care is placed at the forefront of the ESFA's objectives in the light of this research project.

The ESFA's control of football was sanctioned by the Football Association (FA) in an attempt to protect school-children from predatory clubs, who they felt did not have their welfare at heart (Kerrigan, 2004). At the ESFA Annual General Meeting in 1949, rules were formulated to ensure that no schoolboy player, who was registered for a professional club, could compete in a match played under the auspices of the ESFA. This gave them virtually full control of schools football in England. They were now in a position to organise coaching courses, competitions, inter-school matches and international fixtures. They also regulated all schools football at county, inter-county and district level. Thus, since 1904, they have nurtured the soil which later would provide the seed from which future stars would spring (Kerrigan, 2004). It was not until 1963 that a major concession was made by the ESFA which permitted schoolboys, who had reached 14 years of age, to register for a professional club on an *Associated Schoolboy Form*. This allowed them to receive coaching at a club during the evening and school holidays. The scheme prevailed until the 1990s, although considerable effort to reform it was attempted at various stages (Kerrigan, 2004).

The conflict between the professional clubs (who wanted greater access to talented boys) and the ESFA continued, until Bobby Robson, the England

manager, and national coach, helped to produce *The Blueprint for the Future of Football* (1991) which was the first step to prising the control of schools football from the ESFA. Robson's 'blueprint' led to the introduction of a systematic and comprehensive new programme of player development which enhanced the existing Centre of Excellence provision staffed by qualified FA coaches. The FA National School (a full-time residential programme for talented schoolboys) based at the National Sports Centre at Lilleshall Hall, Shropshire had already opened its doors in 1984 (James, 2002). The Centres of Excellence would allow talented boys to be coached at professional clubs more frequently than they had in the past *(Blueprint,* 1991). Despite this, it was evident that the ESFA had made an immense contribution to schoolboy football over the years, as three players who played in the England team that won the World Cup in 1966 had formerly been ESFA Schoolboy Internationals: Bobby Charlton, Martin Peters and Nobby (Norbert) Stiles (Willacy, 1999).

Throughout the 1990s the FA and the Clubs, continued to debate who should have jurisdiction over elite schoolboy players, until Howard Wilkinson was appointed as Technical Director of the FA in 1997. Wilkinson eventually produced the *Charter for Quality* (1997) which finally delivered control of talented schoolboy footballers to the professional clubs (Kerrigan, 2004).

The Youth Football Industry
Youth training at professional clubs in England has a long history, but it was not until 1960 that a formal structure for the training and development of youth players was introduced by the football authorities which saw the establishment of a new category of player – the *Apprentice Professional.* Under this scheme, clubs could sign a player when he left school at age fifteen, and provide for his part-time education at a Sixth Form or Technical College; he also received a small salary which was determined by the Football League. Indeed, it was under this scheme that the present author entered professional football in 1968. Although some clubs took this responsibility quite seriously, the majority of them paid mere lip service to the regulations using players to perform menial tasks around the club such as cleaning and painting the stands in the afternoons after a morning's training. There was no genuine vocational training which would give the boys

some qualifications in case they failed to make the grade or sustained a serious injury (Bradley, 2002).

Monk and Russell (2000) provide evidence that in the early 1990's fifty percent of trainees at football clubs were released at the end of their two year contract, and only two percent remained in the game two years later. This study showed that the failure rate was extremely high making it essential that these young men received adequate education and training so they could begin a career outside of football when the time came. It was clear that professional football was a forbidding profession for those seeking to enter its ranks (Dunphy, 1986; Parker, 1995; Shindler, 2005).

The Apprentice Professional scheme prevailed throughout the sixties and seventies until the Footballers Further and Vocational Training Society (FFE and VTS) was formed in 1978. This put pressure on the clubs to ensure that viable academic or vocational training was provided in some form (normally day release) to attend a Further Education College or similar institution. This led eventually to the government Youth Training Scheme (YTS) which was introduced in 1988, making it compulsory for trainees to receive some form of continuing education (Bradley, 2002; Parker, 1996).

Around this time, the quality of coaching in England was also being seriously questioned, with many people at home and abroad asserting that English football had been ignoring the art and practice of coaching, believing that youngsters would learn the game by simply watching and playing with senior players (Keech, 2002). All this was happening despite the fact that England had introduced the game to the world, and had been producing coaching manuals for several decades (Hughes, 1980, 1973; Wade, 1967; Winterbottom, 1952). In fact, the Professional Footballers Association (PFA) commissioned a report in 1994 which sought to address the declining standard of coaching in professional clubs compared to our European counterparts.

Academies at Professional Football Clubs

The next major report on youth football was the FA *Charter for Quality* (1997). The *Charter* saw the introduction of Football Academies governed by strict rules and criteria with the express aim of improving the overall quality and playing standards in England (FA Premier League Handbook 1998 – 99). It placed the most talented schoolboys in a coaching and education programme designed to produce excellence as well as personal development. Boys as young as eight years could sign formal agreements committing them to several hours of coaching a week. Clubs wishing to establish an Academy had to apply for a licence, and comply with an extensive set of rules and regulations which included player registration, staff quota, coaching and training, as well as compensation procedures in case a player wanted to leave the club. Thus youth football was becoming a major industry as very young boys could now be bought and sold in the same way as senior players (Conn, 1998). This raised a range of child welfare issues that needed to be addressed immediately (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007).

The introduction of the original 38 Academies in 1998 (including Manchester United) was in fact an attempt by the FA and Premier League to implement the model of the Lilleshall National School at a local level, offering promising schoolboys the opportunity to receive increased amounts of coaching sessions without having to leave home. Thus the school was no longer considered viable, closing in 1999 (James, 2002). The *Charter* was an overarching, all embracing document, which firmly established Academies at the forefront of youth development in England, until it was superseded by the Premier League *Elite Player Performance Plan* (EPPP) in May 2011. The EPPP is a youth development scheme initiated by the Premier League with the intention to improve the quality and quantity of home grown players developed by English Clubs. The EPPP is predicated on a set of principles such as creating more time for players to be coached, and allowing clubs that have gained a high category (following an independent audit) to recruit young talent from further afield which was not the case under the previous rules.

As I write, football Academies are in their 16th season of operation and, throughout this time, many concerns have been raised regarding their influence on

player development and welfare. This includes overtraining, overly competitive matches, injuries as well as the various other pressures being placed on such delicate and vulnerable young people (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Green, 2009a). In fact the *Lewis Review* (2007), commissioned by the FA, Football League and Premier League to evaluate and assess the state of youth football, made the point that an over emphasis on winning football matches at young ages was detrimental to the players' physical, emotional and psychological development. The review sought to examine the framework for young player development at clubs in the Premier League and Football League, and attempt to make proposals for change to improve the general situation. When finally published, the review made 64 specific recommendations for the football authorities to consider.

This, then, is the historical backdrop to the Manchester United Schoolboy Scholarship, which is an attempt to offer emerging schoolboy talent a challenging football, social and academic education (within a residential setting), without compromising personal dignity, integrity or general health and well-being. It is to this initiative that we now turn.

The Schoolboy Scholarship

Manchester United have a tradition of discovering and developing their own players which goes back to the 1930s with the founding of the Manchester United Junior Athletic Club (MUJAC), which sought to bring talented young players to the club for coaching and training purposes (Green, 1978; Whelan, 1999). Whelan's research concentrates exclusively on the club's youth policy in the 1950s when the manager, Matt Busby, pioneered a revolutionary approach to developing young players when he took over immediately after the Second World War. Whelan (1999) describes an extensive system of recruiting players from all over the British Isles, and a regime of intensive coaching and training with the aim of getting them into the first team as quickly as possible if they proved to be good enough. This initiative proved to be a tremendous success producing some of the most celebrated young players in the history of British professional football. They were dubbed 'the Busby Babes' by an adoring British press. Tragically, however, eight of them died in the Munich air disaster in February

1958 (Green, 1978). In light of this research, it is important to note that, in those days, clubs were not permitted to sign boys until they had left school; so the youth structure concentrated on the years between a boy leaving school at age fifteen (when he could sign as an amateur); and his eligibility to become a full professional when he was seventeen (Whelan, 2005).

Busby was concerned about the pastoral care of young players coming into the club, as he had found it very difficult to settle in his new surroundings when he joined Manchester City, from Scotland, as a young man. He also experienced at first hand when he was playing for Liverpool, how the then manager, George Kaye, had made a special effort to look after players' needs particularly when they were coming to the end of their careers, and they were having difficulty finding another club. Furthermore, Busby had lost his father in the First World War which perhaps gave him a paternal instinct with regard to the care and welfare of young players who joined the club (Miller, 1994).

On Busby's retirement in 1969, the Clubs youth policy went into decline until Alex Ferguson was appointed manager in 1986. He immediately revived it, applying many of the basic principles for player development bequeathed by Busby himself (Ferguson, 1999). This led, ultimately, to the so called 'Class of 92' (because they won the FA Youth Cup that year), and the 'golden generation' of players like David Beckham, Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes who went on to have highly distinguished careers. Indeed, Giggs and Scholes were members of the team which won the Champions League (European Cup) in 1999 and 2008 (Marshall, 2013). Thus, Manchester United, over the years, earned a reputation for developing young players and tending to their welfare.

In keeping with the Clubs tradition of remaining at the forefront of youth development, the Schoolboy Scholarship Scheme was founded in 2007 in order to respond to what was seen by staff to be a serious problem in the Academy – the lack of residential provision for elite schoolboy players'. Staff at the club had been concerned for some time about the limited period they could spend working with the most talented boys. In general, most Academy players' at the club attended school during the day and reported for training in the evenings between

six to eight thirty. There was also training on Saturday mornings and had matches on Sundays. Some boys also had a special session on Monday afternoons by agreement with their schools, who granted them leave. However, having completed some internal research, it was found that the coaching programme was still some way behind the number of hour's research indicated that elite young athletes should be training. This was 10,000 hours (known as the 'ten thousand hour rule') (Balyi, 2001; Stafford, 2005). The will be further discussion of this issue in Chapter Three.

Analysis of the training programme had shown that if players attended all coaching sessions throughout the year including training camps and tours/tournaments, they would be training approximately 6000 hours per annum. Furthermore, the majority of this training came at the end of a long school day, and did not take into account travel time. The coaches believed that this was detrimental to the quality of their training as they often arrived tired and listless. Staff were then, unrealistically, expecting a high level of technical, physical and tactical performance from them which was almost impossible to sustain over a long period of time. In the long term, it was felt the situation was hindering their development as aspiring professional footballers (Whelan, 2008a).

In order to address this issue, in December 2006, it was decided to visit an esteemed institution which provided residential accommodation for their talented prospects, albeit in a different discipline: Chetham's School of Music, Manchester. Staff found them to be an excellent example of how academic work could be combined with high quality musical training within a dynamic and challenging residential environment. It was immensely impressive. In order to achieve this, the students' timetable was flexible so that they were able to practice at the optimum time of the day when they were fresh, alert and able to produce high standards of work requisite to them becoming world class practitioners in their specialist field: singing, violin, trombone, piano and so on.

The coaches learned much on this and subsequent visits, not least that students' did not have to endure the arduous task of performing at the end of a demanding day as our players. Furthermore, musical training was the primary aim of their

course, although most students were able to achieve very good grades at GCSE and 'A' levels, as government reports had demonstrated. The visitors were informed that students spent approximately 25 hours a week studying music or practising, which was more than double the average hours our players spent training for football. It was evident at Chetham's that really high performing students were placed in a "special programme" commensurate to their specific needs. The coaches soon decided to try and emulate the 'Chetham's model' at the club to add another dimension to the Academy.

Having made formal and informal visits to other football Academies around the world (Dempsey and Whelan, 2007; McGuinness, 2003), it was becoming increasingly clear that failure to make changes to the programme would result in a decreased ability to maximise the potential of the players, who needed to attain the highest standard possible if they were going to break into the First Team squad and play in the Premiership and Champions League. The Academy clearly did not want to fall behind our competitors in England or mainland Europe. Therefore, it was incumbent for the club to offer the most talented players an enriched programme − hence the introduction of the Schoolboy Scholarship Scheme. After due consideration, it was decided that the initial programme would have the following key features:

- The Scholarship would be offered to boys between the age of U12 (High School year eight); and U16 (High School year eleven). It was decided that the youngest age a player would be invited to join the scheme was year eight, because staff felt that the transition from primary to secondary school at year seven was sufficiently demanding, without the added pressure of having to leave home, adjust to a new school, and an increased training load all at the same time.

- Scholarships were offered to thirteen players' nine of whom accepted. They all had outstanding talent and good personalities, and their small number would enable staff to ensure they had the high level of support they needed at this vital stage.

- The boys would attend our partner High School to receive their normal academic education through to GCSE level. Their coaching and training would be at the Clubs' training ground at Carrington (now known as The Aon Training Complex). The school is located in Trafford, south Manchester approximately four miles from the training ground which reduced travel time between the two sites.

- All the boys would be placed with local families', and looked after by the Club's team of Family Accommodation Providers (FAP), who had all been trained in Child Protection procedures, as well as having been registered with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) now known as the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

- Arrangements would be made for the boys to be released from school early in the afternoon in order to be escorted to the training ground for training by a team of professional drivers.

- All boys would be allocated a mentor at the club and school to support their pastoral care needs. This would involve the completion of a personal diary (Schoolboy Scholars Diary, 2007).

- U15/16 boys would be offered a two year scholarship linked to their GCSE course options. U13/14 boys would be offered an annual scholarship until year 10. This gave a degree of flexibility to allow parents/players the option of withdrawing from the programme without unduly disrupting their formal education. However, once boys commenced their GCSE course, they were expected to complete the whole two year scholarship in order to protect their education.

- A bespoke timetable was developed for the boys which was to be intended to monitored carefully, to make any adjustments deemed necessary in the light of the feedback received from all the parties (see Appendix 1).

- Staff decided to introduce a 'Life Skills' course, in order to provide a range of activities which we felt would further enhance the scholarship scheme.

- From the outset, parents were informed that their son's progress towards becoming a professional footballer would not be at the expense of their academic attainment. Indeed, it was envisaged that this aspect of the programme would be the most challenging and demanding for everyone involved.

The Club Directors approved the proposal, and the Head of Education and Welfare collaborated closely with our partner school, in order to lay foundations with regard to the implementation of the programme. This involved meeting with the parents of the selected boys to explain the scheme, and afford them the opportunity to visit the school and families they would be staying with. The programme commenced in September 2007. The Academy was entering new territory, but with everyone's support the staff were convinced it would create an innovative, creative, inspiring and enjoyable development opportunity for gifted young players, as well as attending to their pastoral care needs (Whelan, 2008a).

Having explored the historical background to the Manchester United schoolboy scholarship, I shall now examine the various academic and literary genres which inform this research.

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

I decided to take an interdisciplinary approach to this research, and the literature which helps to illuminate it includes: football history and culture, theory of play, pastoral care, human rights, sport and spirituality and liberation theology. I shall now examine each of these in turn.

There is an abundance of literature on a variety of sport and football related topics for example, sport history (Holt, 1989), football history and culture (Fishwick, 1989; Green, 1974; Mason, 1980; Russell, 1997; Walvin, 1975; Whelan, 2005; Young, 1968) and journalism (Hopcraft (1968). Other topics include

autobiography (Cascarino, 2001; Charlton, 2007), and play (Guttmann, 1978; Huizinga, 1955; Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). However, arguably, only Whelan (2005) has concentrated solely on the process of youth development. It is one of the major aims of this thesis to see how Manchester United's approach to the nurture of young footballers has changed in response to the demands of the modern game.

Guttmann (1978) traces the development of modern sport showing how it grew from religious folk play and ritual into bureaucratic institutions such as the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games. He shows how sport has evolved over time through various phases, each having a distinctive characteristic. Guttmann offers a definition of sport which he describes as "Playful physical contests", arguing that there are two forms of sport: one is spontaneous, such as playing in the schoolyard and Local Park, the other organised and regulated by rules. He makes it clear that to compete at world class level requires athletes to become specialists in their particular sport – hence it is not an ordinary vocation. This is an important point with regard to the scholarship scheme outlined above, as it is clearly a move away from spontaneity and informality towards structure, formality and organisation.

In this regard, Huizinga's (1955) theoretical study of the relationship between culture and play is germane to this study as he argues, persuasively, that play has been a vital aspect of cultural development throughout the ages – culture in all its forms arises from play. Although Huizinga does not specifically mention modern sport, much of what he says can be applied to it. His study has relevance to all people involved in sport especially those working with young people; he discusses the importance of play for the progression of all areas of cultural development. Is a move towards structure and formality detrimental to a player's physical, psychological or emotional development? This is one of the questions which this research seeks to address, as it explores the tension between natural play and the structure and formality associated with organised football programmes (The Premier League, 2011).

This project is primarily concerned with the pastoral care of elite young footballers in the Manchester United Schoolboy Scholarship initiative. Balyi, (2001) and Stafford's (2005) research suggests that the volume of training required for athletes to achieve the highest level in a particular sport amounts to approximately three hours a day over a ten year period. This raises important issues regarding the effect that this training has on the general health and well-being of young people. They and their families have to make myriad sacrifices in order to achieve their hopes and aspirations, despite the fact that so few of them will get anywhere near the top of their particular sport (Green, 2009a). Many training regimes do not allow time for 'spontaneous play', as so much time outside school is devoted to training and competing (Green, 2009a; Kidman, 2005; Martens, 1978). There is simply insufficient time to engage in normal childhood activities like extra-curricular hobbies and socialising with friends. The training load of the schoolboy scholars is very intensive which, along with pressure to succeed, can create stresses that young players find difficult to deal with. This research seeks to analyse the nature of this stress and explore ways that may help to alleviate it. Young athletes have specific welfare needs which the club has a responsibility to address on ethical and pastoral care grounds (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007).

Much has been written in relation to human rights over the last decade, but little has been written about the rights of children involved in sport. David (2005) outlines some serious ethical issues pertaining to youth sport: child labour, physical, emotional, sexual abuse, as well as doping and medical ethics. David explores, in detail, the implications of involving children in competitive sport vis-à-vis their human rights. He asserts that the principle challenge of every coach and official in youth sports is to reconcile the ultimate objective of winning, with the need to protect them from any form of abuse, violence or exploitation. Success must not come at the expense of a negative impact on the athlete's dignity, self-esteem or integrity. David argues that human rights and competitive sports are not incompatible – they can co-exist (2005). The intention of this research is to make a further contribution to this debate within a specific sports context.

Layard (2005) has identified research showing that religious belief is one of the 'seven key factors' affecting the happiness of the British nation including children. Layard and Dunn (2009) see childhood as a precious time, in which children gain a sense of their identity and self-worth. They state that children should aspire to develop the spiritual quality of inner peace – a sense of something greater than them-selves. Furthermore, they argue that a child is incomplete without some kind of passionate engagement with the spiritual aspects of the world around them. One is reminded of the Latin term *Imago Dei* (the image of God), which expresses a key aspect of Christian doctrine. This research aims to champion the fact that young people should be valued and treated by adults with dignity and respect at all times, because they are created in the image of God (Gen: 1. 27; Nye, 2013).

Sport in general, is not seen as an activity in which religion has particular value. However, Parry *et al* (2007) is an essential work which describes the relationship between sport and spirituality. Sport science can quantify many spheres of human performance, yet the spiritual dimension of the sporting experience cannot be comprehended through scientific measurement. The engagement between sport and spirituality (however described), is central to our basic motivation to participate in sport to achieve genuine fulfilment. Parry *et al* (2007) is probably the first work of this nature to embrace such themes as: sport and spirituality, religion and sport, existential psychology and sport and ethics, Olympism and spirituality. These four disciplines demonstrate the complexity of the debate about the relationship between sport and spirituality.

Hutch (2012) argues that sport is not merely an expression of our physicality, but it also contributes "Insight and spiritual depth" to our everyday existence. The experience of both 'victory' and 'defeat' shows that spirituality has deep import for the sportsperson in a journey that may take a lifetime to complete. Sport engages human beings in ways that allows them to have faith in the possibility of success, but it also makes them aware of their limitations. Sport permits us to explore our inner selves as we look for signs of spirituality and meaning in our physical activities. In this sense, sport can give rise to human hope and aspiration and is therefore an extremely powerful spiritual practice. Harvey (2014) is another

work that is especially significant in the light of this research, because it is an attempt to formulate a comprehensive theology of sport which will further stimulate debate about the nature of sport, religion and spirituality.

With regard to the freedom of young people, Wall (2010) has stated that children are often powerless when it comes to making important decisions in their lives. Therefore, liberation theology has value because it deals with issues of power, conflict and community welfare (Sedgewick (2000; Stevenson-Moesser, 2008). These authors assert that the goal of liberation theology is the empowerment of the dispossessed, the colonised and disadvantaged. Originally, liberation theology was a response to the abject poverty found in Latin America – a denial of natural justice and human rights. On a social level, it is a response to the oppression, exclusion and marginalisation of large groups of people (Boff 1987; Gutierrez, 1988)). Liberation theology informs this investigation because it can be critically applied to the young players in the scholarship scheme. In particular, how can staff help them to take more control of their own learning, and contribute to the evolution of the programme? How can they be empowered to make more decisions for themselves in an environment where the views and opinions of young people are not usually taken seriously? However, given the commitment that they and their families have made, it is right that their voices should be heard.

Freire, (1996) argues that the correct kind of education, based on the partnership between teacher (coach) and student, creates a new awareness of self and the freedom for people to make their own choices. In this work Freire describes traditional pedagogy as the "Banking concept", because it assumes that the student is merely an empty vessel into which the teacher will pour knowledge. On the contrary, Freire asserts that the generation of new knowledge involves a dialogue between the teacher and student in which their views have equal value. Thus they are both liberated because "Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1996: 60).   Therefore, the 'Banking model' of education creates a flawed understanding of humans beings as objects, and fails to support their development. There is a wealth of material in the field of practical theology which

makes a valuable contribution to this discourse (Ballard and Pritchard, 2006; Pattison, 2007; Woodward and Pattison 2000).

Having established a conceptual framework for this paper, we will now examine my role as a researching professional.

The Researching Professional

I embarked on the Doctorate of Professional Studies in Practical Theology, because I had reached an impasse in my career, and wished to take time to pause and reflect on the work I had been doing in the Academy at Manchester United since joining the Youth Department in 1990. I had been active in several ways: managing, administrating, coaching – but had never had the time to sit down and begin to seriously think about this process – what had I been doing all these years? Over time, I had developed a deep interest in the pastoral care of the boys I was coaching, and came to realise that most of them were not going to achieve their dream of becoming a professional footballer despite many years of hard work and dedicated training. Green (2009a) has shown that approximately 10,000 young boys are involved in various football youth development programmes in Britain. He estimates that there are around 88 professional clubs chasing limited talent pools, with only one player in a hundred offered a full-time scholarship at age 16. Furthermore, 75% of players who gain a scholarship are no longer in the professional game at age 21 (Monk and Russell, 2000). Of those who do manage to obtain a professional contract at age 18, only one in six are still in the game three years later. These are interesting statistics which were beginning to raise many ethical issues in my mind (Busch and Paine, 2009). I felt a passionate urge to ensure that all the players in my charge had an enjoyable and exhilarating experience during their journey through the Academy, given that so few of them would achieve the requisite standard for a professional career in football.

The Professional Doctorate appeared to be an ideal means of articulating my concerns about these important issues within a formal, structured environment. The opportunity to engage with professionals in other fields would offer new theological approaches to some key player welfare issues which were on my mind. I was coming to the realisation that since the establishment of the Premier

League (PL) in 1992, professional football had become a major industry – a commercial product from which large amounts of money was generated (Conn, 1998). Market forces were requiring clubs to develop youth policies, because developing their own players was cheaper than buying them at extortionate prices in the transfer market. The commodification of schoolboy footballers made me feel very uncomfortable. I began to ponder deeply the day-to-day life of a professional footballer, especially the downside of the game which can be extremely traumatic for players' through injury, loss of form, and various other reasons (Davies, 1975; Dunphy, 1986; Shindler, 2005). I sought to find ways to protect young footballers from as many of the stresses involved in pursuing a career in the game as possible.

I began to reminisce on my own career as a player which started when I signed Schoolboy, Apprentice and finally full Professional forms with Manchester United (1968 – 73). I moved on to play for both Manchester City and Rochdale before leaving England in 1977 to play for the Fort Lauderdale Strikers and Atlanta Chiefs in the now defunct North American Soccer league (NASL). I also had brief spells with the Los Angeles Sky-Hawks in the American Soccer League (ASL), and the Philadelphia Fever in the Major Indoor Soccer league (MISL). I retired in 1984 after playing professionally for 16 years. After a fifteen year career in Social Work, I joined Manchester United full-time in 1998 where I am now Head of Academy Coaching.

When I first joined Manchester United in the summer of 1968 there was a very buoyant atmosphere because, after all, the club had just won its first European Cup. The playing philosophy I learned as a youngster I have carried with me throughout my career, and it has informed all my work as a youth coach. This was that soccer should be creative, artistic and graceful – players should be allowed to express themselves on the field within the framework of team play. The message transmitted to the players was that if you did not enjoy your football, it would hinder your development as a player. I was taught to love the game for its own sake, work hard to improve my skills and simply enjoy playing.

This is not to say that I did not experience emotional distress – I did, because young players can be extremely vulnerable and sensitive. I loved the Club, and when I left after five years, I had acute feelings of devastation, failure and pathos which I have never forgotten. It was a severe blow to my pride, and it took a long time for me to recover. Thus, I have great empathy for the players in my charge, an innate desire to ensure that they receive a high degree of pastoral support throughout their time at the club. There is no question that my engagement with practical theology was helping me to reflect on these experiences especially in relation to our schoolboy scholars. For example, in Woodward and Pattison (2000) I uncovered a whole new library of knowledge and expertise which I had not known existed, especially theological reflection.

The discipline of practical theology embraces subjects such as: pastoral theology, liberation theology, pastoral care, Christian morality, spirituality, pastoral counselling and culture, religion and faith. I found it captivating, and immediately began to explore ways in which it might inform my work with young people in football. I became extremely interested in theological reflection by means of the "Pastoral cycle" (Larty 2000), and the "Doing theology spiral" espoused by Green (2009b: 17-38).

Green (2009b) outlines a five stage process of reflection involving: experience, exploration, reflection, response and new situation. I came to realise that the 'lived' experience of the schoolboy scholars was an ideal opportunity to undertake some serious theological reflection – hence the rationale for this research. The experience of working closely with the schoolboy scholars over several years had made me acutely sensitive to their pastoral care needs in light of their vulnerability to the various vicissitudes of striving to become professional footballers Green (2009a). I began to explore and analyse the nature of this experience by seeking insights from practitioners in such fields as child welfare and rights, pastoral care, athlete development and practical theology in order to relate theoretical concepts to my actual practice (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; David, 2005; Kidman, 2005; Wall, 2010, Woodward and Pattison, 2000). Having garnered such information, I began to reflect theologically on what this meant for my professional practice. To do this I sought the guidance and assistance of my

colleagues on the Professional Doctorate course during residential gatherings as they rigorously interrogated my thought process. This was extremely helpful because I was able to benefit from their theological knowledge and expertise, as well as finding my own voice as an aspiring practical theologian (Osmer, 2008). As a result of my contemplation on these matters, I began to feel, quite strongly, that liberation theology was going to be an extremely important aspect of my research with its notion of freedom and liberation which I was able to relate to the young players in my charge (Boff, 1987; Gutierrez, 1988). However, as Green (2009b) points out, mere reflection is not enough. On the contrary, theological reflection requires a measured response or action in order to transform one's actual practice for the better thus creating a new situation. Green uses the word "praxis" to describe the kind of reflection which demands action rather than theoretical posturing – for faith without works is meaningless (James 1: 22).

The process of theological reflection was also helping me to see certain parallels in biblical stories about children, and the players I was working with Anderson, 2005; Bunge, 2008; Gundry, 2008; Menn, 2008)). As a researching professional, such stories were speaking very powerfully into the professional context in which I worked, and the adult/child relationships and transactions I supervise. Indeed, they were beginning to have a profound influence on my professional conduct and practice. I make no claim to be a Bible scholar, that is, I am not trained in biblical hermeneutics. However, my professional intuition prevented me from ignoring the rich insights which the Christian Scriptures offer alongside secular sources and the assumptions of empirical research.

The Thesis Structure

In order to bring these deep biblically based reflections into conversation with my research findings, so that the veracity of both types of language, knowledge, wisdom and discourse are preserved; Chapters Three, Four and Five of this thesis contains sections entitled 'biblical motif'. This is a space within the text that permits me, as a researching professional, to critically explore the interface between the research findings, and the biblical texts in question. What precisely are the dynamics of the various scenarios which I describe that the biblical text enlightens in a special way? It is hoped that the use of the concept of motif will

circumvent any hermeneutical issues of biblical scholarship, and acknowledge my credence as a researching professional. I would argue that finding a means of reconciling this creative tension, justifies my decision to undertake the Professional Doctorate in Practical Theology. We will return to the topic of biblical hermeneutics in Chapter Six below, where it will be discussed in relation to my development as a practical theologian (Ballard and Holmes, 2005; Pattison 2000a).

The result of my research unfolds in seven chapters which include this introduction and a short conclusion.

Chapter Two: Explains why I chose to use interviews to collect my data and the ethical issues involved when interviewing young people. I describe how this process impacted on my research emotionally and intellectually. The chapter also discusses my use of thematic analyses to identify the themes imbedded in the text.

Chapter Three: Looks at life at the football club from the viewpoint of the coaches and players – the sacrifice of leaving home, and the demands of day-to-day training. The development of life skills is also an important theme which the chapter addresses. The oral testimony of the players, coaches and teachers are especially important here.

Chapter Four: Describes the boys' academic education at a local school, and how they cope with the dual demands of study and coaching sessions. There is also oral evidence from players, teachers and parents regarding the challenge of integrating the boys into the life of the school. The role of teachers and coaches as 'mentors' is also a recurring theme

Chapter Five: Provides valuable witness from house-parents and players regarding life in Family Accommodation which are recounted for the first time in a study of this nature.

In *Chapter Six* I become a practical theologian in my own right, by reflecting on a range of theological issues relating to the schoolboy scholarship including practical, pastoral and liberation theology.

Finally, in *Chapter Seven*, I summarise the research findings, draw conclusions, and make recommendations to further improve the holistic model of player development propagated in this thesis.

<center>**CHAPTER TWO**</center>

<center>**GATHERING THE GOLD-DUST: METHODOLOGY**</center>

Introduction

This chapter aims to orientate the reader with regard to the various processes and procedures which took place whilst the data was being gathered. Firstly, I explain why I chose to use oral history as the main means to collect my information, as well as the role it has played in football research over the last few decades. Secondly, I explore the specific ethical issues and protocols involved when interviewing adults and young people – the sensitivities I needed to be aware of and overcome. Thirdly, I describe why I selected the interview participants, and how they perceived their role in the process. Fourthly, I discuss the actual interview schedule itself – my role as an inside researcher, and how this may have impacted on the participants responses to the questions I asked. Indeed, insider research is very rare within professional football clubs (Parker, 1995), especially in this context, and I describe how I personally overcame some of the challenges I had to face as a researching professional at the club. Fifthly, I discuss my choice of thematic analysis to interrogate the data and generate the major themes the thesis exposits. In the concluding section, I summarise the various issues discussed as well as look ahead to unveiling the results of the research data.

Oral History

The term 'oral history' is imprecise; it is often used in reference to formal rehearsed accounts of the past, presented by culturally approved tradition bearers, and to informal conversations about the 'old days' among members of the family, friends, neighbours and so on. There are also printed compilations of stories told about the past, and recorded interviews with people deemed to have something of value to say. The various uses of the term have certain prevalence, and most people throughout history have learned about the past via the spoken word (Thompson, 1978). Furthermore, through the ages, history-conscious individuals have preserved first-hand accounts of the past for the record, often precisely at the time when personal memories are about to recede. In short, oral history may be

understood as a conscious, disciplined conversation between two people, about an important aspect of the past considered by them to be of historical resonance and recorded for posterity (Terkel, 1984; Yetman,, 2002). By recording the accounts of a large variety of narrators, oral history has, over the last half century, assisted to make the historical record more democratic. It is also personal – it is about individual lives and experiences – and any life is of interest if it can illuminate certain areas of human experience that would not be possible by any other means. This is exactly what this research attempts to achieve. Oral history methodology allows history to be recorded orally, but also made more accessible through the spoken word (Thompson, 1978). This does not mean that oral historians do not value other sources, they do – however, oral history is a method of interpreting the past to both enhance and supplement the conventional documents normally used by historians such as: census records, registrations of birth, death and marriage, social surveys and so forth (Marwick, 1970; Thompson, 1978).

The Value of Oral History for Football Research

Taylor and Ward (1997) have suggested that football research is so distinctive that it requires a genre that is loyal to the sport's 'emotional truth'. They argue that the spoken word is the primary means by which football folk preserve their stories and disseminate the culture of football. Thus, it has immense merit as a research tool. I can certainly vouch for the veracity of this statement, having been involved in professional football as a player and coach for over thirty five years. It is important to understand that the football world is not an academic sphere, and the communication of knowledge and expertise is less formal, structured and systematic. This is reflected in the nature of the literature that football produces, for example biography, autobiography and coaching manuals (Charlton, 2007; Hughes, 1980; Wilson, 2011). In my experience, the majority of people in professional football do not write their autobiographies or memoirs, so oral history offers them a voice that otherwise would not be heard.

One notable example of this is the visit of Rogan Taylor (the eminent oral historian at Liverpool University) to Budapest, Hungary in 1994, in order to interview the legendary Ference Puskas about the famous Hungarian team which defeated England 6-3 in 1953 at Wembley stadium. It was the first defeat of an

England side on home soil, by a team from outside the British Isles in their history – a result which sent shock waves in football around the world. By using oral history methods, Taylor and his collaborator were able to acquire information about how this great team was formed, revealing information which would have been difficult to attain by any other means (Taylor and Jamrich, 1997). Another benefit of oral history methodology is its flexibility, allowing the interviewer to collect evidence precisely where it is needed (Thompson, 1978). Thus oral history interviews are a valuable source of new knowledge about past events, and an opportunity for scholars to develop new interpretative perspectives on it. A recent example of such scholarship is a doctoral thesis on the oral history of football communities in Liverpool and Manchester (Kelly, 2009). There are also archives containing information on a wide range of topics relating to the oral history of football at The National Football Museum in Manchester and its research partner The International Football Institute (IFI) at the University of Central Lancashire.

A chief advantage of conducting oral history is the fact that the interview method is extremely adaptable. A skilled interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate feelings and motives which is very difficult when using questionnaires. One problem to consider is the issue of bias, as interview data is highly subjective and researchers need to be extremely careful when framing their questions in order to avoid 'leading questions'. They must try, at all times, to be as objective as possible. This is probably the foremost challenge for researchers utilising this genre. However, there are steps which can be taken to check the reliability of what is said in an interview, by comparing it both with other interviews on the same subject, and with related documentary evidence. If the interview accords with other evidence, if it builds upon or supplements this in a consistent and meaningful way, one can assume a certain level of truth in the account. If, however, it conflicts with other evidence or is incompatible with it, the historian needs to account for the disparities. In terms of this particular study, the triangulation of my data through the range of interviews conducted and documentary evidence acquired, assisted in helping me to be as objective as possible as an 'inside' researcher (Bell, 2010).

This section has provided a rationale for an oral history approach to gathering the relevant data for researching the schoolboy scholarship at Manchester United. The method used to analyse and interpret the findings is examined further on in this chapter, but at this point, we will explore the ethical protocols which pertain to qualitative research projects of this nature.

Ethical Protocols

Lee (2009) has argued that ethical practices must be the cornerstone of all good research, and researchers should pursue their work with honesty, integrity and in ways that ensure that no harm (non- malfeasance) is visited on the subjects of the research process. In the modern world, the general public have a desire and right to know exactly what is being undertaken in the name of research and professional practice – and why. This interest is often the result of the access to myriad kinds of information on the Internet, and the increased ability of people to avail themselves of enormous quantities of information once the exclusive preserve of the professional realm. High profile international research has a particular interest, prompting various challenges to the very nature of research itself (Lee, 2009).

Correct ethical protocols are paramount, regardless of the location or status of the research project. For example, the professional nature of this thesis falls within the orbit of a world renowned professional football club, and the ethical framework of working with young people in sport (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010). University, government and multi-national organisations do not wish to have their reputations tarnished by unprofessional research practices, and some spheres of research such as health care require rigorous ethical procedures due to the vulnerability of patients and staff working in this domain. It is clear that all human participants in research are exposed to the same stress and anxieties, especially if their own professional practice is placed under the microscope (Bell, 2010; Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Lee, 2009). There are five basic ethical principles related to this research: informed consent, doing no harm (non-malfeasance), safeguarding vulnerable groups (including children), confidentiality and data protection. We shall now examine each of these in turn.

As with all research, participants need to know why, how, by whom and in what circumstances the research is being carried out. They cannot make an informed decision about their participation without this vital information. Informed consent may be obtained in several ways: by written information, for example and the use of a written consent form and participant information sheet. This research was conducted with my organisation's consent, but the field-work participants were entitled to have comprehensive details about the research before they agreed to participate or otherwise. Any withholding of information or lack of clarity could be considered to be a form of misrepresentation and would not, therefore, comply with the ethical standards expected of research professionals. In summary, the notion of informed consent requires the practitioner (s) to think about how they will gain access to possible research participants, explain the rationale for the research, and the role of the participant in the overall research process. The kind of language used will depend on the specific context of the research, which in my case are adults in professional positions, as well as young people. One must be careful not to use inappropriate terms or academic terminology that potential participants will not understand as this will negate the very concept of informed consent (Lee, 2009).

One of my primary aims from the outset of this project was to ensure that all the participants had lucid information, both orally and in writing, on which to base their judgement. I was anxious to make sure they fully understood the purpose of the research, what participation would involve, as well as the benefits and risks (if any) that pertained in their commitment to the project. This would give them the opportunity to change their minds if necessary, without their rights being affected in any way. In the case of the young people (Under 18) involved in the research, this meant speaking personally to their parents and asking them to complete a parental consent form along with their son.

One of the challenges for practitioner research is ensuring that no harm will come to any of the subjects of the investigation. For example, the discussion of sensitive issues, or reflecting on unpleasant experiences from the past such as bullying or harassment in the workplace, has the potential to cause a degree of stress to the participant. It must be said, however, that failure to undertake

research because it may have negative or harmful consequences, or explore sensitive and controversial issues would mean that ultimately some valuable research area would be ignored. This is especially true of this thesis. In fact, one of the reasons for having ethical protocols in the first place, is to raise awareness of any potential harm or distress, and find ways to alleviate them before the research begins. This should be done in consultation with the participants and other professionals in the field who can offer advice, guidance and support (Lee, 2009; Trafford and Leshem, 2008).

It is always a difficult task to guarantee that no harm will ensue during the interview process. For example, detailed discussion of sensitive areas, reflection on past events or a range of other matters can potentially cause pain or anxiety. Furthermore, in this case, there may be a risk that because the researcher once had responsibility for some of the participants – for instance, that he was once their manager and coach – some young people might have felt inhibited to make unflattering comments about the programme for fear of reprisal. Participants in my research, while they may have been employed by the Club, were not directly under my supervision at the time of the interview, having moved to another part of the Academy that I do not manage. Thus, my relationship with the research participants was as a researcher, and not as a manager. Therefore, while research participants and I may have been employed by the club, our relationship was not one of 'manager' and 'managed' or, indeed, 'coach' and 'player'. It is important to note that this research project was funded by my employer, and overseen professionally by the Safeguarding Children Department of the club who are aware of the research, and have given their approval and support of its conduct. I constantly strived to ensure that my interviews with young people were in keeping with the principle that "The best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3.1).

Furthermore, as a former professional footballer, I was deeply concerned to ensure that the subjects of my research did not suffer any unnecessary emotional or psychological trauma as a result of their participation. Indeed, their candid input was crucial for the validity of the research. I also recognised that all interviews with young people must be managed in a highly professional and ethical manner

in accordance with government child protection legislation – the Children Act, 2004 - as well as the safeguarding children guidelines published by the University of Chester and the Club (MUFC Safeguarding Children Policy, 2012). As part of this process, I had to submit to the University Of Chester Ethics Committee a formal application for ethical approval before I was permitted to proceed with the research. Another important issue was the fact that I acted as a 'mentor' to several of the players interviewed, and to what extent this might have affected the nature of the dilemmas were they prepared to discuss.(see Chapter Four for further discussion about the process of mentoring).

Another important issue to consider is that of participant confidentiality, anonymity, and security of data. This was a major concern for me when I was seeking the consent of the research participants, as I did not want to make promises I knew I could not keep. This posed a serious challenge as individuals may be identifiable or guessed within a small study by the role they have, comments made, or actions taken. I sought to address this problem by making no mention of the name, age, year group or achievements of any individual player. All direct quotations from individual participants are simply presented in italics without any indication of who is actually speaking. Thus full-names, specific job titles and other information that could make a person identifiable were totally omitted from the manuscript (Bell, 2010; Lee, 2009). With regard to the security of the primary data (tapes), these were retained on a computer that only the researcher uses, which can only be accessed using a password. Secondary data (interview transcripts), were stored in a locked cabinet in the researchers home that only he can access. Furthermore, research data will not be retained for any longer than data protection legislation permits.

Having looked at the ethical aspects of this study, we shall now examine the research process itself.

The Research Process

The pivotal work of Swinton and Mowat (2006) informs this research as they place qualitative research in practical theology within the context of other methodological approaches such as social science. They argue that practical theology is a sophisticated and multifaceted discipline which offers a distinctive contribution to the discipline of theology in the wider of context of the church in the world. Practical theology is diverse, embracing a wide variety of theological viewpoints from liberal to conservative so "there is no single, standardized way of doing practical theology and it is not owned by any particular wing" (Swinton and Mowat, 2006: V). However, although there are a wide range of views, there is also much consensus – and the common theme that binds practical theology together is its primary concern to evaluate and reflect on human experience. Much of the diversity within practical theology is based on the various methods utilised to detect, capture, analyse, record and understand information. This has primarily been achieved through dialogue with the social sciences which have provided practical theologians a valuable means to better comprehend the human mind. This, in turn, offers greater insight to the broader sphere of church life and the impact this has on the political dimensions of society and the process of theological reflection. Although the input of social science has been criticised, it has produced important data for practical theologians to reflect upon on. So although there has been tension between the two disciplines (some have argued that they are incompatible), as with any other source, data gathered via the social sciences should be dealt with carefully and critically (Swinton and Mowat, 2006).

Swinton and Mowat (2006) have highlighted the importance of engaging critically with social science disciplines such as sociology, psychology, politics and anthropology. Within this context, when we engage in 'qualitative research' we refer to social research that gives priority to textual rather than numeral data. Carter and Little (2007) describe three fundamental aspects of research: epistemology, methodology and method which serve as a framework for designing and assessing the quality of social research. These three facets are often categorised in various ways in research literature and can be described as follows. Epistemology is the study of how knowledge is acquired and verified. Methodology is basically a justification for the methods selected in a research

project, "and not the methods themselves". Finally, methods are the various procedures for gathering research data – It is research in action. In short, methodology justifies method, which in turn produces the 'raw' material or data for final analysis and the generation of new knowledge in an on-going cycle. Carter and Little (2007) contend that epistemology, methodology and method are essential features of any research project and engagement with these important concepts is requisite for all good qualitative research.

Qualitative research of this particular nature in professional football is extremely rare. In fact Parker (1995) has stated that there is an insular atmosphere created in football which makes it difficult to capture the realities of the football world. He argues that "life inside the professional game revolves around a strict diet of authoritarianism, ruthlessness and an assortment of hyper-masculine occupational codes" (Parker, 1995: 107). Davies (1975) spent a season with Tottenham Hotspur, the famous London club, and recounted how difficult it had been for him to get inside the 'bowels' of a football club to observe the day-to-day routines. My position as an 'insider' gave me access to players and staff that would not otherwise have been possible. However, even this created a degree of suspicion and wariness of what this researcher might be trying to achieve. That said, over the last ten years sport science has had an increasing influence on the game in the sphere of diet, nutrition, hydration, rehabilitation and so on. This has meant that more and more academically qualified practioners have entered the game, helping to break down some of the barriers between football and academia. People in football who have Masters Degrees and Doctorates are becoming more common than ever (Johnson, 2008).

Coghlan and Brannick (2010: 114-115) brought to my attention the concept of "pre-understanding" which refers to the knowledge, experience and insights researchers already have prior to embarking on research within their own organisation. They should use this to their advantage. This applies not only to the theoretical comprehension of organisational procedure, but also to the day-to-day operation of the business – how things actually work in practice. Pre-understanding incorporates both overt and implied knowledge. The personal knowledge and experience the inside researcher already has about the way the

company functions is already an invaluable resource. The inside researcher also has intimate knowledge about the various cultures and informal configurations of the institution. Organisations have two facets: the formal or public, and the informal or private. The formal is represented in policy and procedure documents, mission statements, annual reports and so forth; the informal is experienced via custom, tradition and political factions. This information, although beneficial, also has its disadvantages which I needed to be aware of, not least the difficulty of taking a dispassionate stance in order to be an objective critic. As an employee of the club, I also needed to be aware of my own emotions and sensitivities which could have an influence on the research process (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Fox *et al*, 2007). Having examined the key features of the overall research procedure, it is now time to explore how the oral history information was generated.

The Interview Process

In order to gather my oral history data, I decided to conduct guided or semi-structured interviews with people working in the five areas of the scholarship scheme namely: players, coaches, school-teachers, parents and family accommodation providers (house-parents) so that they were all represented. The selection criterion for the interviews was that each participant must have been involved in the scheme for at least two years in one of the above capacities. This was to ensure that they had enough knowledge and experience of the programme to provide well thought-out answers to the interview questions (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Bell, 2010; Thompson, 1978). Therefore, I divided the number of interviews conducted into the following groups:

- Players (6)

- Coaches (4)

- Teachers (4)

- Parents (4)

- House-parents (4)

This gave me a total of twenty two (22) people whom I interviewed during my fieldwork: November 2012 – February 2013. Initially, I wanted to interview several players who were still in the scholarship scheme – that is, under my management. This was because I could include more players who had experienced at least two years in the programme, giving me a greater array of possible answers. On reflection, however, and in light of feedback I received from the University of Chester Ethics Committee, I decided to interview only those players who had graduated from the programme and no longer under my management. This reduced the number of interviewees available to me quite severely. However, because there was now some distance between the 'interviewer' and 'interviewee', I felt that this improved the interview process because the interviewee was now a 'professional' in his own right, and this increased his status, as well as empowering him to speak his mind without fear of any reprisal. On the contrary, the participants, by agreeing to be interviewed in the first place, were implying that they felt confident that no harm would befall them as a result of their participation. Furthermore, during the interview, the researcher wished to create a friendly, non-threatening environment in order for the participants to feel relaxed, confident and unafraid of the microphone. It was felt that this would greatly enhance the research results.

My decision to interview six players whilst the other groups had only four was because I felt that within the hierarchy of the research, theirs were the most important voices. This was because it was they who had to cope with the various demands the programme wrought on their lives: leaving home, training, playing and trying to achieve their hope and aspirations. Furthermore, I believed that this particular group would be far more reticent in their response to the interview questions, so I was giving myself a greater opportunity to gather the data I needed for the research (Bell, 2010); Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). I also made a conscious decision to differentiate between the types of questions I asked the players, from those I raised with the adults in the interviews (see Appendix 2). Although I asked the players more questions than the adults, they were short and less complex, which I hoped would enable them to understand the question better before they answered. All participants were invited to attend the interview at a time of their choosing, either at the training ground, school or their own homes. It

is noteworthy that all but one of the players, coaches and parents chose the training ground, whereas the teachers and house-parents chose the school or their own home. To account for the sensitivities involved with interviewing young people under eighteen years of age, an adult other than me was always in the vicinity for safeguarding purposes. I also invited the parents of players to observe their interview if they wished. None of them accepted, as they informed me that they did not think it was necessary.

An important aim of the research process was to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on the many experiences they had on the programme both positive and negative. It was hoped that this would help them to assess and evaluate the contribution they had made in their various roles as player, coach, teacher, house-parent or parent. It was also intended that the interview process made them conscious of the fact that the club valued and respected their views and insights, and would use the information they provided to improve the scheme for the next generation of players. Another key issue was my own role as an 'inside' researcher which could be a disadvantage. This was because my position as a senior member of staff – representing Club tradition and culture, could make it very difficult for the interviewees to disclose information which they thought might offend me. It could also influence my objectivity when interpreting the data the interviews generated (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

The guided or focused interview technique allowed participants the freedom to articulate the issues that most concerned them, rather than concentrating solely on the specific information the interviewer was seeking to ascertain (see Appendix 2). I was also cognisant of the fact that some kind of formal framework for the interviews was necessary to ensure I was able to assemble data which was coherent. Thus the respondents were able to offer their views and opinions in their own time and way (Bell, 2010). This was also an important ethical consideration (Lee, 2009). It should be noted that this approach is analogous to that of Rogan Taylor's to oral history research – notably Taylor and Jamrich, (1997); Taylor and Ward, (1995) and Taylor *et al* (1995). However, what distinguishes it from these studies is that my focus is entirely on a facet of the Youth Football Industry, whereas Taylor and his colleagues concentrate on

various aspects of the senior game, particularly football history and culture (see also Parker, 1996).

An important outcome of this research was the fact that many of the adult interviewees told me that they were being questioned for the first time about this aspect of their professional lives. I found this to be a thought provoking experience. Moreover, the participants felt that their work was being appreciated and valorised for the contribution it had made to player development over the years, which included working with this particular group of players. They welcomed the opportunity to give their evidence within an environment which, though necessarily formal and structured, allowed them to relax and feel comfortable as they recounted their story. This fact became even more evident when I transcribed the tapes. This was because I could vividly recall their body language, tone of voice and other expressions which confirmed (to my mind) the veracity of what they were actually saying. Such was the nature of the unwitting feedback I received, which I felt justified my decision to use interviews as the main method of mining my 'gold dust' (Taylor and Ward, 1995; Terkel, 1984; Thompson, 1978).

Having discussed how I gathered my research material, I will now discuss how it was analysed.

The Utility of Thematic Analysis
As we have seen, qualitative research is diverse and multi-faceted, hence thematic analysis can be seen as a core method for qualitative analysis. In fact Braun and Clarke (2006) claim it is the first qualitative method that novice researchers should learn, as it offers important foundational skills and expertise that will be helpful when carrying out many other forms of qualitative analysis. Identifying themes is a major feature of this method which is shared across other analytic traditions such as grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). Thematic analysis is a technique to help distinguish and analyse patterns, or themes, within assembled data, and describe them in intricate detail. However, it can do substantially more than this, by allowing us a different of means interpreting different aspects of the subject matter. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis, although

widely used, has no consensus among scholars regarding how it should be done. It is often underrated, and does not often appear in the same category as other methods such as narrative analysis or grounded theory. Furthermore, there is concern about the reliability of the method Guest *et al*, 2012), its limited interpretative power (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and the difficulty to maintain a sense of continuity of data in individual accounts. Despite these criticisms, I used thematic analysis to scrutinise my data analysis for the following reasons:

1. The method had a great degree of flexibility.

2. It was relatively easy for the researcher to learn and understand.

3. It was extremely accessible as I had no prior experience of using this particular method.

4. The outcomes (themes identified) appear to be easy to disseminate to a wider educated audience.

5. The ability to summarise, succinctly, the most important themes within a large body of transcribed material.

6. The generation of possible new insights and perspectives.

7. I felt very comfortable using the method, and the emerging themes made sense *vis-à-vis* the triangulation of all the data analysed.

8. The method was appropriate given the nature of the research questions I was asking.

At this point, an important question the reader may be asking is: what exactly constitutes 'a theme' in thematic analysis? The answer is that a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The perfect scenario is that the same theme will recur across

the data set, but this does not mean that this theme has greater primacy than others that have less representation. Indeed, as this is qualitative analysis, one of the tasks of the researcher is to identify which sections of the data set shows evidence that it contains a particular theme. It does not follow that, because an item occurs several times in a data set, it constitutes a major theme. Conversely, limited appearances of a data item does not imply that it is not worthy of consideration to be a theme. Therefore, the judgement of the researcher is paramount in determining what a theme is. It is important to note that the primacy of a theme is not based on the quantity of its appearance, but rather that it captures something truly meaningful in relation to the research question at hand.

The process of actually doing thematic analysis was, for me, an extremely valuable experience because it brought me very close to the subjects of my interviews through the six phases of this particular research tool which I will now describe (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Phase one is becoming immersed in the data. This meant reading and rereading the interview transcripts, and noting initial ideas and items that had the potential to eventually become themes. I read through each transcript at least three times, before I considered trying to code my ideas with a view to eventually identifying the emerging patterns. This was a time consuming process, but I quickly came to realise that it was foundational to the rest of the analysis. After this stage, I felt really familiar with the content of the data and able to note obvious patterns or repeated issues across the data set. I wrote these down on a notepad in order to use when I began coding and checking for accuracy. It had become clear to me, that the time I had spent personally transcribing the data had not been wasted, but rather it had informed the early phase of my analysis, giving me a comprehensive understanding of the data. I was now ready to proceed to the next stage of the analysis.

The *second phase* in thematic analysis is concerned with the assembly of initial codes from the data. The codes categorise features of the data that appeared to be significant to me, and constituted the raw material that I could begin to assess in a practical way. The coding procedure evolved through an inductive analysis which

was not linear, but cyclical proceeding back and forth as codes emerged through the research process. This interrogation was very important, as I needed go beyond the surface meaning of the data to be completely satisfied that the final themes would accurately represent the story the data was telling me (Guest *et al*, 2012). I performed this task manually, using a pen to underline and note in the margin segments of the data that might contain potential themes. It was important at this juncture to code as many potential themes/patterns as possible as I needed to be certain that none of the most noteworthy data was lost. It was also important for me to begin asking questions related to the data: what was it telling me about the research questions I had been asking; were there any surprises, and what might be the key themes?

I now had a lengthy list of potential codes that I had identified across the data set, which brought me to *phase three* of my analysis. This phase helped me to refocus the analysis, to concentrate on the embryonic themes, rather than codes. I began sorting the various codes into prospective themes, and assembling all the pertinent coded data extracts within the themes I had recognised. This was a crucial point, as I was now taking into account how different codes may merge to form an all embracing theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006). I made copious notes, which helped me to think more deeply about the relationship between themes, and the hierarchy of sub-themes within them. During this analysis, some codes became main themes, others subordinate, whilst some were ignored altogether. I now had a large set of contestant themes, sub-themes, and the associated coded extracts from the data. And yet my toils were not yet over, as I now had to re-examine the themes to ensure they did not need further modification, refinement, or abandonment altogether.

During *phase four* of the analysis, I reviewed and refined the themes I had generated, and tested them further to see if they had sufficient data to support them. This was completed at two levels. Level one involved re-reading the coded extracts for each theme to see if they had a consistent pattern. Once I was satisfied with this, I moved on to the level two which was similar to the previous level, but involved the examination of the entire data set. A vital question concerned the validity of the individual themes in relation to the data set. Did my

'thematic map' cohere with the meanings revealed within the entirety of the data set? This of course was quite subjective, and dependent upon the conceptual framework of my research. I laboured at this; until I was completely satisfied there was nothing more significant to add.

I was now in an excellent position to be able to distinguish and refine the themes my analysis had revealed which is *phase five* of thematic analysis. At this stage, I needed to be absolutely certain about the fundamental nature of each theme and its place within the data set as a whole. In order to do this, I wrote down a name for each of the 'major' or 'first order' themes my analysis had revealed which were: leaving home, life skills, holistic development, mentoring and pastoral care. The significance of these themes (and sub-themes) of this research will become clearer in the sections that follow, notably Chapters Three, Four and Five of this thesis.

Having completed the demanding task of identifying and refining the research themes, I was now well placed to begin to tell the story that lay behind them. This is the *sixth* and final phase of thematic analysis. In this phase, I intend to provide satisfactory evidence for the themes the data has revealed.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explained the value of using oral history for research into the world of professional football. Communication within this sphere has traditionally been in this form, making it especially efficacious for research that involves using interview techniques as the primary method of gathering evidence (Taylor and Ward, 1995). Modern day researchers have to be extremely vigilant to observe university guidelines and procedures relating to the ethical protocols that must be followed when conducting intensive research. I have demonstrated how I have dealt with this aspect of this project – bringing the reader's attention to the particular problems and issues relating to safeguarding young people involved in research. The problem of 'insider' research in a professional football club was discussed – how I overcame a range of institutional, cultural, social and administrative challenges in order to interview the research participants. I also described how the interview process empowered many of the participants, making them feel more respected, valued and appreciated. Finally, I explained the use of

thematic analysis to interrogate the research data – how it helped me to classify themes in order to present a story that did justice to the testimony I had been so generously given.

In the next three chapters, I present the primary source narratives which inform this thesis, beginning with daily life at the football club which is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

NARRATIVES OF THE SCHOOLBOY SCHOLARSHIP:

LIFE AT THE FOOTBALL CLUB

Introduction

Although this chapter is concerned primarily with interview data, I think it is appropriate to first describe the general procedure of the scholarship programme, in order to properly orientate the reader. I achieve this by judiciously integrating the oral testimony along with a theoretical explanation of the specific background to which it pertains.

The schoolboy scholars have to operate in three main spaces, namely: the school, their family accommodation and the football club. Of these domains, it is undoubtedly the football club which offers the most attraction, given this is where their coaching and training takes place. The Training Complex is a vibrant, dynamic and exciting environment in which to play football – the heart and soul of the club. The first team, reserves and youth team players all train there, and the range of staff include the manager, coaches, secretariat, medical team, ground-staff, caterers, security and other professionals who help to keep the club at the forefront of professional football. In short, it is a small village which, since it opened in January 2000, has developed its own *modus operandi* that everyone has to follow, not least young schoolboy players. This can be very intimidating for a young boy at first, and one of the major tasks for the coaches is helping them to overcome their initial nervousness, and become comfortable in this setting. It is into this environment that the schoolboy scholars come each day after school to train and play football, and this has its own challenges (McGuinness and Whelan, 2007).

It is a difficult decision by the boys to leave their home and family to join the scheme and this is the first area we will examine. Furthermore, parents have to permit their son's to come full-time, and this is not an easy decision for them to make. Coaching and training is probably the single most important feature of the programme, because this is the principal reason why they choose to join the

football club in the first place. Thus, we will look at the concept of long term athlete development (LTAD), the Academy syllabus, as well as the importance of spontaneous play to assist their development as aspiring professional footballers. Player well-being is also an important consideration, and St Mark's gospel offers valuable theological insights which will be explored later in the chapter.

Besides their football education, one of the aims of the scheme is to teach young players a set of 'life skills' which will be of benefit to them long after they have graduated and left the club. The chapter will provide evidence of the extent to which this is successful (Whelan, 2008a). In order to do this, we will examine some key primary sources to help tell the story, notably my interviews with players, parents, teachers and members of the coaching staff. They will be distinguished in the text by having a personal code, for example Player A or Parent B, in order to protect their anonymity.

It is important to know that throughout the period of this research the number of boys in the scholarship scheme was as follows: **8** boys in 2007/2008; **12** in 2008/2009; **10** in 2009/2010; **12** in 2010/2011 and 1**3** in 2011/2012. They were distributed throughout the school year groups' 7 – 11 making a total 28 of whom I interviewed six for this project.

Leaving Home

After making the momentous decision to leave home to accept a scholarship, there remain two very important tasks that the players and their parents have to complete. The first was visiting their new accommodation to meet their prospective house-parents; the second was having an induction at their new school. These are normally done in the months of June, July and August. This process takes time, as it is important that the player and his parents have the opportunity to ask questions, peruse accommodation, and acquaint themselves with their prospective house-parents before making a final decision whether, or not, to join the programme. The Head of Education and Welfare tried to place a player with another boy his own age, but this is not always possible. Once the boy and his parents are comfortable with the accommodation, they are ready to

enrol at their new school in September, and commence their coaching and training regime at the club.

Leaving home is a major decision for any young person to take, and the speed of the transition depends on the emotional maturity of the player concerned. Some boys settle in easily, others less so. What is certain, however, is that they are entering what is for them, the 'unknown' and it is inevitable they will feel nervous, apprehensive and more than just a little lonely. The players had this to say about the experience of leaving home:

> *I think you do miss out on your family life, and I think it did affect my mum at first. And then when she realises how it is going to help you in the future then that is important. I think it did affect my mum, but she has seen why I chose to leave for my career. I think my sister missed me because she was young at that age, but dad wanted me to do it. He still missed me, but he wanted me to do it because he knew how it was going to help me in future* (Player D interview: 22, 12, 2012).

> *I think it may have affected my mum – obviously I would not be around more. To be a footballer you have got to make sacrifices and stuff like that, so I don't think I missed out all that much. The only thing I may have missed out on was living at home really, and doing stuff with my younger brothers, sisters. I don't think that was a massive issue to be honest* (Player E interview: 22, 1, 13).

These two extracts are revealing for two reasons. Firstly, the fact the boy leaving home affects not only parents, but also siblings, who are also losing someone whom they love dearly. Secondly, Player E makes the point that leaving home is actually a 'sacrifice', but one he was prepared to make if he wanted to achieve his dream of becoming a professional footballer. Player D makes the same point regarding his father who, he tells us, is prepared to pay the price of losing his son because he knows how it was going to help him in the future.

If players leave behind their parents, brothers and sisters when they join the scheme, then parents too, make their own sacrifice – that of losing their son. This is an extremely traumatic experience, as he is special to them, and giving him to someone else to 'look after' fills them with sorrow and trepidation. One parent said the following in this regard:

> *The main challenge was living away from home at a young age, and obviously, from a parent's point of view, it was not having that every-day control for want of a better expression really. But I think, for him, as a boy, it would have been* [the challenge] *living away from home – definitely. Albeit we were only very local, I think it was getting used to being in a digs environment. I think the football side of it was not so much a challenge for him – I think it's an enjoyable side of it* (Parent B, interview: 12, 12, 13).

Other parents concur with this view, for example:

> *I think the main thing was being away from home, because I think he* [her son] *was used to being in a home environment in quite a close family. And for him…to be living somewhere else, was probably quite difficult because he wasn't that sociable a child. He didn't like going and staying in other peoples' houses overnight when he was younger. So I think that's most probably the most difficult thing for him – the challenge* (Parent D interview: 31, 1, 13).

Parent B is concerned about losing a degree of control. However, Parent B accepts with a calm resignation, that the youngster is leaving home because he wants desperately to play football as he enjoys it so much. That said, Parent B clearly believes that leaving home will still be difficult for him. The reference to "digs" is the popular football terminology to describe the players living accommodation when they are away from home (Green, 1978). Parent D's son is from a close family, and the fact that he is not comfortable staying away from home was a very challenging experience. These are but two examples of how parents feel about losing their son. But what is the coaches' perception of this

experience? It is commonly perceived that youth football coaches are aloof, insensitive and ruthless individuals when dealing with the emotions of young players (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; Green, 2009a; Parker, 2001; 1995). However, the following statements provide a surprisingly different, perhaps more caring and insightful perspective on what it is like for a child to leave their home and kin:

> *Leaving home is a massive one…we are asking them to come away from home, so I think it is a massive sacrifice. I think it is a big one for the parents as well to let their boy move out, because the best years of their life you want them out of the house, so leaving home is a massive one.* (Coach A interview: 8, 11, 2012).

> *The first challenge for me is leaving home, stepping away from all that, some of them very young – twelve or thirteen years old. How they deal with it, and how they cope with being away from home – living with a different family, the pressures and the day-to-day standard of the training they have to keep up. The new school, dealing with new school mates and teachers, and the new environment – all that. And I think, especially in the first year in my experience, it is the year you have to monitor them and watch them, and not really care too much about how they are playing football, there is so much going on* (Coach B interview: 12, 11, 12).

> *Well I think the main challenges are leaving home, dealing with that. I think that's the hardest part. But I think once they get over that first year, I think they are all right. I think it takes a year, I think that cycle of a year is a really important thing to recognise. I think from the parent's point of view it is a really big ask to leave home, give up a sound education whatever school you are at. Give up a family life because you have to consider the effect on all the family. Most of these lads are the golden child in the family. Because of their talent, their mums will have invested a lot of time in them. If they then give that up, they have to be safe in the knowledge that the people they are giving up their boy to are fully capable of replacing them and doing a good job* (Coach C interview: 28, 11, 12).

The coaches raise a number of particularly important issues regarding player welfare, not least the difficulties a young person faces when leaving home at such a young age. They know from experience, that several players have declined to join the scheme because they could not face the prospect of moving away from their family. One player left the programme after a year due to severe homesickness (Whelan, 2008a). Another issue to be considered, is the fact that it must be very difficult for any player to decline a place at a football school such as this; and they may feel that turning an offer down might jeopardise their future with the club, despite being reassured otherwise by staff. As the coaches point out, players not only leave their families, but also their friends as well as their school. They must feel this sense of loss for quite some time. Furthermore, whilst doing this, they are also expected to integrate into a new home and school, and cope with the demands of full-time coaching and training.

Consequently, it is no wonder that coaches B and C comment that adapting to this new way of life can take up to twelve months. Over time, the coaches have learned to be patient, recognising that the players need close monitoring and support during this time, to help alleviate the stress and strain they clearly have to endure. It is noteworthy in this regard, that Coach B makes the point that in some cases a player's performance may completely deteriorate due to his fragile emotional state. Normally, in the fullness of time, their form returns, and the player begins to fulfil his undoubted potential. Coach C also infers that parents believe that their talented son is the "Golden child" because of all the time they have invested ferrying him to training and matches. Thus, to give them up to the club is an unwitting declaration that they have the utmost trust and belief that staff will look after their physical and emotional well-being. This is something coaches take very seriously – a major rationale for this research. The theme of sacrifice has been prominent in this section which is the subject of our first biblical motif.

Biblical Motif: Sacrifice

In light of this research area – practical theology, it is curious that Player E and Coach A use the word "sacrifice" to describe the commitment it takes from parent and players to join the scholarship scheme. This word has deeply entrenched theological significance in the Judeo-Christian religious tradition, related to the sacrificial system in the Old Testament (Leviticus), and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross to redeem mankind in the New. This redemptive process is expressed primarily in the four Gospels, as well as the book of Hebrews (Berkof, 1984). Chriswell (1975) has called this the "scarlet thread of redemption", that is, various symbols of the blood of Christ are woven into the biblical narrative. It began with the slaying by God of an innocent animal in the Garden of Eden (Gen: 3), and ends with the vision of St John (Rev: 7), where he sees the "blood-washed, blood-bought redeemed of the Lord in glory" (Chriswell 1975: 1252). In between, we have the extraordinary biblical story of the patriarchs, Israel, priests, kings, psalmists, prophets, apostles and the Son of God who came to earth clothed in human flesh (Criswell 1975). There are clearly different levels of sacrifice, and the sacrifice of Christ was truly transcendent. However, I use the biblical example of sacrifice only as a means to describe the pain the boys suffer when they choose to surrender a stable home life in their quest for the glory a career in professional football can bring (1 Pet: 1, 11). In the case of the scholars parents, it is the letting go of something precious (their son) in order to enable them to realise their dream of fame, fortune and success in the world of professional football (Charlton, 2007; Hamilton, 2013; Shindler, 2005).

Having forfeited the comforts of life with their family to join a full-time soccer school, the following section describes the coaching and training programme, which is the prime reason the players accept a scholarship offer in the first place.

Talent Development

Balyi (2001) formulated the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model from research he had performed on elite skiers. Since then, his basic model has been used by a number of sport organisations around the world including the Football Association. Balyi's premise is that it takes ten years of intensive training to excel in anything whether it is sport, music or academia. This is the so

called 'ten thousand hour rule' mentioned in Chapter One, which translates approximately to three hours of daily practice for ten years (Balyi, 2001). Consider, for example, how many hours a chess Grandmaster must have spent playing as well as studying in order to earn his esteemed status. Balyi argues that too many coaches approach training with the attitude that peaking by Friday (athletes reaching their optimum physical and psychological level) is essential in order to win on Saturday. In other words, they train their athletes to win. Other researchers agree with this assertion, stating that long term commitment to training is required in order to attain the highest standard of excellence in any sphere of human endeavour (Coyle, 2009; Gladwell, 2009; Syed, 2010). The result of the research shows that a football-specific, well thought out training and competition programme would ensure optimum development throughout an athlete's career. Success is derived by performing well over the long term, rather than winning in the short term. Thus there can be no short cut to success, as rushing to put elite athletes into competition too quickly may result in shortcomings in technique, tactics and psychological development (Bompa, 2000; Stafford, 2005).

Gladwell (2009) has argued that success is the result of what he calls "accumulated advantages" such as having been born at the right time or place, and having opportunities to practice that other talented people simply do not have (p. 30). He gives the example of the famous rock group, the Beatles when they were serving their musical apprenticeship in Hamburg in the early 1960s. They performed in club's there five times between 1960 and 1962, playing up to eight times a day, seven days a week. Therefore, by 1964, when they had their initial success, they had played live an estimated 1200 times. Most aspiring musicians did not perform as many times as this during their entire career (Gladwell, 2009). Coyle (2009) makes a similar point regarding Renaissance artists, who apprenticed their craft by serving under a Master Painter, learning their trade through action rather than theory. In other words, by mixing paint, preparing canvasses and sharpening chisels. They competed within a hierarchy in which they could rise from the status of journeyman to a highly skilled master. Consequently, apprentices spent thousands of hours solving problems: trying, failing and trying again in an environment where the ultimate goal was

excellence. This is exactly the milieu coaches are trying to create for the scholars (Whelan, 2008a).

The coaches, found all the above research impressive, and felt it we had a duty to take it into account when we were devising the coaching and training programme for the players. Therefore, our coaching and training was based on Balyi's five phase Long Term Athlete Development model. The stages are as follows: Fundamental, Learning to Train, Training to Compete, Training to Win and Retirement/Retraining. Each of these phases has its own characteristic. For example, the fundamental stage is widely considered to be the 'golden age of learning' during which children between the ages of six to twelve acquire the fundamental movement skills which are the foundation of all athletic development. These skills include: running, jumping, throwing, hopping, bouncing and bounding. Thus, the A, B, C's of athletics (agility, balance, co-ordination) are introduced during this time which will lay solid foundations for the attainment of excellence in later years (Balyi, 2001; Bompa; 2000; Stafford, 2005).

This study is concerned exclusively with the second phase of Balyi's model: Training to Train. During this stage (broadly U12 – U16), young players learn how to train, and they also learn the basic skills of a specific sport – in our case football. Furthermore, they are introduced to the basic technical and tactical skills and related activities such as warm up, cool down, stretching, hydration, nutrition, recovery and recuperation, mental preparation, competition routines and post-competition recovery methods. During competition, players are expected to play to win, and do their best; but the main focus is the learning of basic skills as opposed to competing. Too much competition wastes valuable training time and, conversely, not enough competition (matches) inhibits the practice of technical skills and learning how to cope with the physical and mental challenges presented in competition. Therefore, a seventy-five percent training, and twenty-five percent competition ratio is recommended by experts during the training to train stage (Stafford, 2005). However, this is only a guideline, and can vary from sport to sport, as well as the differing physiology of individual athletes. Research indicates that players undertaking this type of training will be better prepared for

competition, in both the long and short term, than those focused on winning. During this stage our players train in competitive situations daily in the form of game related practices and exercises. Thus, the Training to Train phase forms the core of the schoolboy scholars training programme, because it addresses the critical or sensitive period of physical and skill development. Research has demonstrated that players who miss this stage of training will never reach their full potential regardless of any remedial strategies that are implemented at a later time. In fact, the major reason why so many athletes plateau during the later stages of their careers is primarily because of an overemphasis on competition during this delicate period of their development (Balyi, 2001; Stafford, 2005).

However, Balyi's (2001) model of athlete development is contentious. Baker (2003) argues that there are a variety of "negative consequences" associated with specialising in a particular sport to early. There is evidence that the narrow range of skills attained at an early age endangers general motor development. This may also affect physical activity and general health in the long term by reducing the prospect of participating in different sports and the benefit this engenders for psychological and emotional well-being. Concentration on a single sport at a young age can also hinder sociological development. Participating in several sports is an excellent way of learning social skills such as team-work and a greater understanding of acceptable social behaviour. Therefore, there is a danger that spending too much time training may hinder social growth leading to social isolation. The risk of injury through excessive activity and the lack of fun which can occur because training becomes a boring routine are also factors which can be damaging to an athletes well-being. Baker *et al* (2003) concur with this view contending that the nurture of athletes involves not just deliberate practice, but rather an amalgam blend of support from coaches, parents and friends. There are also cultural and environmental factors to consider such as the value a particular region or nation place on a particular sport – for example, Hockey in Canada. Brackenridge (Brackenridge *et al, 2007)* adds to the debate stating that although Baly's (2001) model offers a solid framework for improved performance and development, it can also be seen a "Dehumanising practice" which concentrates solely on performance outcomes to the detriment to genuine holistic human growth and development.

The Academy Syllabus

Closely aligned with the Long Term Athlete Development model described above is the Academy Syllabus. This clearly sets forth the Academy strategies and ideas regarding player development, which had previously been transmitted orally. The six major areas covered by the syllabus are: Technical, Tactical, Physical and Psychological development. There are also sections on Club History and Culture as well as Life and Social Skills (Fenoglio, 2006).

The syllabus is designed to assist coaches to achieve one of the primary aims of the Academy, which is to make practice fun and enjoyable for all the players. In order to do this, it is important to create an environment conducive for learning, and to assist the players to achieve the ultimate aim of getting into the first team, however difficult this may prove to be.

As well as their football coaching, staff insist that the boys have high personal standards if they are to progress as players and young men. Both on and off the field, it is expected of the boys that they represent the club in the correct manner, showing respect to coaches, opponents, officials and guests of the club at all times. This is facilitated through the club culture and awareness programme, which teaches the scholars about the glorious history of the club, and the fact that they are following in the footsteps of the players who have represented the club in the past (Green, 1978; Whelan, 2005). Coaches also instil in the players the importance of personal discipline: in timekeeping and dress, to train hard, to listen to instruction, to work within a team and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. By emphasising and constantly re-enforcing these traits, the coaches not only increase the joy of playing football, but also provide for the players a foundation which will be immensely valuable throughout their lives (Fenoglio, 2006).

Spontaneous Play

There has been much debate in recent years regarding the role of play in children's lives given the organisation and structure of much of their activities – the schoolboy scholarship being just one example (Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002). Palmer (2007) has argued that until modern times, children did not rely on organised games for their physical, social or emotional needs. As they grow and

gain physical strength, they learn more about themselves and how to interact with others by simply 'going out to play'. In the modern age, children are now rarely allowed to roam freely, and informal play is increasingly rare. Issues of health and safety and fear of litigation have had a major impact on the Physical Education curriculum in schools and children's sport in general.

Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002) have stated that adults (coaches) who work with children should use their knowledge of play in order to guide their practice. They hold that play is dynamic, active and constructive behaviour and essential to a child's health, growth, learning and development across all cultures. Play is a process that evolves and changes as it becomes more varied and complex. Research on the brain has demonstrated that play is a 'scaffold' for development, a means of increasing neural structures and ways that children practice skills for life. Therefore, play is a serious undertaking that has a powerful influence on learning (Huizinga, 1955). The importance of creating the right environment cannot be over-estimated, because if it is hostile and threatening, it may breed a climate of fear and trepidation which is far from being conducive for learning. The coaches in the scholarship programme must be aware that the players need to have fun, and the best way for them to achieve this is to make the training environment as playful, informal and stress free as possible. This is not an easy task given the demands of modern player development in England (Green, 2009a; The Premier League, 2011).

Quinn (1997) has argued that youth soccer should not look like the adult game. It is often over organised, when it should be chaotic at times. Children's environments have changed beyond recognition as parks, streets, playgrounds, and neighbourhoods are not as safe as they once were. Children simply do not have the freedom that was the experience of the post war generation, and consequently their activities are restricted (Feeney, 2010)). It should be recognised that one of the reasons football is so popular, is the unrestricted movement and action the sport offers. Indeed, it is the very essence of the game. Thus the coaches have learned to allow the players to express themselves more freely in their training, as this will assist their understanding and enjoyment of the game even more. Children play sport for companionship, a feeling of belonging,

social contact and a sense of having responsibility for their own learning (Fenoglio, 2009; Martens, 1978; Thomas, 2013).

A Coach and Player Perspective

Having described the theoretical context in which the scholars coaching and training takes place, it is now time to allow the players and coaches to give their opinion of this process:

> *I felt coming into training every day with people who I felt quite close with at the time. And then to see myself progress through the system from getting better coaching every single day, coming in it made me feel happier because I felt confident in myself to be able to play better football. It made me feel a more confident footballer because I'd been getting better training. My skills would improve, and everything was improving because of the training I was doing, and it made me believe in myself a bit more* (Player F interview: 25, 1, 13).

> *I really didn't enjoy school, so just leaving to play football that's the best thing you can do. Playing football – less school – more football – just being in school with all your team as well. I think it made me better technically because compared to the players I play with now they haven't had the training I had. And I think the range of techniques that I have are better than theirs at the moment. We used to have a whole technical day, and if I could do that again now I'd do it every day. But we don't really do it now, it's just possession. We'd have two mannequins you'd have to curl it around* [the ball], *a game with your left foot* (Player D interview: 22, 12, 12).

For both players, the opportunity to play football everyday helped to improve their skills. Player F says the quality of the training had contributed to making him more confident, and his self-belief had improved during his time with us. Player D clearly did not like school, and saw the programme as a means to play more football as opposed to sitting in a classroom all day. That said, he felt that all the extra training had improved his overall technique. Having moved on his

career, it is interesting to note that he has fond memories of the "Technical day" and wished that he could still do it.

So what do the coaches think about having the opportunity to spend more time with the players at optimal times of the day?

I think there are three or four major advantages, but obviously one for us as coaches is more time spent with them actually on the field, so we get more opportunity to work with them. Not only that, the opportunity to coach them is there, but obviously I think the other thing is that we get to know them, because we spend more time with them. We see them every-day and get to know their character, what they need as young footballers. How do I get him to do better individually? I know them individually, now that I can say "Right he needs coaxing, he probably needs a telling off for certain things". Certain ones can be lazy; other ones are doing too much. So that advantage is massive, because we spend time with them, and you get to know the (Coach A interview: 8, 11, 12).

The advantages, again I think it's a major one, if we are running our programme right and the boys' move on to become scholars [i.e. full-time professional at age 16]*, and that's the idea of the programme, to come into the programme at a young age, and living away from home, being in digs and learning what's required to be a footballer. So by the time they get to sixteen, seventeen they're well versed on everything, it's ingrained and that's what we want with them. So I think that's another massive advantage going off the feedback you get now that we've been doing it six years. We've got boys who are now in the reserves, played for the first team. I think they do get a bonding, I think they do get a bonding through those years, I think that's important* (Coach A: interview: 8, 11, 12).

Well obviously the main advantage is progression from a football point of view; I think that's pivotal to it all. I think they do gain from it over my time in the programme, seeing some of the early inductees; it's clearly obvious that those players who are in the scheme for any length of time

were technically better. And even in simple terms they look stronger, and can even kick a ball harder. There's also that part where they get initiated early on, rather than going through the most difficult part such as your digs, peer pressure and dealing with different cliques and things at the club (Coach C Interview: 28, 11, 12).

But I think after that, the biggest challenge they have, I feel, is maintaining the high standards required year in year out, maintaining and learning how to motivate themselves every single day to produce the required level that you need at this club. I think that's a real challenge, because sometimes they sort of fall into autopilot where you waken up every day and do the same thing. And by the time you'd have two or three years in the system there's no real challenge anymore. And it's maintaining that hunger, but that is the skill of the coaches as well, that's where the coaches play their part, and that's why they're so important at this club. We recognise that, I think they're good at that. So that is always the challenge – can you maintain the standards, because when you go to Manchester United's First Team, that is what is required – you're not allowed to have a day off (Coach C interview: 28, 11, 2012).

Coaches A and C have similar views to the players, seeing the opportunity to train everyday as being a major advantage for their development as players. Also, they get an early initiation to the rituals of football culture – dealing with peers and the demands of living in family accommodation. They are going to have to get used to this if they are to survive in the professional game. Coach A stresses the importance of getting to know the boys characters as individuals, and a large degree of trust between coach and player is implicit in his comment. Coach A sees the value of the players forming positive relationships with one another – a bonding that is cemented by having shared both good and bad experiences, and supporting each other as they try and achieve their goals. This is an integral part of the history of youth development at the club (Whelan, 2005). Coach C believes that maintaining exactingly high standards is a major challenge as "You're not allowed to have a day off" from the technical, physical and emotional demands being in an elite training brings each day of their lives. The issue of having a

trusting relationship between the players and coaching staff is implicit in both interviews.

With regard to the health and well-being of young people in sport, there are valuable lessons to be learned in the Bible. The Gospel of Mark being one such example. It is to this text we now turn for our second biblical motif.

Biblical Motif: Lessons from the Gospel of Mark

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus uses the example of a small child to demonstrate to his disciples how to be great in the Kingdom of God. He equates the receiving of a child into their care in his name as receiving himself (Mark 9: 33-37). When people bring little children to Jesus, he teaches that they are the intended beneficiaries of God's eternal Kingdom which he demonstrates by hugging them, laying his hands on them, and blessing them (Mark 10: 13-16). Mark includes a substantial amount of material on children in his gospel, bound together by the use of familiar language. This proves that he valued young children as occupying a significant space in his public ministry and as "forming a motif" in Mark's gospel (Gundry, 2008: 148). Children are the weakest and most vulnerable link in the human and social chain, and therefore in a very fundamental yet profound way, they are dependent on the rule of God being implemented in their lives. If Jesus' ministry showed anything, it was that the Kingdom of God is for those who are needy, and reliant on God's bountiful mercy. Thus Jesus rebukes his disciples for preventing their coming into his presence (Mark, 10; 14). But children are not mere chattels to be used and abused by adults; rather they are heirs of God's kingdom. Jesus exhorts his disciples to become just like children, because failure to do so would exclude them from his forthcoming reign (Mark, 10: 15).

There are abundant Bible scriptures which address the delicate, caring and thoughtful way in which adults should approach the teaching of young people which we would do well to heed (Deut 6: 6-7; Prov 22: 6; Matt 18: 14). If this is true, it amplifies the importance of ensuring that the boys enjoy coming to training and playing for the club, as it cannot be guaranteed they are going to achieve their ultimate goal. Therefore, when there is tension between the demands of coaching, training and the well-being of the players, they must be nurtured and cherished as

children of God. Furthermore, staff should always seek to act in their best interest (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; David, 2005).

One of the major aims of the schoolboy scholarship programme is to instil in the players some core 'life skills' which will benefit them in all aspects of their lives well beyond football. The final part of this chapter examines this aspect of the scholarship programme.

Life Skills: A Definition

As demonstrated above, the boys spend a lot of the time at the training ground coaching and training. This is extremely important, but the programme also aims to instil in the players some 'life skills' which they can use in other areas of their lives. But what exactly are these life skills? Johnstone (1999) has defined them as an "Ability to do something". She argues that skills come in all shapes and sizes including: literacy and numeracy, verbal communication, physical and mental skills, professional, domestic and so on. The acquisition of such skills enables us to survive the various demands which are made of us by our families, working life and the wider community. The players clearly learn a large amount of technical skills related to football such as ball control, passing, heading, shooting and dribbling. But what other skills can young people acquire at an early age? Professional football is replete with examples of footballers who do not appear to have acquired the requisite skills to cope with the wealth and fame success can bring – they simply have not acquired the necessary life skills to survive (Davies, 1975; Gascoigne and Davies, 2005; Hamilton, 2013). Claxton, (2002); Layard and Dunn (2009) and Martens (2001) offer examples of the type of skills and abilities young people need in order to thrive in the modern world such as: reasoning, resourcefulness, discipline, collaboration, listening and self-knowledge. The coaches see it as one of their major responsibilities to ensure that the players develop such proficiency. Although the term life skill is a modern term, it can be used anachronistically as we turn to the Bible for our third motif (Pattison, 2007).

Biblical Motif: Old Testament Examples of Life Skills

Menn (2008) provides an account of the numerous ways in which children demonstrate life skills in the biblical narrative. For example the story of Joseph's escapade with his brothers (Gen: 37); Moses' sister Miriam at Pharaoh's court (Ex: 2); and the story of the Israelite slave girl's compassion for her peoples enemy – the Syrian army commander Naaman – who had leprosy (2 Kings 5: 1-19). The tasks and occupations of children, however humble and mundane, may already manifest the core of a person's character. Thus youthful pursuits prepare a person for future responsibilities such as David's youth prepared him ultimately to be a warrior, musician, temple patron and King (Menn, 2008).

There is much to be learned from the biblical account of David's confrontation with Goliath, in terms of how he was able to use the skills he had learned as a young shepherd. Here was a boy in a man's world, but he displays guile, competence and skills which ultimately lead to his success in slaying the giant Philistine (1 Sam: 17). This episode shows David displaying astonishing physical and leadership skills for one so young – skill he would need in his future Kingship. But childhood is more than mere preparation for adulthood, the activities, and achievements of a young person should be seen as ends in themselves. Childhood is often portrayed as being a time of vital formation and embodiment of personality, commitment and vocation. In this sense, adulthood is merely the 'living out' the identity created as a child (Menn, 2008: 341-42). Hence, we can see how the scholars can acquire such mature skills as leadership, resourcefulness, resilience, self-belief and emotional sensitivity. They do this by responding positively to the daily challenges each day brings, as they experience the different aspects of the programme. They have their good and bad days and times when they must wonder why they ever chose to enter the scheme in the first place. One valuable lesson they do learn, however, is that the journey towards a life in professional football is not an easy one; as they use the various skills they are learning to negotiate the many hurdles they are required to leap (Green, 2009a; Parker, 1996; Shindler, 2005).

It is now time to see if our interviewees felt that the scholarship programme had succeeded in the goal of developing a set of life skills.

Life Skills: A Player, Parent and Teachers Perspective

> *It's helped me to grow up, mature a lot faster than I thought I would have. I think my communication with the coaches. Knowing I can go and say things to the coaches that otherwise I might not want to say, because I might feel an edge about what the response might be (*Player B interview: 13, 11, 2012).

> *Your mums never there, because she's at home and you're with your digs – you just have to work things out for yourself. Remembering things, like on Thursdays we'd have to remember our footy kit for night. That's your responsibility; you've not got your mum in the morning saying "Have you got your footy kit"? You'd have to have it in your bag ready the night before. It makes you more mature because your away from home, from your mum and dad...you have to learn – obviously you make mistakes (*Player F interview: 25, 1, 13).

Player B believes that being a scholar has helped his communication skills. He makes the additional point that he felt more comfortable approaching a member of staff because he was now a more confident person. He no longer felt so nervous about the reply he would get. Player F believes that he is now able to take more responsibility for his kit management, and you had to "Work things out for yourself". He feels much more mature now, seeing mistakes as an important part of the learning process. What follows are the comments of several other interviewees on this interesting topic:

> *You'd know he wouldn't want to go to school because someone has asked him to read out. He had a fear of it; he had a fear he did. And coming here has helped him get over that. And somehow it helped him leaving home, and it really helped him and matured him, and he got over it (*Parent A interview: 30, 11, 12).

> *Probably a bit more organisation, thinking for himself more – massively more independent than what he was. And I think he's a lot more mature than most boys of his age. When I talk to other parents that have got*

children the same age, they find it astounding that [Player D] *does what he does. To be honest with you Tony, I can only go off knowing* [Player D]*, because it's only when I get to speaking to other parents who have got boys at home that I appreciate how mature* [Player D] *really is. So I'd say life skills in general – his time management for one as he's more responsible for himself. Maturity, he's grown massively, he's more independent because of the programme. I think even at 14, 15 when he was at United he was a lot more independent than most boys' his age* (Parent B interview: 19, 12, 12).

I went on a learning walk around school the other day and we dropped in at a year eleven science lesson. A player was in there, and I get on with him really well. And I went and spoke to him about what he was doing. But before I could do that, the teachers asked him to speak and tell the five or six staff who had entered that room what the focus for the session was, and what they'd been learning. He turned around in front of his own peer group, all of his peers, and spoke really well, confidently. All the students respected what he was saying because they didn't say anything, they let him talk. So in terms of his development as a student, apart from the club, I think it's a different type of responsibility (Teacher A interview: 26, 11, 2012).

The first thing to notice, is the contrast between the comments of Parent A, about the teenager's fear of speaking in front of his peers, and that of Teacher A regarding another young players' eloquence in a similar situation. It was encouraging for school staff (and others) to see how the young man had actually overcome his fear, as speaking in public is not an easy skill to master. Teacher A says that the young player who spoke was accorded a great deal of respect by his peers because of his skill, something that no doubt raised his self- esteem immeasurably. One is reminded of the story of the twelve year old Jesus engaging in mature discussion and debate with the eminent Temple doctors (Luke 2: 41-48). Parent B notices how her son has become more independent, and his time management had also improved. He also appears to be more mature than

other boys his age. Parent B actually uses the term "Life skills" which I think is quite captivating.

Skills that have value for life are innumerable, and hard to quantify because you need to develop different skills for different aspects of your life (Johnstone, 1999). However, it is clear that aspiring professional footballers need to develop the specific skills and expertise commensurate to this profession notably communication, discipline and time and lifestyle management (Cascarino, 2001; Dunphy, 1986; Parker, 1996). As the evidence above shows, the scholarship programme, by its very nature and intensity, places the young players in situations where they simply have to develop these skills in order to survive. This is achieved not by stealth, but rather by a process of education and training which takes place every single day. In this regard, the Academy provides opportunities for the players to engage in a wide range of activities which will assist them to develop these skills such as: Tours and Tournaments (Whelan, 2008a), visits to other education establishments, interacting with members of the club staff at the training ground. This is especially true on the two days a week in which they eat in the main canteen where members of the First Team have their lunch and the annual visit to a Special School for children at Christmas time.

All the staff at the club work very hard to ensure that the players benefit from being in the programme. But they are also aware that they must never be complacent, as the needs of individual players differ. Coaches must be constantly vigilant, sensitive and responsive to these needs; looking for signs of physical, psychological or emotional distress. When it does occur, they have a duty to respond sympathetically, compassionately and in accordance with the highest professional standards of child welfare practice (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Brackenridge *et al*, 2007). In this regard, it was decided (in 2011) to offer players who reach the end of their U14 year a fulltime scholarship contract in order to reduce the anxiety they often feel of having to wait until they were close to leaving school for a final decision to be made (see Chapter Six for further discussion of this issue).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to offer an 'insider' view of what life at Manchester United Football Club for a schoolboy scholar. In the first instance, they have to make a major decision to join the scheme, as it means they will have to leave their normal home life to go and live with a surrogate family. They also have to cope with the challenge of going to a new school, and adapting to a full-time training load at the same time. We have seen that this is an extremely difficult thing to do, as it affects not only the player, but also his extended family. There are also various rites of passage and initiation cultures to overcome, which can be daunting for boys who no longer have the 'safety net' of the home life common to most schoolboys (Parker, 2001; 1996), In fact, one of the lessons of the chapter is that this is not a 'normal' programme for the majority of schoolboys in our country – on the contrary, it is an extraordinary endeavour which requires a certain level of ambition, fortitude and personal sacrifice. Also, the first year of the programme is particularly arduous, as the players have to overcome homesickness, and cope with the challenge of integration into a new school (Busch and Paine, 2009; Cascarino, 2001; Shindler, 2005).

We have also examined the Long Term Athlete Development model (LTAD) espoused by (Balyi (2001) and Stafford (2005). In this respect, the Learning to Train stage of the model was particularly influential, as it addressed crucially delicate issues in relation to the physical and technical development of players of high school age coaches needed to be aware of. Failure to take into account the biological implications of this research could do untold damage to the players' long term development as elite athletes. The issue of the players having the opportunity to have some spontaneous play – or play for its own sake was also raised, being seen as essential for children's all-round growth, development and ultimate well-being. We have seen that one of the challenges for the coaching staff was reconciling the concept of natural play, with the organisation and structure intrinsic to the scholarship programme.

From the outset of the scholarship scheme, staff were concerned to ensure the players not only progressed as footballers, but they also acquired skills that would be valuable throughout the rest of their lives. The data demonstrates that this aim

is being achieved in a range of areas including: communication, time management and leadership. The themes of personal responsibility, respect and self-reliance are also seen as being seminal life skills. Theological insights are also important, especially the idea of sacrifice which permeates the Bible narrative. Moreover, we saw in the gospel of Mark, examples of Jesus' gentle, compassionate response to children as an expression of God's 'preferential option' for the powerless and marginalised (Gutierrez, 1988). There are also some biblical perspectives on how children oftentimes display ability and skills normally associated with the maturity of adulthood. The story of David in the Old Testament, amply demonstrates that God's chosen are not necessarily the strongest or most powerful people who inhabit the earth.

The second realm in which the scheme operates, is the place the boys receive their formal education – their school. It is here that the boys probably spend most of their time studying, developing socially and morally; and engaging with their peers. It is to this domain that we now turn.

CHAPTER FOUR

NARRATIVES OF THE SCHOOLBOY SCHOLARSHIP:
ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND MORAL EDUCATION

Introduction

The club's partner school in the outskirts of Manchester has aproximately1, 450 students in year groups 7 to 11 and 75 in year groups 12-13 which constitute the Sixth Form. In September 2008, the school opened a new Sixth Form with purpose-built facilities. The school's pupil population is largely of a White British heritage, with a small percentage from minority ethnic backgrounds. A lower than average proportion of students are eligible for free school meals; and the number of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is above the national average. The school became a specialist Sports College in 1998, and was awarded high performing specialist school status in 2005, attaining a second specialism in applied learning in 2006. The school also holds healthy school, sports-mark, arts-mark gold and investors in people awards. The school receive funding from the club by means of a three year 'capital donation' to make improvements to the non-academic aspects of the school such as buildings and other amenities.

The club has had a collaborative arrangement with the school since 1998, which has grown and evolved during this period. Originally, the school delivered a Sixth Form curriculum to the full-time young professional players, but this was expanded to include our schoolboy scholars in September 2007. The school has a national reputation for quality education, and is one of only a few that has achieved four successive Grade One inspections since the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED) was established. In July 2011, as a result of consistently high levels of attainment, and the quality of its teaching, the school became one of the first in the country to be designated a National Teaching School. Following the school's last OFSTED inspection in April 2013, it was deemed to be outstanding in all four categories namely: student achievement, quality of teaching, student behaviour and leadership and management. Thus, the players and their parents are assured that once they join the programme, they will receive an excellent standard of education.

Since the scheme was inaugurated, the club and the school have developed a flexed timetable which allows the boys to train at the training ground on two afternoons a week, with one session taking place at the school one morning each week. There is also a weekly yoga session at the school, staffed by a qualified instructor. Thus, the timetable of academic work and football training has been adapted, so the academic education of the players is not compromised by their training load (See Appendix 1). The boys attend normal classes, and are transported by mini-bus to the training ground after school each day for training.

This chapter describes the kind of academic and social education the boys receive in school. It also investigates the nature of the partnership between the club and school staff, with regard to achieving the shared goal of high academic and athletic achievement for both parties. When joining the school, the players have to cope with both the academic demands of school life and forming new friendships with their peer group. Therefore, the process of integration is extremely important. One of the aims of the scholarship is for the players to have a stable school life; albeit they have to follow a different timetable to their classmates. To answer this question, we will hear the voices of players, and a member of the school staff to see how well they are assimilated socially into the school. The school is a proven beacon of academic excellence, and we shall explore how successful or not the players were at their studies, alongside their football coaching and training. Again, the witness of players and school staff will be important. From the outset of the programme, each player has had both an academic mentor as well as a football mentor. This exercise has been integral in relation to the quality of pastoral care provided for the players. Insights from scripture will be vital, as well as the observations of players, coaches, school staff and house-parents. Given the various stresses and strains of trying to combine academic education with football, the issue of the holistic health and well-being of the players comes to the fore. This will be scrutinised theologically, as well as from the viewpoint of the various participants in the programme. In the final section, I will summarise the main findings from the data presented in the chapter.

Integration into School Life

Joining a new school is never easy for any student. However, the scholars have to combine this with leaving home, settling into life with a new family, and having increased football training. The scholars spend more of their time at the school than they do at the club, and in this section we will investigate this essential part of the scholars' weekly schedule. In order to do this, we will probe the interview data from both the players and one of their teachers to gain valuable insight regarding this process.

As a researcher, one of the major questions I was seeking to address was the extent to which the scholars are accepted into the life of the school by their peers and school staff. Does their status as elite athletes at a famous football club, have a bearing on how they are perceived by their peers, given they have privileges other students do not have – the opportunity to leave school early for coaching at the club? The players have a view on this as the following extracts from the interview data shows:

> *If the whole class was messing about, say if me or one of the lads or two other lads were messing about, we would get punished a little bit harsher than what the other ones would. Say if everyone was having a little joke about, then I think if the other people just got let off, then if it got back to the Sixth Form person* [Head of Sixth Form], *then we would get in a bit more harsh trouble than they would. I think a couple of teachers did not like us because of what we were. As I am older now, I know they were helping us, but I was younger, and I was not mature and got a bit defensive* (Player D interview: 22, 12, 2012).

> *Well, when I first went into year eight it was a bit like everyone was a little bit jealous of what you were. They would not let you get involved in anything for the first couple of months; it was just us* [scholars] *on our own. But then, as you get through it, I think they just accepted it, and then everyone just started to mingle. I think we had privilege over what they had because we did not have to do school every-day* (Player B interview: 13, 11, 2012).

At first it felt like the kids, because they knew you as being the footballer at the school, they sort of look at you and watch what you do. Some of the kids – when we do the football stuff they were very nice, they were not the opposite way. Sometimes you get people jealous. When we used to do PE and football at my old school, you would get a couple who would try and kick you. But at that school [his present school], *they are all right – they were good about it. They were nicer to you because you were good at football, instead of trying to kick you* (Player F: interview, 25, 1 2013).

Player D believes, strongly, that sometimes the scholars were treated differently to other students because of their status as elite footballers. He actually uses the words "Harsher" and "Harsh" to describe his feelings of how some teachers treated them at the time. However, on reflection, he came to realise that, on the contrary, the staff were merely trying to help him, and his lack of maturity prevented him from understanding this. In his interview, Player D demonstrates a maturity of thought which belies his young age. Players B and F felt there was a certain degree of jealousy among their peers. Player B believed he was actually frozen out for a couple of months when he first arrived, but this did not last, and he soon began to intermingle with his peers. Furthermore, he is able to identify the cause of the perceived jealousy – the fact that the scholars can get out of school early. Player F makes an interesting comparison between his current and former peers. He mentions the fact that some of his former colleagues "Would try and kick you", something that did not happen at his present school, much to his relief.

The school have many experienced staff who are well used to dealing with talented pupils. They have all become acutely perceptive to the various problems that the scholars have integrating academic work, school life and football on a day-to-day basis. My interview with Teacher D was especially revealing and representative of many of the schools' senior staff:

The first issue for me is the school life and the social side. I think we have got to do a lot more work integrating the boys socially into the school. I do an awful lot of break time duties, lunch time duties and I would still say most of them socialise amongst themselves in school as opposed to mixing

with the other children which I fully understand. I am not saying they are wrong to do that ...I would like for us to do more work as a school so that the boys do not feel that – they obviously feel that they want to [socialise among themselves] – I understand that, but how can we develop a culture where we might want to socialise more with our school children?

Because, also, when we have children who join the school in what we call in year admission – so they don't join in year seven, but they come because their parents have moved house. They integrate better. Here's the crux for me – because they have to – because they come by themselves. They don't come in a group of seven, eight or nine, they come by themselves and they have no choice. If you don't integrate, you're on your own! If the boys come in as a group, they don't have to because they have got a ready-made social group. And I think that's a really key issue. But I think it would be just nice for the school, and sometimes it could potentially be a richer experience for them if they had friends outside of football as well as inside. And that's not about right or wrong, this is a richer experience.

The challenge for us is to balance what the boys are getting. What they are doing against what the other people's perception – and perception is the key word! We know the value of what those boys are getting, and what to do to compensate for the fact that they are out of lessons. But you have to overcome the perceptions sometimes of other people, and let's be fair, other staff sometimes in terms of what those boys are having compared to other pupils. And I think what is important is that we, as a school, have to make sure that pupils and staff see the bigger picture – and there is a bigger picture.

I asked Teacher D if it was a challenge for the players to be seen as 'different' or 'special':

They have to understand why sometimes as a school we have to be seen to perhaps overcompensate because they have to be aware of their role in

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that. Sometimes they may feel – not that I have been treated unfairly, but we have come down hard on them. But that's because they have to appreciate sometimes they have privileges other pupils don't have, and it has to work both ways. It is a difficult one this…because I think sometimes the staff will talk about them [the scholars] *and will be hard on them because they see these boys having a number of privileges that the other children don't have. And I feel like saying sometimes, "Treat them the same, treat them the same". But when they walk out of school at five past two or an hour earlier than the rest of the group, it's not the same. But the boys understanding of that dynamic is part of them growing up in an elite environment, and I think that's very much part of their experience of moral development. Their understanding of why that exists* (Teacher D interview: 13, 12, 2012).

Teacher D makes four important observations about how well the scholars integrate into school life. The first point he makes is the fact that in general they do not integrate very well at all. He felt that the school could do more to create an environment in which they could socialise more with other students. Secondly, pupils, who join the school as "In year admission", normally come on their own and, are placed in a situation where they have little alternative other than attempt to make friends with other students. The fact that the scholars arrive as part of an already established group may not help them to bond with other students. Perhaps, unwittingly, Teacher D is suggesting that the scholars do not seriously attempt to socialise outside their group, because they are so focused on becoming professional footballers. However, he states unequivocally, that better integration into the life of the school would provide the players with a "Richer experience". It is difficult to disagree with this view. Thirdly, Teacher D argues, persuasively, that the school has to value the fact the scholars are seeking excellence in a particular vocation – professional football, and this is the bigger picture they have to see. In order for them to achieve this, it is necessary that the young footballers have a timetable that frees them from normal lessons. There is a reference to the fact that there are some mainstream school staff that need to better understand the importance of this process. Finally, Teacher D comments on the challenge the school has to ensure that the boys are treated the same as other pupils in school.

This can be difficult when it is so obvious that due to their talent, they have privileges not accorded to other pupils. It is notable, that teacher D believes that having a deeper understanding of their dual role as elite athlete and student, and how this impacts on their relationships, is an essential part of the players' moral development.

Teacher D offers an informed view of the nature of 'togetherness' and 'team cohesion' amongst the schoolboy scholars in relation to their life at the school and how it may sometimes interfere with their full integration . The fact that they have a distinct timetable marks them out as a 'special' group, and they share a social life at the club which differs from the experience they have at school. Parker (1996) explores the issue of 'identity' 'culture' and 'socialisation' within professional football albeit in a different context. However, it informs this research because it demonstrates the institutional complexity of life within the Youth Department at a professional club dealing with issues which are akin to this study.

This section has shown that the integration of the schoolboy scholars into the normal life of the school is far from being a straightforward process. In reality, it is fraught with difficulties for both staff and pupils. We also saw how teacher D challenges the school to seek ways to absorb the players more comprehensively into school life for the mutual benefit of both parties. We shall now turn to another important subject, the boys' experience of academic life at school.

Academic Life
The players spend a considerable amount of their time attending classes at our partner school. Therefore, one of the objectives of this research was to acquire an appreciation and understanding of how they manage their studies on a day-to-day basis. The coaches are cognisant of the fact that they have to work extremely hard in training every day – but have little knowledge of the various academic challenges they face each day. We will now explore this issue through the eyes of the players and the boys' teachers.

Over the years, the boys have settled into the school very well, and the school have had few apparent problems, evident from the comments of three players below:

The school is a good school because I felt at my other school that I probably wouldn't have a better education there than I did here; because it was the wrong crowds and stuff at my old school. I was getting mixed with the wrong crowds. And I went to [the school] *and sort of got my head down a bit* (Player F interview: 25, 12, 2012).

It was alright academically, I think it's good because they give you a lot of things to make it easier. And especially the BTEC that's quite easy, whereas at my old school you'd probably do more work. But they do make it easy for you. I got a distinction in BTEC, two "A's in PE, six "B"'s, two English, maths, science – "C" in geography. I had a few operations and everyone helped me. I was allowed time off school, time to go home just to relax after my operation. Everyone was dead helpful, I couldn't really ask for much more (Player E interview: 22, 1, 2013).

I had a proper good Head of Year. He just like, I don't know, he just helped me, used to talk to me all the time and just speak to me really – told you about school work. I wasn't doing any homework, never done it, and if you are alright in the class – make sure you do it in the class, you'd be alright. He let me leave it (Player A interview: 7, 11. 2012).

Player F makes the frank statement that he has actually come to a better place for his education, given he was mixing with the "wrong crowds" at his previous school. This allowed him to concentrate much more effectively on his studies. Player E remarks that the flexible curriculum – the ability to take a BTEC qualification (Business and Technical Education Council) in sport, made it much easier for him achieve a good grade. His success in other subjects is very impressive; in light of the fact he had considerable time off school due to injury. He also states that the school was very helpful and supportive whilst he recuperated from injury. It is clear that Player A was very fond of one particular

teacher who was especially sensitive to his needs. He even turned a 'blind eye' when Player A failed to submit homework on occasion. All these players appear to have formed cordial relationships with members of staff which benefitted their academic progress. This is good evidence that the school are very sympathetic to the specific needs of the schoolboy scholars.

During interview, I asked members of school staff what they thought were the major challenges for the players with regard to their education. What follows represents their views and opinions about this topic:

I think really the biggest challenge is finding the correct balance so that the boys have sufficient time to give to each aspect of their development. By development I mean the football development from the club, their academic development from the school; and their social development which is provided from family providers and also from their homes as well. Obviously we have got to address the issue that these boys are taken away from their family setting, got to still ethically provide them with that kind of provision of a surrogate family. I think that's really important. But making sure that they can balance effectively the expectations of everybody, because sometimes it's very easy from the school setting just to look at it from the education side. We need these to get their results, that's sometimes difficult to put the club's perspective on it. The club need them to be fit and be healthy, to be training. And they need to be improving, and we don't see what goes on in the club in the exact same way you don't see what goes on in the classroom. And sometimes I think the boys don't always tell us about that, and sometimes we're too busy in our own worlds to actually get that understanding of what's going on in each other's aspect.

And I think that's a real challenge…some of the boys cope admirably with the expectations of the new transition into the programme. But some of them find it hard to cope, find it hard to tell us and just do their best. But actually, is that enough – are we providing them with exactly the backbone support that's required at every level? And can we understand what's

required by the club, what's required by the families, what's required by the family providers and mix all that together? Because sometimes I think that's lost.

I think it's remembering and understanding that everybody's got high expectations. We're an outstanding school; we need them to be outstanding. And on top of that we are trying to ground out well-rounded individuals and good citizens of the future. And sometimes I think it's really hard for us as teachers, and perhaps the coaches, to have to put ourselves in their shoes because this is a new style of programme, away from home, dealing with the demands of that. I would imagine a lot of these boys are frightened to death of telling anybody there's something wrong because that's a cause of weakness. And when you are working in outstanding areas – the club and the school, I think sometimes it's really difficult to show weakness.

Within the culture of football they would never want their friends to see that they were emotionally weak or struggling in an aspect of it. But I think where some of them who maybe in the culture of elite performance don't want to show any weakness, and therefore they sometimes don't ask for help even though they're screaming inside. (Teacher C interview: 6, 12, 2012).

I think this interview is very revealing offering an 'insider' opinion of how the school responds to the various challenges managing the schoolboy scholars brings. Teacher C believes the main challenge is to ensure there is a good balance between all aspects of the players' development – the triangulation of their football, academic and social development which includes their home life. There is an interesting point that the school has the moral responsibility to become a part of a "Surrogate family" – the school and the club. And they each need to have a clear "Understanding of what's going on in each other's aspect". Both the school and club are outstanding achievers in their own right, with the task of producing "Well-rounded individuals", and "Good citizens of the future". There has to be recognition that the boys are involved in an extraordinary programme which they

often have difficulty coping with. They often feel worried or concerned about their situation, but the culture of elite performance prevents some players from seeking help because it could be seen as a sign of weakness (Dunphy, 1986; Parker, 2006). Teacher C questions whether coaches and school staff are actually giving them enough of the indispensable support they need to survive and grow in the scholarship scheme. This is an extremely important question, because it points to the rationale for this research: the improvement of the pastoral support of the boys. Such insight from an experienced member of staff is extremely enlightening in this respect.

In concert with school staff, the coaches continue to strive to get the correct balance between football training and academic work. This has improved during the last five years as the students realise that they have to prioritise 'key subjects' over other disciplines. Thus they have learned to focus on those subjects that are essential for their future careers outside of football: English, maths and science. The evidence shows that the school have been highly successful in achieving this goal since the scholarship began in 2007 (see Appendix 3).

The process of mentoring has been a fundamental feature of the schoolboy scholarship since its inception, being seen as a vital aspect of the players' pastoral care. It is to this subject that we now turn

The Mentoring Process

In his recent book, former Olympic four hundred metre hurdles champion David Hemery (2005) quotes Olympic coach Bruce Tulloh:

> *As coaches, we are the Guardians of the Flame – the flame being the enthusiasm of our performers* (2005: 6).

Tulloch firmly believes that one of the most important responsibilities of any coach is to encourage and instil in their athletes the strong belief that they can achieve their dreams. In order to do this, they have to be prepared to spend quality time in conversation with them on a regular basis, to discuss a range of issues relating to their performance and general welfare.

Ever since the scholarship scheme began, there has been a weekly process of sitting down with each player to discuss any issues or problems he may have in his life. This may be his football, education, family accommodation or social life. Each player is allocated two mentors: a coach and schoolteacher, who have a duty to offer advice, encouragement and assistance whenever it is required. Initially, each player was given a personal diary to complete each week before the session with his mentor. However, this proved to be too formal, and has gradually progressed through several steps to the current system, where the mentor now has the responsibility to keep a confidential written account of the matters discussed. This is the guardianship Tulloch describes so well (Hemery, 2005). The notes are then formalised into a 'six week review' document which is placed in the players file for future reference. There are also two annual parent meetings, in which coaches and staff provide feedback on both the boys' football and academic progress.

The Bible offers some excellent examples of mentoring, and this is the focus of our fourth biblical motif.

Biblical Motif: Mentoring in the Old and New Testament

Given mentoring is such an important facet in developing a practical theology for the schoolboy scholars – one wonders what the Bible and other literature has to say about the area under discussion? In the world of the Greek myths, Mentor was a character entrusted the commission to tutor and guide Odysseus' son, the young Telemachus in Homer's *Odyssey*. The concept of mentoring has since been extended to a variety of fields including management, education and sport (Chua and Lessing, 2013; Hemery, 2005). Traditionally, mentoring takes place in the adult workplace or in an academic environment where an experienced employee or older student guides and advises a younger colleague in a particular area of expertise (Pulliam, 2012). Although the modern phrase mentor or mentoring cannot be found in the Bible, the concept can be found if one looks carefully enough. Mentor-mentee relationships described in the Old Testament include Moses and Joshua (Deut 31: 7-8), Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1: 7-18; 2: 17-3: 16), as well as Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2: 1-6). In the New Testament, Jesus mentored the twelve disciples, and one of them, Peter, formed a mentoring relationship with

Barnabas (Gal 2: 9-13). In turn, Barnabas eventually served as mentor to both Paul and Mark (Acts 12: 25 – 13: 5). Paul himself proceeded to mentor Timothy, Titus and several other men (2 Tim: 2: 2).

Chua and Lessing (2013) identify three crucial elements of the mentoring process: instruction, encouragement and inspiration. The apostle Paul gave Timothy instructions to help him manage the strains of ministry (2 Tim 2: 14-26), and mature as a minister of the gospel (1 Tim 4: 6). Paul was unrelenting in encouraging Timothy in his second epistle, despite the fact that the problem of false teaching continued after the first letter was sent. Additionally, Paul inspired Timothy by being an exemplar of the faith by his fearless approach to preaching the gospel (2 Tim 1: 8; 4: 1-4).

Paul's mentoring of Timothy (2 Tim 2: 14-26), is an outstanding example of what the scholars mentoring programme is trying to achieve. Paul exhorts Timothy to be diligent in his studies, avoid negative influences and live a life of honour, integrity and humility. None of these values requires a religious justification – you do not need to be religious to be good. Yet, the architecture of religion and practical theology can provide a platform to reflect on what is considered to be best practice (Pattison, 2007; Woodward and Pattison, 2000). The mentoring process seeks to inculcate in the players the virtue of wisdom, which in turn will help to produce well-rounded individuals who are also capable of playing professional football at a very high level. I know from experience that a career in professional football is a relatively short one, but such qualities will endure long after their playing days are over (Parry et al, 2007).

The Value of Mentoring

Mentoring is now a well-established part of the schoolboy scholarship, and one way to assess the degree to which it has been successful, is to speak to those who have been either receiving or doing the mentoring. I asked the players about their experience of mentoring:

> *I found it very helpful because you get to tell the coach on your own without anyone there, what you feel, and what you want to say. Sometimes*

you feel a bit shy in front of people, to tell them what you actually tell them. But when you've got a mentor, just you and him, and you do it every week, you get used to telling him. So if you did have something on your mind you wouldn't be scared to say it. Some people hold stuff in, and they never get to say it. But if you have a mentor, then you have the chance to say what you want to say (Player F interview: 25, 1, 2013).

Yes, it helps you a lot. If you have a mentor at school he can help you through the school stuff. And then the mentor at football helps with the football stuff (Player D interview: 12,12, 2012).

The scholars greatly value the support they receive from their mentors. They have a thorough understanding of the process and know to use it for their benefit. Player F mentions the fact that mentoring is confidential, implying that he trusted his mentor implicitly. The issue of trust is essential throughout the process. The result from these interviews is that the scholars agree that mentoring is a vital means of communicating with the coaches on all aspects of the programme. Staff are trying to forge a relationship with the players, which will help them to acquire a particular set of skills. It may also foster in them a measure of virtue and wisdom which will help them to become a better professional player if they reach this level of attainment. We saw in the previous chapter a model of mentoring from the Renaissance, where a Master painter passed on craft knowledge to his student. Thus they established a relationship of mutual respect which had long term benefits for both (Gladwell, 2009).

What follows illustrates the thoughts and opinions of the coaches, teachers and house-parents regarding the practice of mentoring:

Training isn't just about running round a field all day long, it's about lots of aspects. If you sat down with a boy for half an hour, that could actually help his training, because you could have said something in half hour that makes that boy understand something when he does his training that makes him a better player (Coach D interview: 14, 1, 13).

We've produced a mentoring report on education. We asked them about football, but they'll tell us what we want to hear. They won't tell us that at the moment I'm really struggling. I'm worried about not being offered a contract next year. But the coaches might be able to tell us that, and that's something that can obviously hinder our understanding of what they're going through (Teacher C interview: 6, 12, 2013).

Routine pastoral care you just deal with it as it comes along. If it's something that you can handle, and you're comfortable dealing with the situation then you deal with it. If it's something that you're only getting half the tale, because sometimes they'll just drip feed you, or you can tell when they come in there's something not quite right (House-parent D interview: 19, 2, 2013).

The above data indicates that mentoring for the scholars is shared between all members of staff. It can be a very informal discussion with a player as seen in the example of Coach D, who describes how a simple conversation with a player can help his performance on the field. On the other hand, it may be a more structured process involving a formal report as recounted by Teacher C, who is firm in his belief that very often, players are not always candid about their inner thoughts and feelings, and tell you only "What we want to hear". This is an extremely noteworthy observation, showing that mentoring has its limitations. He also suggests that the communication between the education and football mentor could be improved to gain a more comprehensive knowledge and understanding of their thoughts and feelings. This in turn would help to improve the level of support staff can offer. This is yet another example of the culture of professional football in which players are expected to show mental strength and resilience in the face of adversity that staff need to be aware of during the mentoring process (Dunphy, 1986; Parker, 1995; Shindler, 2005).

The House-Parent quoted is a highly skilled professional, knowing precisely how and when to approach the young players if they perceive they have a problem. House-parent D makes the point that mentoring is actually closely related to pastoral care which is an important theme of this research. Thus, the players have

the opportunity of receiving support for their general well-being from three chief sources: coaches, teachers and house-parents. It also enables them to receive advice, guidance, and encouragement from people who have their best interest at heart. This is undoubtedly a positive feature of the schoolboy scholarship (David, 2005; Hemery, 2005).

The mentoring process is inherent to the holistic development of all our scholars, which becomes the topic of our fifth biblical motif.

Biblical Motif: Holistic Well-being

As we have seen, the life of a schoolboy scholar is exceedingly demanding, as they spend much of their time training, playing matches and receiving an education. In fact they have little time for anything else. The arduous lifestyle the scholars follow undoubtedly places great emotional and physical strains on them which staff have the moral duty to counter. In other words, the holistic well-being of the players is especially important.

Holistic well-being highlights the pre-eminence of the whole person and the interdependence of different aspects of the person – physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual. Christian holistic well-being sees a person, not merely as an isolated individual, but rather as someone living in harmony with God, other people and the whole of creation. There is much to learn from the Bible about health and well-being, and this is not just an issue for people working in health care, because poor health touches everyone's life, either directly or indirectly (Atherton *et al*, 2010; Jubilee Centre Report, 1998).

In fact, concern for human welfare lies at the very heart of the Creator manifest in scripture. In the Old Testament, the word 'shalom' is the closest Hebrew word to health in that it means wholeness, well-being, vigour and vitality in all areas of human existence. It is a symbol of life in all its fullness. This is wrought by being in the right relationship with God and other human beings. Having an understanding of what it means to be human is fundamental to understanding the nature of health and well-being (Jubilee Centre Report, 1998).

One of the primary aims of the scholarship is to help the players to mature, not only into technically and tactically gifted footballers and athletes, but also as fully rounded individuals. They need to be equipped to live the life of a professional footballer, but also have instilled into them a conscious respect and compassion for all humanity. This is achieved in a variety of ways, such as visiting special schools to see children who have physical and psychological disabilities, as well as the mentoring process through which they can receive the emotional support they need (Hemery, 2005; Whelan, 2008a)). Furthermore, during the annual trip to Jersey, the boys are expected to coach a group of youngsters to help them to develop their self-confidence, communication and leadership skills (Whelan, 2012). Coaches also have a responsibility to manage their players' physical needs, to ensure that the boys have ample rest in order to assist recuperation from the demanding training sessions they undertake each day (Balyi, 2001; Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; Stafford, 2005).

With regard to human well-being, the book of Leviticus describes a model of practices specific to health and welfare provision, and gives us valuable insights with reference to basic priorities and principles. Firstly, although they may appear to be health-related, Levitical laws and rituals are centred more on pleasing God rather than providing guidelines on public health. The Hebraic understanding of health and well-being was that only full obedience to God would ensure it. Secondly, Levitical law compelled people to be responsible for their community's health; for example, by not touching a deceased person's body which had the potential to spread disease. The stress on responsibility and obligation shows the significance of relationships in health care, and the need for values upon which to build social relationships. Finally, the biblical view of health care is seen as the shared responsibility of the family and the wider community. The primary lesson the Bible teaches regarding health and well-being, is that all people are valued because God created us in his image (Imago Dei), and not because of our social, economic or professional status. Thus equality, dignity and respect must be accorded to all persons with regard to providing for their overall health and well-being before God (The Jubilee Centre Report, 1998).

At this juncture, it should be noted that the club takes very seriously the health and well-being of all the schoolboy scholars through a comprehensive medical screening process which includes the club doctor, physiotherapists, podiatrist and allied professionals. The club's Head of Education and Welfare, and Safe Guarding Manager also have a vital role to play in offering guidance, counsel and support to the players whenever issues arise regarding their overall physical or psychological health. In the event of injury or illness, the club have full-time physiotherapists and doctors at hand to offer immediate treatment, or referral to highly respected medical specialists (MUFC Physiotherapy Service Standards Policy, 2012; MUFC Safeguarding Children Policy, 2012).

Holistic Well-being: **A Professional Viewpoint**

During the course of my interviews, I asked coaches, teachers, parents and house-parents in what ways did the scholarship scheme promote the players general health and well-being and received the following response:

> *What they do is they learn – behaviour is a massive thing for a young boy. Discipline, how they are around the place, not just here* [the club] *but away from here as well; how they are in their digs, what we expect from them. We set a high standard and I think the boys respond. And self-respect, respect your room- mate, respect team-mates, I think we're big on that. I think that puts them in good stead the rest of their lives when they move on* Coach A interview: 8, 11, 2012).

> *We have a responsibility – a duty of care as people would put it to look after these boys. We have rules and regulations not only on the training ground, not only on the mini-bus, not only in the family accommodation, but also the school rules, there's a lot of rules there for the boys for the boys to break. But by educating them on those rules and what they are for, and why they are there to help them to grow up as people, and to be more responsible in the community and to look after each other. Straight away you hope they that they're thinking about other people as well as themselves* (Coach D interview: 14, 3, 13).

Then you can do things like we went to the school at Xmas ,that little school, and some of the boys would never have managed, coped with that properly if they'd just come straight from home because they're doing things in a group together. And I think that we make sure that at the end of it, well we've got a boy who comes out of it as a good human specimen (Coach D interview: 14, 3, 2013).

These two coaches make discerning observations about the moral precepts the staff try to teach the players. Coach A believes the staff set high standards of behaviour and discipline, as well as respect for their colleagues on the programme. Coach D believes staff have a "Duty of care" to set some basic rules and regulations which the boys must comply with. One is reminded of the various Levitical laws described in the previous section. These rules apply in all three spaces in which the players operate: club, school and family accommodation. The responsibility to always behave well never goes away. The little school that Coach D refers to is a special school the boys visit at Christmas time to interact with the children, and to help them become more aware of people less fortunate then themselves. The use of the term "A good human specimen" is particularly salient, pointing as it does to one of the main objectives of the scheme which is to produce individuals who possess a highly developed social and moral conscious.

The teaching staff at the partner school provide another viewpoint regarding the boys holistic development:

I find it very rewarding watching these boys grow and develop, and many of the boys who we've taken through have been a real success. They're fantastic ambassadors not just for the club but for the school, and they will remember their time in this programme because of what's been put before them… they are well catered for. I still think however, that we just need to make sure that we're doing all we possibly can to understand this expectation, this weight that's thrown on them at this early age. And to try and make sure that we are not caught up in our own world, that we're considering the whole child. And I think it's really difficult, easy sometimes to separate these two areas [football and education]. *But*

actually we need them all to be developed equally and that's really important (Teacher C interview: 6, 12, 2012).

I think sometimes my focus is on education, yours is – I know you have conversations with them about their education – but the priority for the coaches is their football development. And you won't be on the side-lines on a Saturday talking about their education, but likewise, I won't be talking on a Saturday on their football because I don't play that football. But driving forward on two parallel paths, the club one way and the school another and we both want the same for them. But sometimes what I think needs to happen is these two roads running parallel at some point. They need to be merging closer together. If it's going to improve in the future we need to look at the whole child. Look at that in terms of the whole athlete, looking at their development on a wider scale. And that might mean we need to improve the communication between different sets of people. But actually we don't work in the same circle although we are working with the same vision. And I think that's improved in lots of ways, but I still think there's an opportunity for us to merge some of those areas so that the boys' welfare – I'm talking general welfare – is considered by everybody involved not just the education by the teachers and the coaches looking after the football (Teacher C interview: 6, 12. 2012).

When you pass a boy on the corridor they put their hand out to shake your hand. It's just for me a symbolic in which the boys pay their respects, and the fact they transfer it outside the club and away from the coaches, and some of the personnel who they have that football contact with shows that respect that they have and that social, moral development. They have the responsibility they have as ambassadors for the club because that's what they are. They're on a scholarship scheme with arguably the biggest club in the world. When you think about it, that brings a huge responsibility. That's why we come down on them when occasionally one or two let themselves down (Teacher D interview: 13, 12, 2012).

You will have noticed that both teachers describe the role the boys' role as "Ambassadors" for the club, which places a great deal of responsibility on very young shoulders. This was not something they sought when they joined the programme but, nonetheless, it has become an added burden which they carry very well with staff support and encouragement. Teacher C thinks that the collaboration between the school and club could be improved by better communication, and the recognition that we both share the same goals: academic and athletic success. He is convinced of the need to consider "The whole child" in any vision staff have for their academic and athletic development. Teacher D is very impressed by the boy's habit of regularly shaking the hands of staff they meet as a mark of respect, something other students at the school did not do. He felt that this contributed to their development socially and morally. Thus we see another example of the tension between two distinct cultures – football and education discussed in relation to mentoring earlier in the chapter (Parker, 1995, 1996). The goal of the staff is too reconcile these two seemingly divergent objectives through better understanding of the dilemmas facing the young people in their care, as well as improved communication between the coaches and members of the school staff.

We have seen the sacrifice that parents have to make when their son becomes a scholar, and during interview I received some encouraging comments regarding their general social development:

> *From being with this club from a young age, I think it's instilled a certain level of discipline in him which has stuck with him. But I think the discipline side from the club has carried with him and developed him massively. What's expected of him, the whole process, training, his well-being – what's expected of him not just the football side of things, his manners, everything as a person. You know there are certain standards that you expect from them as players. I think a lot of it is down to the club and the whole structure you have with the boys* (Parent B interview: 19, 12, 2012).

I think what they get here is a really good grounding for life. I think the other thing in the school as well was that they were very much ambassadors weren't they [for the club] *in some way, because all the other kids in the school would know that they were on the programme because they were going off every-day. You don't want them put on a pedestal. And you don't want them to get to the point where they're a bit cocky about it. And you want them to be nice human beings don't you really?* (Parent D interview: 31, 1, 2013).

Health-wise he's definitely good because it's just think health all the time; his food, everything he eats, his exercise. So for that side, mentally, I think it's probably made him a lot healthier as well as just his body. I think generally, it's healthier all-round and I think his social life is better now at this age group (Parent C interview: 19, 1, 2013).

All three parents agree that the programme has improved their son's general welfare. Parent B uses words such as discipline, well-being, standards and manners to depict the qualities being part of the scheme helps to develop. Parent B felt the way the programme was organised accounted for much of this progress. Parent D believes the scholarship has provided a solid base on which to build for the future – a "Good grounding for life" is the expression used. Parent D also echoed the views of Teachers C and D when referring to the ambassadorial role the boys have, but was wary of the danger attached to them being put on a pedestal by their peers. This might prevent him becoming a nice human being which was a vision shared by the staff. Finally, Parent C specifically refers to the improved physical and mental health of the teenager whilst he has lived away from home. During this time, he had also become a much more sociable person.

Such remarks are important, as they appear to fulfil one of the foremost objectives of the schoolboy scholarship, which is to produce individuals whose physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual development is improved rather than diminished by their admission to the scheme.

Conclusion

This has been a necessarily long chapter, as it has tried to encapsulate an enormous amount of professional knowledge, expertise and information within a relatively short discourse. During the first five years of the scholarship's existence, staff have attempted to 'learn with the students', and listen intently to their feedback in order to respond to the myriad needs they have, not least their holistic well-being.

In the first instance staff learned that the players often had difficulty adapting to life in a new school with students who had wholly different ambitions for the future. They were often seen as being 'different' to their peers, because they had certain privileges owing to the fact they were associated with the football club. This was also a cause of some tension among some staff who had not yet understood the nature of the schoolboy scholarship scheme. Despite this, however, the programme is now seen by everyone as an important ancillary feature of life at the school.

We have also seen that the school is very highly rated by Government Inspectors, and parents could be assured that their son would receive an excellent education. Over the years, the school had acquired a large degree of professional or 'craft knowledge' which enabled staff to flex the school timetable in order to facilitate the boys' education and coaching schedule ensuring there was a good balance between these two streams. Staff at both the school and club felt they had a responsibility to ensure that the boys' education was not affected because of their coaching and training schedule. This is a very important point, as it shows that the boys' future prospects outside football are not undermined. There was a feeling that, from time-to-time, the players experienced problems which they found difficult to express due to 'peer pressure' or because it would not seem masculine to admit to any form of weakness (Parker, 1995). The fact that the coaches and school staff are aware of this is an important step towards finding a positive solution to this extremely sensitive issue.

The school and the club's approach towards mentoring was also considered, being seen as indispensable to the quality of pastoral care they could provide for the players. This has been adapted over the years through various phases in the light

of the reaction of the players to the methods used. The coaches and teachers believe that the present mentoring technique is meeting the players' needs. The importance of the players' holistic development is implicit in the mentoring process; and the scholarship is concerned to produce individuals with a highly developed social and moral consciousness, the ability to become consummate ambassadors for the school and club, and outstanding citizens in their own right. The evidence analysed indicates that the scheme is making good progress on the road to achieving this objective.

We have spent the last two chapters interrogating data relating to the scholar's life at the club and its partner school. The next chapter goes behind the scenes of the boys' family accommodation to uncover some hitherto unrevealed disclosures about life in this sphere of the scholar's life.

CHAPTER FIVE

NARRATIVES OF THE SCHOOLBOY SCHOLARSHIP:
LIFE IN FAMILY ACCOMMODATION

Introduction

This chapter will take a closer look at life in the schoolboy scholar's family accommodation which is a research area that has been relatively unexplored over the years. This is no doubt due in part, to the suspicion that professional clubs often have of 'outsiders' infiltrating the sanctity of the dressing room or other areas (Parker, 1995). The club have a long tradition of housing their young players with local families which goes back to the 1950s when Matt Busby established his renowned 'youth policy' (Whelan, 2005). A good example of this practice was Mrs Watson, who ran a small boarding house near Lancashire County Cricket Ground not far from the club stadium. Famous players such as Duncan Edwards and Tommy Taylor resided there at one time or another. Both Busby and his loyal assistant Jimmy Murphy, strongly believed that the quality of the players' living accommodation (or digs) was vitally important (Whelan, 2005).

Despite the advent of hostels, lodges and other forms of residential accommodation being introduced into youth development programmes in the modern era, the club continues to believe that housing their young players with ordinary families is best for their general welfare and well-being (The Premier League, 2011). It is believed that such an environment gives them attributes which help them to keep in touch with the realities of everyday life which could be lost if they were housed in a large boarding house or other type of residence. Indeed there has been much recent discussion and debate within the Academy surrounding this subject, with a view to building a large hostel to house the schoolboy scholar's.

The work of the club's Family Accommodation Providers (FAP) is essentially a form of hospitality which has a long historical as well as biblical tradition. The chapter will briefly discuss this concept before moving on to place under the spot-

light the naked views, opinions, experiences and reflections of the people who are best able to recount them – the players and the house-parents involved in the process. They have to deal with the challenge this brings on a daily basis, which is no easy matter as we have seen in previous chapters of this study (see also Parker, 1996).

Hospitality: History, Literature and Religious Tradition

The concept of hospitality has an ancient and noble tradition which the family accommodation providers perpetuate through the medium of football. In Ancient Greece, people were extremely wary of a stranger knocking on the door – would he be friendly or hostile – or a God in disguise passing judgement on mortal man? Hospitality was seen a means of honouring the Gods and fundamental to civilised life. Thus its patron was the King of the Gods himself – Zeus the protector of supplicants and guests (*Odyssey* 9). In many of the Greek myths, due to their honourable behaviour, human hosts were favoured by the Gods and received just reward. For example, Odysseus during his Odyssey, constantly seeks *Xenia* (hospitable reception), in a variety of situations. On his return home, only those who offered him hospitality are shown mercy and spared summary execution. In all of Homers writing, the Gods and legendary humans such as Odysseus and his son Telemachus, were seen as role models for the ancient Greeks who would have been expected to imitate them in a positive manner. In fact, hospitality was so sacred that when it was violated, breached or abused, it was deemed to be an extremely heinous crime bringing the wrath of the Gods on perpetrators. An example of this was the Cyclopes, the guest eating monster in the *Odyssey* (O'Gorman, 2007).

Hospitality in Rome was never as arbitrary as it was in the heroic age of Greece. However, the custom of keeping the laws of hospitality was certainly germane to all the tribes of Italy. In most cases it was affected without any official compact between the parties, and it was seen as an honourable duty to receive eminent guests into the house. Community or public hospitality seems to have appeared at a very early stage in the history of Italy, as the front gates of homes were opened up to display all kinds of goods and wares in the open courts, as all comers whether friends or strangers were invited to share the abundant hospitality. This

kind of bountiful hospitality often led to the longstanding friendship between the host and guest, and ultimately to more public ties of comradeship (O'Gorman, 2007).

Private hospitality in Rome was similar in nature to that of Greece, but was more exact and legally defined. For example, the character of a *hospes* (a person connected to a Roman by ties of hospitality), was seen to be even more sacrosanct, and to have greater claims on the host than someone related by consanguinity. The offer of hospitality to a foreigner imposed on a Roman citizen certain responsibilities. These obligations included receiving travellers (hospes) into their homes, and the duty to represent a guest in a court of law if necessary (O'Gorman, 2007: 24). Hospitality was also established between people by mutual consent or via the mediation of a third person who was revered by religion. Thus, as Zeus cast his eyes over hospitality conducted by the Greeks, the Roman God Jupiter was believed to watch over and guide the *ius hospitia* (law of hospitality) in the Roman Empire. On the other hand, the violation of hospitality was as serious a social transgression and crime as it was in ancient Greece (O'Gorman, 2007).

The oldest religious texts which refer to hospitality are from a literary genre known as Ancient Near East Texts. These belong to a large family of Eastern Mediterranean traditions of Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt. These texts are normally associated with the Old Testament in the Bible and give examples of Ancient Near East hospitality in which the host is attentive to the needs of his house guest. Another well-known text of this type is the Egyptian Book of the Dead (O'Gorman, 2007).

Having placed the concept of hospitality in historic context, we shall now see what valuable insights the Bible has to offer on this theme which is our sixth and final motif.

Hospitality: A Biblical Motif

The Old Testament contains numerous references to the practice of hospitality – the service of hosts, and the treating of guests with civility, dignity and humanity. The book of Genesis shows God creating the world with abundant living space for plants trees and animal life to serve as food for all living creatures. They are his guests, sit at his table and have the privilege of enjoying his courteous provision. God's human guests, in turn, are to preserve the legacy bequeathed to them by respecting his ultimate ownership of all creation (O'Gorman, 2007). The story in Genesis recounts the fall of man and the eviction from the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve's eating the fruit of the forbidden tree is an overt act of disobedience and an attempt to usurp the power and authority of God their maker (Gen 3: 6-24). Seen in this light they wish to be owners rather than the guests of their creator (O'Gorman, 2007).

Further in Genesis (18: 1-8), we find an example of biblical hospitality when Abraham and his wife Sarah show courteous receptivity to three strangers. In the story, Abraham sees three simple nomads in the distance, and hastens to greet them with gestures of hospitality as a mark of respect. Initially, he sees them as merely fellow humans, but soon learns that his guests are actually Angels in human form. He warmly greets them, and invites them to dine in his tent to rest awhile. When they arrive at his tent, they find that rather than a simple meal, he provides them with a large banquet. This episode is an example of the way that hospitality is central to all Old Testament ethics as God, the great Lord of Host, invites his guests into his house (the created world) to partake of its rich blessings. The duty of his guests is clear; the host expects them to follow his example by sharing their livelihood and possessions with their fellow guests here on earth (O'Gorman, 2007).

Research into New Testament hospitality is a recent development in biblical scholarship. O'Gorman (2007) notes that until recently Bible Dictionaries seldom contained entries on the subject. In 1992 an article on hospitality was published in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* that recognised a distinctive cultural component in biblical hospitality, in which God or Christ was oftentimes the host or guest. The Gospel of Luke was especially interested in hospitality, and he alone of the

disciples includes the parable of the Prodigal Son (15: 11-32), the rich man and Lazarus (17: 19-31) the Good Samaritan (10: 25-37) and Zacheus (19: 1-10). Furthermore, the beginning of St John's Gospel (1: 10-11) gives a delicate account of the treatment Jesus and his family receive during his birth. No one was prepared to take them in – and this in a land steeped in the tradition of hospitality (O'Gorman, 2007).

The concept of hospitality was also an important feature of the early church for two primary reasons: the preservation of the Hebrew conception of hospitality which associated it with God, covenant, and blessing; and also the Hellenistic and Roman practices which connected it with benefit and reciprocity. We have already seen how Greek and Roman perspectives on benevolence and hospitality emphasised mutual obligations between patron and beneficiary. A grateful response from a beneficiary was the key to sustaining the relationship, as the Greco-Roman tradition stressed the goodness and merit of recipients rather than their need. Jesus instructed his disciples to travel lightly, and this implied that they were sure to find adequate hospitality throughout their various journeys (Mark 6: 8). Furthermore, it was they who could choose their hosts (Matt 10: 11-15). The claims of the traveller to hospitality are brought to the fore by the fact that they bring glad tidings for the people. Thus, to reject hospitality to one of his followers is tantamount to rejecting Jesus himself (Matt 10: 41). As he approached the end of his life, Jesus still relied upon the generosity of friends and others for two of his finest acts. The Last Supper, kept with his disciples, took place in a borrowed room (Mark 14: 13-16), and even after his death, he remained the guest of Joseph of Arimathea who provided his tomb (Mark 15: 42-47). Thus, New Testament hospitality, especially to the poor and needy, was the key to eternal life (Pohl and Buck, 2001). Indeed, the parable of the last judgement shows God separating the sheep from the goats which was contingent upon whether the principal of hospitality was honoured or denied (Matt 25: 32-37).

Having located hospitality within historical and religious context, it is now appropriate to survey and assess the nature of hospitality within the players' family accommodation. I do this from the vantage-point of the players and their house-parents. This is because their witness is especially important, as they alone

inhabit this world. It is world in which communication is primarily oral, as there are very few written documents or records apart from private photographs or scrapbooks as we shall see.

Hospitality: The Players View

For a boy to leave home to live with a surrogate family is one of the most difficult challenges of the schoolboy scholarship. It is a challenge they meet with admirable fortitude and resilience which the following statements show:

> *It was a risk I wanted to take because I knew I could go and do something I wanted to do. But I got used to it, you get used to it after a few months. I think I did the right thing in moving away, it's made me grow up a lot faster (*Player B interview: 13, 11, 2012).

> *If you do get a scholar* (full-time contract at sixteen), *when your older at 16, then you're going to have to move into digs anyway so it's best to be prepared and know what you're going to get into than missing home all the time. I had the choice. The first years were all like missing home and I was fine. And I wasn't bothered about how far away because I had a choice of which clubs to go to. And I wasn't bothered about how far away it was because I knew I wasn't going to miss home* (Player D interview: 22, 12, 2012).

> *It was hard at first, that first three months, I really didn't like it. I'm still not a fan of digs anymore. It's just different to home really, like food's a lot different. It's not privacy. I share a room, very busy the house. I didn't have much privacy, just like bringing a few friends something like that. But I think it's worth that. So then as soon as you get to the scholarship, I think if you've been there and done it with the scholarship scheme then you progress, and it helps people who are in the scholarship to just get on with it in the end* (Player E interview: 22, 1 2013).

> *I was in the first digs six months and I really didn't get on with the lady, she was quite strict. She had me going to bed a lot earlier than I was used*

to. So I really didn't get on with her. And I told (a member of staff) *about it and he sorted me out in a nice new digs. The lady, the family there is lovely (*Player F interview: 25 1 2013).

It is interesting that Player B describes living in family accommodation as "A risk I wanted to take", because he wanted so much to become a professional footballer. He was not able to articulate exhaustively exactly why it was such a risk, but one gets a sense of how much this opportunity meant to him. He accepts the fact that living away from home is simply part of the reality of trying to achieve his goals and helped him grow up a lot faster along the way. By contrast, Player D is quite prescient; living in family accommodation was something he had to get used to if he eventually became a full time scholar when he was sixteen. For him, it was a necessary inconvenience – just another stepping stone along his chosen path. Having achieved his scholarship at another club, he felt that it had given him an advantage over some of his peers who were struggling to adjust to living away from home.

For Player E the whole experience of living in family accommodation was very uncomfortable – something he never really came to terms with. He found his privacy was often compromised as he had to share a room in a busy house. However, like the other boys, he sees the bigger picture, which was the prospect of moving closer to the fulfilment of his dream of becoming a professional player. Finally, Player F courageously recounts an upsetting experience he had of living in family accommodation when he first joined the programme. This demonstrates the fact that it is often difficult to match players with the right families, and a degree of trial and error is normal in order to get things right. Fortunately for Player E, with staff support, he was re-housed elsewhere. This incident is an example of the importance of the mentoring process described in the previous chapter. This gives players the opportunity to discuss any problems they may have, knowing they their voice will be heard – and more importantly – acted upon. This is especially important given the embarrassment players may feel about talking about negative experiences in their accommodation. Thus it is imperative for staff to be attentive at all times, and not assume that all is well, when in fact this may not actually be the case (Parker, 2001; 1996; 1995).

Given the above evidence, it is clear that Academy staff have much to learn from the feedback the players supply regarding life in family accommodation. Likewise, the feedback from their house-parents is central to this research as they, along with the players, are the only people who have experienced this world. It is to this area of the scholarship programme we will now cast a discerning eye.

Hospitality: The House-Parents View

The schoolboy scholars' house-parents have a unique job – that of 'looking after' talented schoolboy footballers along with their own children. It must be recognised that athletes have special needs which have to be catered for. This requires a good deal of knowledge, patience and understanding of young people gained through the experience of parenting as well as formal training (Layard and Dunn, 2009). Needless to say, the role of house-parent is crucial to the success of the programme, and they undergo a rigorous selection process which involves interviews, home visits and proof of appropriate parenting skills. They also have the onerous task of raising their own children alongside the scholars, which is a major feat.

I asked several house-parents how well the boys integrated into life with their family, and how it impacted their overall development (see Appendix 2). What follows is their response:

> *They have to be part of the family, it's the only way we can do it that they are part of the family – it's not a job for us. And if they want anything they go and get it themselves out of the fridge or they make themselves something. They just get on with it. That's the only way we can do this – they have to be part of the family, and as such they've got the run of the house. All we ask is that they are respectful to us and the house.*

> *I take photographs of every lad. I've got photographs of every lad that comes here. And I do say to them: "Write about your experience, what you were like in training, and what did you think of the set up"?* (House-Parent's B interview: 14, 2, 2013).

A significant disclosure of House-Parent's B is the fact the players have to become "Part of the family". It is clear that they cannot look after them properly if they are not comfortable with their surroundings. Another important point is that the role is a vocation, rather than a job. In fact the house-parents receive a monthly remuneration from the club, but they are not asked to sign a formal contract. Their relationship with the club is based on mutual trust and a non-contractual agreement. There are no burdensome ground rules, the boys are simply asked to be respectful to them and their property. There is also a reference to the taking of photographs of the boys for family records,

House-Parent C has this to say about the experience of housing the schoolboy scholars:

> *They may have come from mums or dads who have particularly smothered them, and trying to find their independence is quite hard. My rule is, if I go to into your room and it looks like a bomb's hit it I can't clean it because that's your property and I'm not prepared to go rooting through it. But if your washings in the bin and your plates are downstairs I will clean for you. I will make sure that you are smart, and you will go out the door looking clean and fresh. I think the key is to never get annoyed because I take things in my stride, very much so. I think you have to because otherwise I'd be rocking in a corner. And at the moment, the dynamic of my house...which is like a youth club, and if they're in the family room playing FIFA they're all together* (House-Parent C interview: 18, 2, 13).

> *They do integrate, and at dinner time it's great. We all have a family meal, nobody eats separately and all those sorts of things. I think that's important, to touch base at the end of the day. Phones are banned from the table so I can know what is going on in their world. I think that's important because I'm interested – rather than being nosey – I'm interested. Let's catch you before you fall. If you feel unhappy, tell me and we can do something about it, that's my philosophy. I think juggling sets of hormones is quite difficult sometimes. The challenge is sometimes*

you've got to notice if someone's having a bit of a bad day. If there's an atmosphere and someone's a bit tetchy, I make sure I sit at the table and we'll have a light hearted conversation which is led by me. Therefore it defuses before it starts House-Parent C interview: 18, 2, 13).,

I talk to them a lot; I always talk to them a lot. If I think there's something that's going off with one of them, I would never say in front of them – "you alright sweetheart" at the table, because that's always going to be a yes. But I might give them a knock on the door and ask how it's going, or "do you need anything"? They are absolutely no different whatsoever to me – they are children within my care. I'm a mum, and to leave your child with me is a massive big thing for the parents to do because your child's got a dream and you can stop that dream (House-Parent C interview: 18, 2, 13).

The benefits to the players are always that they've become established as a person. Although its teamwork, it's all very personally based isn't it? They know that they have accountability, and then there are boundaries they know they have to work hard to achieve. And if they take that ethos, if they never make it as a footballer and they work hard in life, they're going to be a success in whatever they do. And that's an adaptability which most children may never see in their lives, let alone at such an early age which is amazing.They're all really good foundations, aren't they, massive stepping stones for these children to be a success in whatever they decide to do (House-Parent C interview: 18, 2, 2013).

House-Parent C is very experienced. Like House-Parent B, house-keeping rules are established early in order to avoid a situation in which the stresses and strains of parenting would leave the interviewee "Rocking in a corner" which is an apt description of the situation if there was no sense of order or discipline in the house. There is also recognition that many of the players are still trying to find their own identity as they enter adolescence which is a very trying period of their lives (Parker, 1995, 1996). There is a vivid description of the kind of environment that exists in the household at certain times – that of "A youth club" in which the boys interact with one another in a convivial atmosphere. Family meal-times are

also seen as being very important opportunities to sit and talk – to find out what is described as "What is going on in their world". It is felt that informal chats over dinner is the best way to enable the players to express their thoughts and feeling, rather than waiting for a crises to occur – "Let's catch you before you fall" is the expression used.

House-Parent C is sensitive to the fact that there are a variety of hormonal changes going on in teenage bodies, which can cause them to be awkward or temperamental. These situations have to be handled with a good deal of warmth, understanding and compassion. This house-parent sees the value in talking to the boys regularly in an informal way, which is actually a form of unwitting mentoring. Confidentiality is also important, especially if there is a sense that a young person is going through a particularly difficult time for one reason or another. House-Parent C aims to treat the boys no differently than other family members. It is essential that the highest standard of pastoral care should prevail, because for a parent to give up their child is a major sacrifice as we saw in Chapter Three. A valuable lesson from this interview is that each child must be supported in a way that suits their particular persona.

We shall now make a final comparison with the view of house-parent D, who has this to say about her experience of looking after the scholars placed in her care:

> *Well it's like any child living at home really, there's certain house rules that are laid down by the family, and that also applies to anyone coming into family accommodation. So when two youngsters come in that are schoolboys you've got to re-jig everything. I'm sort of in loco parentis aren't I for them? So my role is to make sure that no-ones compromised, the older boys aren't compromised by the younger boys and vice-versa. Part of my role for their development is to make sure that by the time they finish with me they're capable of going out and looking after themselves. They know how to work a washing machine, they know how to recycle, they know how to put bins out. And that's just the living arrangements* (House-Parent D interview: 19, 2, 13).

I would say family wise we have general discussions where everybody's involved. They also know that if there are any particular issues, if one has a problem…that boy will come and talk to me. Also, you have to integrate with their family and in some circumstances that's fine. Now it can be a single parent family so you've not just got one person to deal with, you've got the other partner to deal with. Then you've got the conflicts between those two partners, and one isn't talking to the other and it can be quite acrimonious. So you've got to be in the middle and a counsellor for everybody so it can be very challenging House-Parent D interview: 19, 2, 13).

Routine pastoral care you just deal with as it comes along. If it's something that you can handle and you're comfortable dealing with the situation then you deal with it If it's something that you're only getting half the tale – because sometimes they'll drip feed you, or you can tell when they come in there's something not right. And you find out how things are progressing by just talking to them. A lot of it is talking. If you don't talk to them you don't find out anything. But again, I do talk to the parents because the parents become part of my family as well you know. I'm looking after their kids so I need feedback from them. It's not all about them playing football; I want them to develop life skills, teaching them to be able to cope independently. They have been taught fairly well I think by the club, they'll always stand up and greet somebody and shake their hand and say "Hi pleased to meet you." They are very respectful in that way House-Parent D interview: 19, 2, 13).

I do say to them about their education, they must try and put as much into their education as they would do they would do the football. Because when football goes, they've got to turn the hand to something else. And it's not all about coaching, it could be business skills or something like that they've got to turn their hand to (House-Parent D interview: 19, 2, 2013).

A common feature of all my interviews with the house-parents was the importance of establishing from the outset a clearly defined set of house-rules which the boys had to adhere to. This is even more important in cases where the host family still have children of school age living at home. The club also has a set of rules which they are expected to comply with when they are in their family accommodation. The second point worth noting from this interview is that House-Parent D's accepted the full legal responsibility of being a parent of the boys placed in this particular home. The term *in loco parentis* is the Latin for in place of the parent. This brings to the fore the magnitude of the task all the house-parents face helping to raise these young players, all of whom are trying to excel at sport and education. One of the first tasks is making sure the lines of communication are always open. This is especially important when dealing with boys from single parent families whose mother and father may not be on good speaking terms. House-Parent D feels that one of the roles of house-parents is being a counsellor; such are the conflicts which often exist between parents who are separated from their children. A third point is that House-Parent D believes that helping the boys to develop basis skills such as using the washing machine, recycling materials and cooking are an essential part of the house-parents role, in order to help the players to become more independent individuals. This was something that we discussed at some length in Chapter Four above.

Finally, House-Parent D refers to pastoral care as being a merely a "routine" aspect of the job – "You just deal with it as it comes along". This is very true. But it must be understood that there are many facets of pastoral care which demand a set of skills commensurate to a specific social situation and context. In our case, this is the pastoral care of schoolboy footballers who aspire to reach the highest levels of the professional game. I do not believe that House-Parent D under-estimates the value of high quality pastoral care, but the comment serves to remind us, that good pastoral care requires an intimate knowledge of human nature, and the accumulation of the kind of wisdom which only life experience can engender. The club have been fortunate that many of the house-parents in the scheme have acquired this expertise through many years of professional practice caring for young people (Pattison, 2000a). One of these skills is simply talking to the boys: "If you don't talk to them you don't find out anything". Another

example is House-Parent D ensuring that parents "Become part of my family" which is a valuable means of communication. Finally, House-Parent D is attuned to the fact that in the world of professional football there are no certainties – a career threatening injury is only a match away. In these circumstances, they are advised to pay as much attention to their studies as they do to their football training. Needless to say, this is often an extremely thankless task, but in the best interest of their welfare (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Brackenridge *et al*, 2007 David, 2005).

Conclusion

The provision of residential accommodation for aspiring young footballers is not a new phenomenon within the world of professional football (Parker, 1995; Whelan, 2005). The chapter opens with a brief introduction to the nature of hospitality by setting it firmly within its historical, social and religious context. Ancient Greek and Roman literatures were important works which we explored, as well as extracts from Jewish and Christian scriptures: The Old and New Testament. The concept of offering lodging to individuals in need has a long history, and we saw that the scholarship scheme is a modern example of a wonderful tradition of humanity (Pohl and Buck, 2001).

The chapter also provides extracts of interviews with four players and three house-parents who kindly recounted their experience of the programme in some detail for this research. Their comments and observations are representative of the views and opinions of many others whose voices are also extremely valuable. The testimony of the house-parents contained much knowledge and perception of the wider world, which could only be acquired through a life-time of experience.

Finally, the data presented in the chapter encapsulates the various issues and themes which this thesis is concerned to address: holistic development, mentoring, life skills and pastoral care. That it does so through the voice and witness of individuals who have never been heard before is quite compelling. The player and house-parent voices eloquently recall the challenge, risk, strife, anxiety, heartbreak, joy and success of being involved in such a demanding venture (Green, 2009a; Parker, 1996; Shindler, 2005).

The three previous chapters has seen the presentation of primary source data from five different sources namely the players, coaches, teachers, parents and house-parents involved in the scholarship scheme. In the penultimate chapter, there is one last voice to be heard – that of the thesis author, as he reflects on the data as a practical theologian.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SOCCER COACH AS PRACTICAL THEOLOGIAN

Introduction

The focus of this thesis has been to critically assess and evaluate an elite schoolboy soccer enrichment programme at a professional football club. I first became involved in this scheme in 2007 when the initiative was launched, and I have played a leading role in its development during the last six years. Since its inception, there is no doubt that the schoolboy scholarship has transformed my thinking regarding the nature of player development, and the insights I have gained through this research project will enhance my professional knowledge and practice immeasurably.

I embarked on this research as a coach with a solid base of professional knowledge and experience spanning more than twenty years of coaching elite schoolboy footballers. However, I was convinced that this could be further enriched and enhanced by acquiring more profound insights into what the study of practical theology, religion and spirituality could bring to my professional situation. My professional context places me in daily contact with the schoolboy scholars who have to endure the emotional roller-coaster ride that success and failure brings to these vulnerable young people. I have to deal with it every day of my working life.

It was becoming apparent through my research, that I was gradually gaining a clearer and more coherent understanding of the nature of practical theology and its impact on my professional practice. Theological refection via the pastoral cycle and other methods espoused by practical theologians such as Green (2009b), Lartey (2000), Osmer (2008) and Pattison (2000b) has been transformational in the sense that it has helped me to better comprehend and respond to contemporary situations in my work-place from a theological perspective. In other words, to think and act theologically, and thus become a practical theologian myself.

The purpose of this chapter is to engage in some theological reflection in the light of the valuable data that the three previous chapters have presented to the reader.

That is, the raw material of the various interviews with players, coaches, teachers, parents and house-parents. Transcribing and writing up this material afforded me the invaluable opportunity to actually do some theology, using the 'doing theology spiral' or the 'pastoral cycle' as propagated by Green (2009b) and Lartey (2000). This involved theological reflection in five key stages which we saw in Chapter One. I would argue that this thesis, per se, is an archetype of this process. Nevertheless, theological reflection is not a solitary occupation. On the contrary, the theological knowledge, expertise and wisdom I have received from my colleagues on the Doctor of Professional Studies in Practical Theology course has greatly assisted me on this journey – they have been my partners. My reflection involves a critical analysis of four important disciplines (three of which are theological) in the light of the oral evidence I have gathered concerning the schoolboy scholars, and how they have an impact on my professional practice. These domains are as follows: practical theology, liberation theology, child rights legislation and pastoral theology.

Practical Theology and Player Development

Given my interest in practical theology, I was once asked if there had been a 'critical incident' in my career which may have had an effect on me, leading to my engagement with the discipline. At the time, I thought this was an extremely discerning question which would take a considerable amount of time to answer satisfactorily. My initial musing led me to believe that my views emanated from childhood experiences, or from my days as a professional footballer. I also wondered to what extent my schoolteachers, and youth coaches influenced my psyche? Perhaps there had been no single event or moment which served to inform my approach to coaching elite schoolboy footballers. Another thought was that the accumulation of professional experience had influenced me – or was there yet another reason? I was certain, however, that my research was going a long way to helping me to find the answer.

My professional life has encompassed three careers: professional footballer, social worker and youth football coach. These have all been valuable and rewarding experiences, providing myriad encounters with young people which have had a significant effect on my mind-set. For example, as a young player, I recall the

various traumas I endured when trying to achieve my goal of becoming a professional footballer such as not getting selected for a particular match, loss of form, injury, peer-pressure, low self-esteem and worrying about being offered a professional contract (Parker, 1996). It was a time in my life I have never forgotten, and it has given me a great deal of empathy with the young players I am working with. During the course of my fourteen years in social work, I counselled disadvantaged teenagers who truanted from school because the National Curriculum was unsuitable for their needs. This often resulted in academic failure, and the consequences this would have for their future prospects. Indeed, my current role with the schoolboy scholars involves dealing with the dreams, hopes and aspirations of talented young footballers in the knowledge that many of them will be devastated if they fail to attain their goals. This can be emotionally draining for the coaching staff, especially when they have worked with them for several years (Green, 2009a; Whitehouse, 2008).

Since the schoolboy scholarship was introduced, I have become acutely sensitive to the importance of the nurture, care and holistic well-being of the young people I work with. I retain an entrenched desire to ensure that no deliberate harm should come to them in any way (non-malfeasance) during their time in the scheme. Over time, I have come to realise that mere compliance to the legal requirements of safeguarding children is not enough and, as coaches, we should go further by offering additional support to the players socially and emotionally in ways that may be difficult to quantify. This may be from experiences such as the opportunity to form friendships, have quality play, learn life and leadership skills, and participate in a range of other activities which occupy young people today (Layard and Dunn, 2009). With regard to safeguarding, the Club have a comprehensive Safeguarding Children Policy, and some departments (including the Academy) have additional guidelines to support its delivery. When the schoolboy scholars are at school they come under the guardianship of the school safeguarding policy.

When reflecting on my work, I was becoming increasingly aware of the fact that elite young athletes are more vulnerable to abuse in all its forms the more successful they become. This abuse may be physical, emotional, psychological or

commercial exploitation (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; Conn, 1998; David, 2005). I realised that coaches have a great deal of power and influence over young players which can be abused if proper procedures are not in place to prevent it. This was something I felt was highly relevant in the work I was doing with the schoolboy scholars at the club. Attending professional development courses over the last few years in areas such as mentoring and child welfare, was giving me a better understanding of these disciplines in order to improve my professional practice. Furthermore, through this research, I was also beginning to see more clearly how themes in practical theology such as pastoral care, community welfare, and human liberation could assist my development as a practical theologian working in professional football (Boff, 1987; Gutierrez, 1988; Pattison, 2000a; Wall, 2010).

My research was demonstrating that practical theology is an extremely broad church employing a variety of methods and approaches (Woodward and Pattison, 2000). Study of the discipline has offered me another perspective on my work with the schoolboy scholars – a new way of looking into their world so to speak. It has also enabled me to receive some new insights into pastoral theology such as counselling, Christian Ethics and Liberation Theology (Boff, 1987; Harvey, 2000). I have found practical theology to be transformational in the sense that through my research, I am seeking to address a range of contemporary issues that affect the lives of the schoolboy scholars' on a daily basis. It is focused within the context and situation of my professional practice, as I attempt to find new and enlightening responses to the many testing situations I encounter each day of my professional life. As I have previously stated, practical theology is also concerned with theological reflection, the intellectual activity of thinking about one's professional practice as a means to improve it. This is achieved by analysing my experiences via the theory-practice-theory continuum which is the very essence of theological reflection (Green, 2009b; Lartey, 2000). The *sine qua non* of my research in practical theology is to interrogate these situations more deeply and profoundly, in order to improve my skill and expertise as a practical theologian working in football. The nature of this investigation – oral testimony, is closely aligned with models of action research which seek fundamental transformation in professional practice (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). That said, this does not

obviate the need to be highly sensitive to the voices and participation of one's informants.

An example of how the Green's (2009b: 17-38) 'doing theology spiral' has transformed practice in my work-place is the recognition that during their final two years in the programme – school years 10 and 11, the boys experience a great deal of stress and pressure due to the fact that they are taking a range of GCSE courses which are essential for their future prospects in the work-place. This is a time when they also start to wonder if they are going to receive the offer of a full-time contract with the club when they leave school at age sixteen. In order to alleviate this nervous tension, and after considerable reflection and debate, the club introduced a policy in 2012, which confirmed that when the players reached the end of year nine of their secondary education (under fourteen); they would be told that they were to receive an offer of a full-time scholarship when they left school. This came as a great relief to them (and their parents) because they could now concentrate solely on their important academic work, without the undue strain of worrying about their future. Conversely, if a player is not offered a contract at this stage, he had the option of remaining in the programme or electing to leave and return home to continue his training part-time. The possibility still remained that he would be offered a contract before he left school. This strategy has already proved to be extremely beneficial for the boys' emotional and psychological well-being; and a major transformation in professional practice at the club (Academy Meeting Minutes, 2011). Thus we can see how a specific professional issue was analysed and assessed through the five phrases of the spiral, namely: experience, exploration, reflection, response and new situation.

Through my studies I have also discovered that practical theology is interdisciplinary in that it utilises theory and methodology from other academic disciplines to articulate its concerns. This includes: sport science, coaching, child development and welfare, counselling and mentoring. Doing practical theology encourages me to ask the right questions about the nature of my practice, even if some of the possible responses fall outside of the norms of theological orthodoxy (Pattison, 2007, see also Pattison and Woodwood, 2000).

A specific illustration of this point, is that in the three data chapters above (Three, Four and Five), I have used the literary device of a motif in order to make connections between my professional practise and stories gleaned from the Bible which I believe have ethical, moral and practical significance in my work with young people. The Bible is replete with stories about people from all areas of life who have struggles, hopes, failures and triumphs. The Bible has long been admired and exalted for its pragmatic view of human life, and its emotive depiction of the glories of faithful servants. It also provides stunning portraits of people from resplendent Kings to humble servants. There is no doubt that the ideas of Christianity have inspired and influenced a plethora of outstanding writers from Shakespeare to Tolstoy, and there are countless other writers who have leaned heavily upon the narrative of the Bible to create diverse layers of meaning in their literature. Furthermore, Christian values, concepts and heritage inform our understanding of everyday life in Britain. They form a moral compass to society and therefore have significant value when examining biblical texts (Garnett *et al*, 2011; Panasenko and Sestakova, 2013).

Pattison (2000a) argues that there has been a scarcity of literature on the value of using the Bible, especially in relation to pastoral care. The truth of the Bible has been dissected to the extent that it is now assumed by most scholars that the biblical record is not a valid historical account of actual events. This challenge to the trustworthiness of the Bible has not prevented many scholars from recognising in the Bible some outstanding literature, worthy to be placed alongside other works of antiquity and the modern world. While it is accepted that the biblical narrative fails to provide a literal record, it does offer an insightful, significant and timeless account of the various toils of humanity. The cultural 'distance' of the Bible from the modern era highlights the pastoral and simplistic society inhabited by the biblical authors compared to our own. Nonetheless, the difficulty of relating to this world view from the vantage-point of the 21st century should not prevent us from learning from their experience (Pattison, 2000a).

Anderson (2005), states that there are a variety of ways to relate the Bible to pastoral care. There are many people who still regard the Bible as an important text without yielding to its 'absolute' authority. Some will use a biblical story or

theme to symbolise a particular human predicament without regard for its origins in the bible text, or scholarly hermeneutical consideration. Others assert that biblical stories and themes have a large degree of authority for Christian living, and reveal a diverse lifestyle for people who remain uncertain of its truth or authority (Bennett, 2013).. On this issue, Bartholomew (2005) makes the point that any appropriation of the Bible in theology must include a means to *hear* the Bible in relation to the interests of pastoral theology. If we attend properly to questions of hermeneutics, it is a valuable ally to assist our reflection and promotion of the value of the Bible in pastoral theology. My use of biblical motifs in this thesis is my humble attempt to follow in this noble tradition, and to do justice to the richness of the research data in relation to my professional practice (Ballard and Holmes, 2005; Bunge, 2008). In this regard, I did not find it easy to reconcile the visceral relationship between my professional practice and the scriptural texts I encountered during the course of my research. The continuous interaction between my professional practice and theological reflection will greatly enhance my personal development as a practical theologian in the following areas:

1. A greater awareness and understanding of action guiding world views, and the harmony of theory and practice (Green, 2009b; Larty, 2000; Pattison, 2000b).

2. An holistic vision of humanity as created in the image of God (Wall, 2007).

3. A strong belief in the concept of practical wisdom gained through life experience. It is not necessary to have expert knowledge, in order be able to offer the insight and reflection which engenders greater understanding.

4. The value of liberation theology (see below) as a viable alternative for the poor and powerless (children and young people).

5. The importance of reflecting on 'lived' experience, as a means to find best practice in a specific context (see the interview transcripts in the three preceding chapters).

We now turn our attention to a branch of theology which offers themes that have valuable resonance for young people in sport: liberation theology.

Liberation Theology

Liberation theology is concerned with questions about all human beings whatever their particular ideology or religious persuasion. Liberation theology has a place in the modern world operating on the 'coal face' of every-day life where the fate of all individuals is ultimately decided. It attempts to take up the cause of the most marginalised people in society, fearless of the most hostile conflict in its effort to restore the most basic of human requirements – dignity and respect. It is a theology which challenges theologians to reflect on the taking of specific action, of the real and tangible problems of life and faith rather than dwelling solely on the classic themes of theological orthodoxy. In this sense, liberation theology gives the gospel message a new semblance of authority and credibility, because it creates a condition in which a sacrifice can be made for the weakest in our community which includes young people (Boff, 1987; Gutierrez, 1988).

The liberation of the oppressed requires a deep understanding of their predicament through the process of "Conscientization", the recognition of the root cause of their oppression. This, in turn, enables them to form themselves into co-ordinated groups in order to confront their oppressors. The idea of conscientization was disseminated as a political term by the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire in his work with illiterate Brazilians. For Freire, the fundamental component of learning was always closely entwined with the social and political status of the learner as distinct from objective learning or propaganda (Friere, 1996). Thus liberation theology is all encompassing – more than just another theological system to add to many others. It is an active theology embracing the whole gamut of theological enquiry: religious, social, political, and in our case young people in professional football (Friere, 1996). It calls out for a theology for elite young footballer which frees them from some of the bureaucratic constraints placed on them by

institutional requirements. By this, I mean that the players do not always have the freedom to play football spontaneously, for its' intrinsic' value, but rather they have to conform to the requirements of the coaching, training and games programme imposed on them by the football authorities and the club (Huizinga, 1955; Isenberg and Quisenberry (2002; The Premier League, 2012). Furthermore, Brackenridge *et al* (2007); David (2005); Green (2009a) and Martens (1978) all provide accounts of some of the oppressive practices pervading organised youth sport.

The Bible contains many narratives about children hidden behind the more popular stories of figures such as Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Joseph, Joshua, Jesus, Peter, Paul and so forth (Bunge, 2008). For example, the New Testament offers a glimpse of a child being empowered when Jesus, as a twelve year old boy, is discovered in the temple discussing scriptural texts with learned scribes. They accord him a large degree of respect and marvel at his wisdom (Luke 2: 41-52).

Liberation theology is a branch of divinity which embraces the concept of the empowerment of the weaker members of human society. It could be argued that, in the modern age, children and young people in general are not empowered to make their own decisions. Thus, the *raison d'être* of liberation theology is the emancipation of all oppressed people (Stevenson-Moessner, 2008; Sedgewick, 2000). Liberation theology originated as a reaction to the dismal destitution and injustice found in Latin America – a gospel of liberation. Gutierrez in his seminal work (1988) has called this "The preferential option for the poor"; it has allies within the trade union movement, human rights struggle, and other protest movements. Liberation theologians urge Christians to abandon their complacency, and take up the banner of justice on behalf of all oppressed people of the world including children (Boff, 1987; Gutierrez, 1988).

For Christians, living the true faith includes the practice of liberation because faith is the foundation of all theology. Through faith, the Christian places his or her life journey and ultimate death in God's hands. By faith we are able to see that divine reality permeates all spheres of life enabling the believer to experience the

presence of God in the various encounters and endeavours of existence. It opens the door to a more reflective and meditative perception on life and the worlds toils (Gutierrez, 1988). However, faith must be also be true, and is requisite for salvation. Biblical tradition requires more than mere lip service to faith (orthodoxy), rather it has to be verified by action and deeds performed in the spirit of love for humankind, and a concern for justice in a harsh world. The Apostle James argues that faith without works is worthless, and belief in God is insufficient because even demons have the same belief (James 2: 20). Thus orthodoxy must be properly aligned with orthopraxis (Gutierrez, 1988; Raymont-Pickard, 2007). A vibrant faith enables us to listen to, and hear, the voice of the oppressed, including young people who rarely permitted to make their own decisions. This is especially the case in the world of professional football, a sphere dominated primarily by adult authority in the form of coaches and administrators (Green, 2009a). Only a faith that leads to a love of God and our fellow humans is truly transformative, liberating, real and active (Gutierrez, 1988; Pattison and Woodward, 2000). It is the aim of liberation theology in all its forms, to restore the practical dimension requisite to biblical faith which is liberating for all oppressed people who experience its benefit. Furthermore, Stevenson-Moessner (2008) argues that the purpose of the church and its ministry is the increase among humankind of the love of God and neighbour – the encounter with God in his many guises.

The Bible shows that God always takes the side of the oppressed in a world whereby injustice and repression is commonplace. It is important to emphasise the characteristics of God that directly express and extol the practice of liberation. God is transcendent, but he does have a concern for those who face oppression in all its manifestations. He hears their cry and desires to set them free (Ex 3: 7-8; Matt 5). God is father to the entire human race, but especially to those who are victims of injustice. He takes up the gauntlet against the oppressive measures of all the pharaohs in this world (Boff, 1987; Gutierrez, 1998). It must always be remembered that it was Jesus, through his life death and resurrection, who redeemed and liberated human-kind from the consequences of sin and death. Thus he became a servant to his Father's will whom he obeyed even unto death (Phil 2: 6-11). He publically set forth his mission and life's work in the synagogue

in Nazareth, when he revealed himself as the promised Messiah who would heal the wounds of the broken hearted people in the world (Luke 4: 16-21). The Messiah is the only person who is able to bring about the liberation of all classes of people who are in need.

It could be argued that, in many ways that the young people in the schoolboy scholarship scheme are burdened by a regime which shackles their natural tendency to explore their environment without undue interference by adults. There is a real sense that perhaps they need to be empowered, liberated and set free from so they can enjoy the simple joy of playing football because they love and enjoy it, rather than having to comply with the institutional demands of the football club enumerated in Chapters Three, Four and Five above. If this research reveals anything, it is perhaps that coaches, should be more mindful of the importance of play in the lives of young people, and thus allow them more time in their schedule to indulge more freely in care-free activities (Fenoglio, 2009; Huizinga, 2005; Isenberg and Quisenberry, 2002).

Having made a brief sojourn into the realm of liberation theology in order to analyse the schoolboy scholarship; we now inspect the legal aspects of working with young people in sport – child welfare legislation.

Child Welfare Legislation and the Importance of Spirituality in Player Development

In the 21st century, concern for child welfare has never been greater, and was brought to the fore by the *United Nations Children's Charter 1989*. In the United Kingdom, legislation such as the *Children Act 1989*, promoted child welfare further, forcing organisations and institutions to accept more responsibility for their health and general well-being (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007). In sport, this transformation of the legal framework regarding child welfare has been reflected in the wealth of writing by child welfare experts and others who are seeking to empower children, and challenge the existing system which led inexorably to their abuse and exploitation in a variety of ways (Kidman, 2005; Lyle, 2002; Martens, 2004). Thus, research on child welfare in sport seeks to elevate the position and status of the child, rather than viewing them from the perspective of adult

stakeholders. Professional football is clearly an arena in which children's voices should be heard more (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007). Young athletes do not have to accept the harmful effects of intense training and competition as a way of life, as they have legal rights under International law. These rights are enshrined in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990), which has tremendous import for all young people involved in sport. It is to this document we now turn.

Child rights law can make an extremely positive contribution to schemes such as the schoolboy scholarship, because its legal nature brings with it certain responsibilities and obligations for the club (David, 2005). The *Convention* helped raise awareness of violations of their human rights in a number of situations including sport. The football world is not immune to abuse in its various forms, including sexual and economic exploitation (Brackenridge *et al* (2007; Conn, 1998).

The maltreatment of young people in sport is certainly not a new phenomenon. The ancient Greeks had children as young as twelve attending sports schools to train as professional athletes; many were often sexually abused by their trainers (David, 2005). The core article of the Convention (3.1) states that "In all acts concerning children…the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration" (David, 2005: 267). Athlete rights have rarely been given priority, and sports culture does not engender a climate of child empowerment seen in other fields such as education or the arts. This may well be a reason why sport robustly resists external interference and monitoring, often over-reacting when challenged or confronted by those championing human rights. In football, for example, the 'Bosman Rule' (1995) in which the European Court of Justice overturned the football authorities', ruling that prevented a players right to freedom of contract, is evidence of football's failure to recognise the rights of players to transfer from one club to another once their contract had expired (David, 2005).

Wall (2007) has argued that adults should support the rights of children, but also strive for a better understanding of the way human rights can improve and

transform the lives of young people. Thus, traditional concepts of human rights should be re-assessed in light of young people. Wall further suggests that Christian Ethics has frequently not only applied itself to children, but rather re-thought itself in the light of children – this is what he terms "Childism" which he uses to anchor his theology of child welfare and rights (Wall, 2010; 2008; 2007). With regard to the UN Convention, there needs to be more religious ethical reflection on children's rights especially in the United States which, along with Somalia, are not presently signatories to the treaty. In the book of Genesis (1: 26-27), the affirmation of human-kind as made in the image of God (Imago Dei) is a symbol of much of Christian Childist history. The notion of children as made in the Image of God informs the recent attempt to re-evaluate children's rights from a Christian stand-point. Thus, they are made in the image of the very God who took upon himself human flesh and came into the world as a humble servant (John 3: 16). Wall (2007) encourages us to use symbolism of Genesis in such a way that our consideration of childhood transforms how we understand human rights.

In a report for the Children's Society (Layard and Dunn, 2009: 12), describe children as being a "Sacred trust" who should be nurtured and cherished during their formative years. This raises the question of children's spirituality. In this regard, *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990) refers to spiritual right*s* in four of its articles, another four delineating specific religious rights as well. If we acknowledge that all children have a right to spiritual health and well-being, then we are under an obligation to ensure that these rights are met. We should not patronise children by only valuing their spirituality when it is convenient for us to do so. This should inform our understanding of everything we do in relation to their health and well-being (Nye, 2013). For as Wall (2008; 2007) intimates, Childism forces us to revaluate how we think and act when it comes to forging the relationships required to support them. Thinking about children's spirituality can assist us to move beyond mere words and philosophical posturing, towards positive action and transformation in their lives. Spirituality is indispensable for their development, and something we should take seriously, as it is enshrined in national and international law. Schools and other educational institutions in the United Kingdom are charged to cultivate spiritual development in all aspects of their work with children and young people (Nye, 2013).

Brackenridge *et al.* (2007) have challenged all people working with young athletes to pay more attention to their physical, emotional and educational needs. Therefore, the inclusion of the liberative power of spirituality to their three-fold typology of athlete well-being, adds a fourth dimension to research into athlete welfare. It also accepts that, as signatories to the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, staff have a legal and moral duty to ensure that the spirituality of the young scholars is allowed to take root and flourish in whatever form it reveals itself (Nye, 2013). This is one of the features of the holistic model of player development presented in this thesis. Assimilated into this are profound biblical, religious and theological concepts and themes, in order to better comprehend the fundamental needs of young people aspiring to become professional footballers (Bunge, 2008; Parry *et al*, 2007).

In light of the Childist Ethics espoused by Wall, (2010; 2008; 2007), Green, (2009a) has shown that the likelihood of a schoolboy player gaining a professional contract is extremely slim, which serves to highlight the importance that coaches do all they possibly can to ensure that the players in their care do not have their human rights violated in any way. As Wall (2010) points out, childhood is precious and a more humanistic and holistic approach to player development would help to assure that a player's health and overall well-being is protected.

The context of sports competition does not always provide a suitable environment for athletes to exercise their human rights. The culture of participation, self-motivation, ownership and independence evident in spontaneous play and games organised by children themselves has almost been eradicated by adults (Fenoglio, 2009; Palmer, 2007). In order to preserve the rights of young athletes, various safeguards must be designed and implemented in accord with government child welfare legislation; and coaches have a moral duty to protect the human rights of the players in their charge (David, 2005; Wall, 2010). Sport programmes such as the schoolboy scholarship create situations unique to the genre, and young people may experience breaches of their human rights in ways not encountered in other aspects of their lives (Parker, 1996).

The primary aim of the schoolboy scholarship is to recruit players at a young age with the goal of getting them into the Manchester United First Team. A secondary objective is to produce players who are capable of getting professional contracts in football (Whelan, 2008b). However, staff at the club are cognisant of the fact this must not be at the expense of their human rights. Child welfare and sport science research recognises that talented young footballers are subject to pressures that may prevent their talent being fulfilled (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; Busch and Paine, 2009; Johnson, 2009).

The data presented in Chapters Three, Four and Five confirm the validity of this view. The evidence has shown that life as a scholar can create high stress levels, and generate a fear of failing to measure up to preconceived expectations. This is an extremely unhealthy situation. Aligned to this, is the growth of the spiritual aspects of the players consciousness, as part of the holistic model outlined above.

In the final section of this chapter, we will examine, albeit briefly, a discipline closely aligned to child rights, that of pastoral care.

Pastoral Care

The concept of pastoral care is not generally associated with professional sport, as sports-people are usually portrayed as being physically and mentally robust, resilient, disciplined and not subject to the frailty of other human beings (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Hamilton, 2013. However, the research data has revealed that pastoral care has a vital role to play in the lives of the schoolboy scholars given the extraordinary demands placed on them each day. But what precisely do we mean when we use the term pastoral care?

Pattison (2000a) insists that in the historical Christian tradition the term pastoral has meant "healing, sustaining, reconciling and guiding". It has revolved around the activities of the church leader who carried out ministerial tasks such as hearing confessions, counselling, visiting the sick as well as administering the sacraments. It is a diverse activity which responds to a particular need or circumstance of humanity such as prison or hospital chaplaincy. The term is often used in schools to describe the role of a specialist teacher, and does not necessarily imply any

religious or theological connotation. Christians do not have an exclusive use of the term, thus pastoral care and Christian pastoral care can be quite distinguishable (Pattison, 200a)). Whatever the circumstance, pastoral care has value for whoever performs the task. People in all areas of life perform caring acts without any formal knowledge or understanding of the multitude of ways that the word pastoral can be used. In the case of our schoolboy scholars, it is the Head of Education and Welfare who is the designated person directly responsible for their pastoral care (The Premier League, 2011).

Hoffman (1992) has examined the relationship of sport and religion to pastoral care, and the moral dilemma it can pose for coaches and trainers working with athletes. Providing a high standard of pastoral care to young footballers is often difficult, as the demands that clubs place on youth coaches to produce the next outstanding First Team player increases all the time (Green, 2009a). In this way, many young players can become slaves to a system that sees them as machines, and not the sensitive human beings they actually are. Layard and Dunn (2009) discuss at length many of the problems facing young people today – not least the dangers of alcohol, drugs, nicotine, bullying and self-esteem. All these issues are relevant to the interview data presented in this thesis. Although sport is not specifically mentioned, the report states that the increased dominance of many aspects of children's lives by adult influences is hindering their mental and social development and creative instincts.

Brackenridge *et al* (2007) have also addressed pastoral care issues specifically related to young players in football. They argue, persuasively, that development schemes in football such as the schoolboy scholarship create a new set of challenges for the care of young people. They ask if it is possible for staff at the clubs administering these programmes to facilitate a cultural shift towards more pro-active child centred practices. Brackenridge *et al*, (2007) believe that the appointment of education and welfare staff, who have experience outside of football in education or pastoral care was a positive step. This is because it brought qualified teachers into football who have had the experience of dealing with children in a wholly different environment – the classroom. The schoolboy scholarship has benefited from the input of the teaching staff at the partner school.

The industrial action by teachers in the 1980's may have assisted the decline of schools football leading ultimately to the establishment of Football Academies in 1998 (Kerrigan, 2004; Wilkinson, 1997). Brackenridge *et al* (2007) show that with the schoolboy scholarship, we have moved far away from plentiful school football, and children playing in parks, to a bureaucratic system that is highly organised and driven solely by adults. This intrusion continues to blight the sporting experience of many young people. Brackenridge *et al* (2007) are vociferous in challenging the validity of the 10,000 hour rule (Balyi, 2001; Stafford, 2005), and the overtraining and burn-out syndrome it produces. But they go even further, by declaring explicitly, that all this activity is dehumanising, with children increasingly seen only as performers, rather than being valued or respected for simply being themselves. For Brackenridge *et al* (2007: 202-203), there is far too much focus on "human *doing*, rather than human *being*".

In my quest to become a more reflective practical theologian, I have come to the realisation that children's sport (football) produces a collision of values between adult expectations and children's desire to have enjoyment, excitement and fun. Children's needs and well-being can easily be undermined by a failure to encourage them to experience the other important adventures of childhood life: school, family, friends and time for simple play. Williams (2000: 21) has made the observation that: "There is a peculiar horror and pathos in children not – as we say – allowed to be children". If this is true, then the schoolboy scholars should always be advised by the staff to live a balanced life in order to preserve their general health and well-being.

The pastoral care of the schoolboy scholars is becoming increasingly important, given the historical mandate coaches have to develop 'home grown' talent (Whelan, 2005). This places pressure on coaches, and other professionals to find and produce high quality players capable of playing in the First Team. However, it must be recognised that the schoolboy scholars are not commodities, but rather highly emotional and sensitive human beings, who have the right to be cared for physically, socially and psychologically regardless of the demands of coaching and training schedules (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Conn, 1998; HM Government, 2004). Indeed, this is something that the model of player

development encapsulated in this project seeks to address. To re-enforce this point, one is directed to the Gospel of John in the New Testament which provides a wonderful example of pastoral care, when Jesus feeds the *five thousand* (6: 1-14), *changes water into wine* (2: 1-12), encourages Nicodemus to be *"born again"* (3: 1-15), and in his encounter with the *women at the well* (4: 5-29). In all these instances, Jesus demonstrates a compassionate concern for humanity in attending to a particular physical, emotional or spiritual need.

Conclusion

In this section, I have attempted to find my voice as a practical theologian, by expounding on the research data gathered from coaches, players, teachers, parents and house-parents involved in the schoolboy scholarship. The research produced some valuable information which caused me to reflect deeply and intensely on four fundamental areas emanating from the data: practical theology, liberation theology, child welfare legislation and pastoral theology. I hope to have shown how these disciplines interact with regard to the liberation of children and the ultimate enhancement of their well-being at physical, educational, emotional and spiritual levels. Indeed, they are the very foundation upon which the holistic model presented in this thesis rest. Practical theology has helped me to reflect on the many paths I have trodden in my professional life to see how these experiences may have informed my work with young people in football. It has also assisted me in understanding the importance of the theory-practice-theory continuum which is at the very heart of theological reflection. My engagement with liberation theology has allowed me to consider the tension between the institutional demands of managing a programme such as the schoolboy scholarship, and allowing the players to enjoy the carefree pleasure and freedom of childhood.

Child welfare legislation and spirituality were other crucial topics. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* was discussed in order to see to what extent its existence is acknowledged, applied and appreciated in the world of sport. Children have rights, and coaches have a duty to ensure that such rights are respected in all areas of their lives. Finally, the critical influence of pastoral theology in relation to my professional practice was brought to the fore – what are

its various meanings both theological and secular? I have argued that good pastoral care is fundamental to the health and well-being of the schoolboy scholars, and should always be given priority.

The final chapter of this thesis draws together the research findings, looks towards further developments in the scholarship programme, and offers some recommendations to enhance the scheme in the light of my holistic model expounded via this research. This is the reconciliation of the extraordinary demands of the scholars training and education programme, with their physical, emotional, social and spiritual health and well-being.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

This research is set firmly within my professional domain –professional football, but it also generates a range of theological, social, educational and ethical issues which need to be addressed. The Manchester United Schoolboy Scholarship offers a comprehensive football coaching and education programme alongside residential provision since it was established in September 2007. Education takes place at a local High School, and the boys are 'looked after' by local families who are carefully screened by the club. Most of the training takes place in the early afternoon, as there is provision for the players to be released from school early so that they are fresh when training commences. When, in November 2012, I began the field-work for this thesis, there were sixteen boys in the scheme. This is the largest number of boys registered since its inception.

The thesis has sought to provide a critique of an extant pioneering model of talent development which attempts to address the player's football, physical, educational, social, emotional needs, and to which has been added spiritual welfare. It has also explored the relevant theological, pastoral, political and human rights issues relating to this sphere of professional practice. How does a child centred approach to pastoral care within a professional football club contribute to the field of practical theology as a whole? This was one of the major questions this research was seeking to answer. Moreover, I saw the project as a valuable opportunity to undertake a comprehensive audit, review and strategic appraisal of the scheme; and also contribute to my professional development as a soccer coach and practical theologian. The research was also a valuable means of demonstrating that the club valued young people for themselves, rather than viewing them merely as financial assets or commodities (Conn, 1998).

Justification of the Research Method

The research was conducted via a series of guided or semi-structured interviews with key people involved in the programme, in order to generate the data I subsequently used for completing the *thematic analysis*. This was based on identifying themes in qualitative material and placing them in categories for

further analysis as a means of finding out about the reality or experience to which they refer (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A major advantage of the interview method is its adaptability. A skilled interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate felling, motives and body language which is almost impossible when using questionnaires (Bell, 2010; Thompson 1978). One weakness of the interview process was the inherent danger of bias, as the interview process is very subjective. Thus I needed to be careful about the framing of my inquiry in order to avoid leading questions and to seek as much objectivity as was humanly possible. The triangulation of my data: range of interviews, documentary evidence was vital in this regard.

I had considered using a questionnaire, but I did not feel this was personal enough. It would also severely limit the nature of the questions I might ask. Information from this method has to be taken entirely at face value, and there is little possibility for elaboration or further questioning. Focus groups would also pose a specific problem in that some respondents may be inhibited by other people, and may say things they think I want to hear (Bell, 2010; Thompson, 1978).

In light of the above comments, my decision to use the technique of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2009) was justified because the method produced a rich array of important themes which helped illumine many areas of the scholarship scheme: holistic development, pastoral care, mentoring, life skills and so forth. That said, one of the main limitations of this research method is the fact that its flexibility makes it difficult to concentrate on a specific aspect of the data due to the numerous themes generated. It was also impossible to interview a wider spectrum of people connected with the scheme, whose observations, opinions and views may have been contradictory to the ones recounted in this thesis. None-the-less, I do not believe that this fact negates from the value of the research data I managed to assemble and disseminate in this paper. They represent the views of a wide range of participants in the programme – important members of the Academy community (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

Synopsis of the Research Findings

The data presented in this thesis has shown that one of the foremost tasks for the players is to safely navigate the three different spaces they must operate in each day: the academy, school and accommodation with local families. This is far from easy, as each of these spaces have their own rules and conventions which the players are expected to adhere to. Thus they find themselves having to adapt to the dynamic of a different environment and culture three or four times each day which is very challenging. The architecture of the thesis is a combination of a number of spaces, and a discussion about what actually occurs in them.

In order to respond to the various demands of occupying these different, often overlapping spaces, requires the development of a range of personal skills such as resilience, time management, flexibility and patience. An even temper is also very helpful in order to overcome the diverse tensions which constantly arise in these spaces. At this point, it may be appropriate to outline the tensions or fault-lines which have immerged from the data and need to be reconciled in order to achieve the correct balance between the boys' ambition to be professional footballers and have a stable life at the same time. These are as follows:

1. Football versus education.

2. Institutional/organisational demands verses freedom, play and childhood pursuits.

3. Football training verses the players' holistic well-being.

4. Home life verses lodging in family accommodation.

5. Football coaching and training verses social life.

6. Academy staff and parent expectations verses player expectations.

We shall now see what conclusions can be drawn from the research data, and to achieve this, we will review the five primary themes my thematic analysis produced: sacrifice, life skills, mentoring, holistic development and pastoral care.

In Chapter Three we saw how the boys had to make the life changing decision to leave home in order to pursue their dream of becoming a professional footballer. This was very upsetting for everyone concerned, and it often took at least twelve months for many players to adjust to living away from home. This placed a great deal of responsibility on all the staff: coaches, teachers and house-parents to provide a high standard of pastoral care, and support the players through this traumatic period in their lives. During the interviews the word "*sacrifice*" was actually used by two respondents which was quite affecting, causing me to reflect on the biblical concept of sacrifice in relation to the very different kind of sacrifice the boys and their parents faced in the context of the schoolboy scholarship.

Chapter Three also introduced the theme of *life skills,* the second major theme the research data generated. It was apparent from the data that the scholarship scheme was helping the players to develop a set of skills which would serve them well in any area of life. The scholarship was concerned to develop two types of skills: personal and practical. These included communication, time management, resilience, leadership, housekeeping, and attending to their personal health and well-being. These were all transferable to any area of life, and would therefore be invaluable for a future career outside of the game.

Chapter Four introduced the important theme of *mentoring* which was seen as a vital instrument in relation to the long term pastoral care of the players. The evidence showed that the mentoring process was effective, efficient and an essential means of communicating personally with the players. All the adult interview respondents commented on the various ways in which they 'mentored' the boys both formally and informally depending on the particular circumstance. Most importantly, all the players I interviewed found the mentoring process to be extremely valuable in allowing them a space in which to express their views and opinions about the different aspects of the scheme. It was also an ideal

opportunity to receive advice, guidance and encouragement from staff on a range of practical or personal matters.

Chapter Four was also concerned with the theme of *holistic development* that is, the all-round health and well-being of the players: physically, psychologically, and spiritually. The evidence showed, conclusively, that the boys' parents, coaches, teachers and house-parents were fundamental to the success of this critical area of the players' development. The players GCSE exam results had also demonstrated that the scheme was achieving one of its major aims, which was to ensure that the players' progress at football would not be at the expense of their academic education (Appendix 3). An additional feature was the fact that the boys had also proven to be outstanding role models and ambassadors for the club and the school.

Finally, the overarching theme of this thesis is *pastoral care* in all its manifestations. The research data is replete with instances of good practice in this sensitive area of the programme, including the mentoring process, the delicate management of the players' education, training load and, home and social life. However, the evidence also showed that there is still much work to be done to further improve this particular aspect of the programme – not least improving the collaboration between the coaches and teachers at the school. Although they had different roles, the purpose was the same – to produce outstanding athletes and students. Yet, to continue to achieve this aim, requires more clarity regarding the different roles the coaches and school staff have in relation to the players. The coaches are primarily concerned about football development, whilst school staff are more concerned with academic achievement. These parallel lines: football and education, which run side-by-side, will have to merge more seamlessly in future, in order to improve the overall football and educational experience of the players.

One of the most important outcomes of this research has been my own development as reflective practitioner, and how my research has made a contribution to my professional practice, my own institution and the discipline of practical theology. It is to this we now turn.

Professional Development and Contribution to Practical Theology

I began this research because I had reached a critical stage of my professional career when I wanted to take some time to reflect on the work I had been doing with the players at the club. I had joined the Youth Department in 1990, and I saw this project as an opportunity to focus my attention on a new initiative for the Academy – the schoolboy scholarship. I had become deeply interested in the pastoral care of the players, and this thesis was means of conducting some valuable research in this important area of elite youth football (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2010; Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; Green, 2009a)). In short, the process of doing the fieldwork and writing up my results enabled me to challenge myself personally and professionally to explore a new area of knowledge and expertise. I was able to examine an area of professional practice from a number of interdisciplinary perspectives including: practical theology, liberation theology, pastoral care, child rights and health and well-being (Brackenridge *et al*, 2007; Gutierrez, 1988; Palmer, 2007; Wall, 2010; Woodward and Pattison, 2000).

This thesis has presented a model of player development at Manchester United Football Club – the schoolboy scholarship. It began with a basic idea of how staff felt the programme would unfold; the model was then adapted and modified it in response to the feedback received from the players as well as the craft knowledge acquired working with the players' every-day (Whelan, 2008a). One of the reasons for undertaking this research in the first place was the opportunity to give a voice to many of the participants in the programme. It has also given me an important space in which to introduce myself to the academy as a practical theologian working in professional football.

In light of the research findings, I believe this research has made a contribution to knowledge in the following ways: Firstly, it has provided an innovative model for player development which attempts to protect the schoolboy scholars right to have a truly fulfilling childhood physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually *vis-à-vis* the inordinate demands training to become a professional footballer places on them. Although bespoke to Manchester United Football Club, this may perhaps be used as paradigm for other clubs to enhance their own practice in this area. Secondly, I am not aware of any research of this nature having been undertaken at

a professional football club in the United Kingdom. That is, interviewing key personal (including players) at an elite youth football Academy about their professional practice. Thirdly, the research has brought to the fore important issues regarding child welfare and rights in football such as the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1990)*; and the need for professional club's to take this legislation into account when working with teenagers in residential environments (David, 2005). Fourthly, this research has furthered my knowledge and understanding of how themes from practical theology can inform my professional practice in a positive way. It has also uncovered a new area of knowledge and expertise which will be immensely valuable as I continue my personal and professional development. Furthermore, the interview process has helped to increase staff awareness and sensitivity regarding child welfare issues, and the importance of achieving and maintaining a high standard of pastoral care for the scholars'. Fifth, and finally, it has prompted the club to review and re-assess general policy and procedures in the schoolboy scholarship to ensure they are more player centred. This has involved positive and constructive debate about the meaning and understanding of best practice when dealing with the many issues that arise when working with our elite schoolboy scholars (Green, 2009b).

Recommendations for Further Research

This research has afforded me the time to reflect on all the above issues and highlights the importance of reflexivity in order to ascertain 'best practice' in the context of the schoolboy scholarship scheme (Lee, 2009). Therefore, I see this particular research as merely the beginning of the search to develop a practical theology for elite schoolboy footballers which affirms their identity as children of God and made in his image (Gen 2: 26-27). I would, therefore, recommend further research in the following five areas:

1. Research of the schoolboy scholarship at the club by an *external* researcher to explore the mentoring process, holistic development and pastoral care issues. How can this aspect of the scheme be further improved? The autonomy of an external researcher may greatly enhance the quality of the data generated.

2. Due to the limitations of this research, I have been unable to conduct an inquiry into the occurrence, treatment and rehabilitation of the injuries sustained by the schoolboy scholars since 2007. The club have a 'duty of care' to ensure that this aspect of the scheme meets the highest professional standard, hence the need for further research in this area by the club (Johnson, 2009).

3. Further research, perhaps by the Premier League, into residential programmes at other clubs in the country in order to locate, collate and disseminate 'best practice' throughout the youth development industry at professional football clubs.

4. Research on the extent to which clubs educate the players and parents about how demanding the journey to becoming a professional footballer can be. Only a very small percentage of boys actually reach the highest echelon of the game; for the vast majority, there can be a large amount of heartache and pain (Busch and Paine, 2009; Green, 2009a; Parker, 1996; Shindler, 2005).

5. Research into the extent of the legal obligation there should be on clubs to continue to provide career opportunities to the boys they release, who may have been in residence at the club for a number of years. If this is examined from an economic perspective, young aspiring players and their parents are investing years of social and personal capital in the hope that their investment will play dividends in the future. From the point of view of the club, they probably only need one or two players to reach the first team or be transferred elsewhere for a fee, to recoup their total outlay for that year. Thus the investment risk is highly in the club's favour. In what ways should this inequality be addressed? If one relates this scenario to liberation theology, should practitioners who are sympathetic to this approach of praxis (myself included), be seeking to recalibrate the relationship so that a semblance of natural, legal, moral and economic justice prevails (Boff, 1987; Conn, 1998; Gutierrez, 1988).

Finally, and most importantly, this research is a *précis* of the academic and professional knowledge I have acquired working with the schoolboy scholars over the last few years within a discrete, coherent and professionally orientated document.

APPENDIX ONE

SCHOOLBOY SCHOLARS TIMETABLE

Commencing Tuesday 4th September 2007

Monday (from 24 September)	
8.40am – 12.35pm	School then transport to Carrington
1.30pm – 6pm	Training at Carrington Theme: Functional Training
6.15pm	Depart
Tuesday	
8.40am – 2.05pm	School then transport to Carrington
3pm – 5pm	Training at Carrington Theme: Basic skills/movement
5.30pm	Depart
Wednesday	
8.40am – 2.05pm	School then transport to Carrington
3pm – 5pm	Training at Carrington: Theme: Games for understanding
5.30pm	Depart
Thursday	
8.40am – 3pm	School
3pm – 4.15pm	Snack/drink, staff meeting, one-on-one reviews with players, prep and catch up work
4.15pm – 5.15pm	Multi-skills activity at school
5.30pm	Transport to Carrington
6.30pm – 8pm	Training at Carrington with their own age group
8.30pm	Depart
Friday	
8.40am – 2.05pm	School then transport to Carrington
3pm – 5pm	Training at Carrington. Theme: Light technical work/seminar session or guest visitor
5.30pm	The boys will be collected by their parents to return home for the weekend.
Saturday / Sunday	
Boys playing on Saturday will have Sunday off and those playing on Sunday will have Saturday off. Parents are expected to return the boys to their family accommodation providers (FAP) on Sunday evenings to prepare for school the following morning. During school holidays the boys are expected to return home	

SCHOOLBOY SCHOLARS TIMETABLE

Commencing Monday 10th September 2012

Monday	
8.40am – 12.35pm	School
12.35pm	Transport from school to Carrington for lunch
1.30pm – 3.30pm	Coaching Session
3.30pm - 4pm	Tea
4pm – 5pm	Coaching Session
5.30pm	Transport to accommodation
Tuesday	
8.40am – 12.35pm	School
12.35pm	Transport from school to Carrington for lunch
1.30pm – 3.30pm	Coaching Session
3.30pm - 4pm	Tea
4pm – 5pm	Coaching Session
5.30pm	Transport to accommodation
Wednesday	
7.30am	Transport from accommodation to school
8am – 9.45am	Technique Session. All players to do this technique session even if playing a game in the evening.
9.50am	Lessons begin
3pm	Transport from school to Carrington
3.45pm - 5.15pm	Coaching Session
5.30pm	Transport from Carrington to accommodation
7pm	Possible game, players involved in the game must have pre-match meal and complete any homework.
Thursday	
8.40am – 3pm	Normal School day
3.15pm – 4.15pm	Prep
4.15pm – 5.15pm	Multi-skills - Yoga
5.15pm	Transport to Carrington
6.30pm – 8pm	Coaching session
8.30pm	Transport from Carrington to accommodation
Friday	
8.40am – 2.10pm	Normal School day
2.10pm – 4pm	Light coaching session
4pm	Parents pick up from school 6th Form Reception
Saturday / Sunday	

Boys playing on Saturday will have Sunday off and those playing on Sunday will have Saturday off. Parents are expected to return the boys to their family accommodation providers (FAP) on Sunday evenings to prepare for school the following morning.   During **school holidays** the boys are expected to return home for rest and recuperation however, boys may be invited to come in for matches / training sessions or tours/tournament preparation.

APPENDIX TWO

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As you see each group of people were asked different types of questions with one exception. All coaches, parents, teachers and carers interviewed were asked the following question – *"To what extent do you think the Scholarship programme promoted your son's/players social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health?"* This was taken from the UN Convention on The Rights of The Child, Article 17. I included it in the list of questions as it addresses some important issues the researcher is seeking to answer.

Questions for Graduates (Players who have now left the programme)

1. What did you enjoy most about your time in the Schoolboy Scholarship programme?

2. Is there anything you did not enjoy?

3. Do you think that participating in the Scholarship programme affected your normal family life?

4. Did you experience any problems at School because of your status as a Schoolboy Scholar?

5. Were you happy with coaching staff support when you encountered problems or difficulties whilst on the scheme?

6. Do you think participating in the scheme has changed or developed you as a person in any way?

7. In what ways do you think we can improve the programme for future Scholars?

Questions for Parents of the Schoolboy Scholars

1. What do you think were the main challenges of your son being in the Scholarship programme?

2. In what ways, if any, do you think the programme has helped your son grow as a person and develop life skills which will benefit him in the future?

3. Were you happy with the overall standard of education your son received at School?

4. To what extent do you think the Scholarship programme promoted your son's social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health? *

5. What aspects of the programme do you think we can improve for the benefit of future students?

By spirituality, I refer to an ultimate or alleged immaterial reality, an inner path which enables a (young) person to discover the essence of his/her being or the most profound values and meanings by which people live. Spiritual activities may include meditation, prayer, contemplation or other activities intended to develop an individual's inner life.

Sports science can quantify many aspects of human performance but the spiritual dimension of the sports experience cannot be fully understood through measurement. However, the spiritual experience of sport whether described as "flow", "transcendence" or the discovery of meaning and values is central to the motivation to take part in sports and to achieve success.

Questions for the Coaching Staff

1. What do you think are the main advantages of the programme for the players?

2. What do you think are the main challenges for the players?

3. What aspects of the programme do you think we do well?

4. To what extent do you think the Scholarship programme promotes the players social, spiritual and moral well-being and mental health?

5. In what ways do you think we can improve the programme for future Scholars?

Questions for school staff who work with the boys

1. What do you think are the main challenges of the programme for the players?

2. How well do you think the scheme integrates academic work, school life and football, given that elite athletes have an extremely heavy training load?

3. To what extent do you think the Scholarship programme promotes the players social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health?

4. In what ways can the collaboration between school staff and the coaches be improved for the benefit of the players' football and academic education?

Questions for House Parents who look after the boys in Family Accommodation (FAP)

1. How well do the players integrate into life with your family?

2. What are the main challenges for you in "looking after" elite young athletes?

3. How do you deal with any problems relating to pastoral care?

4. How do you communicate with parents/staff to resolve issues that may arise?

5. To what extent do you think the Scholarship programme promotes the players social, spiritual and moral well-being, and physical and mental health?

APPENDIX THREE

GCSE RESULTS

MUFC Cohort	Qual Type	Subject	Grade	Date Attained (June)
4	GCSE	English	D	2012 Nov
5	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2012 Nov
5	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2012 Nov
5	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2012 Nov
5	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2012 Nov
5	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2012 Nov
2	BTEC L3	Diploma in Sport (Perf & Ex)	PP	2012
3	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2012
4	GCSE	PE (single)	C	2012
4	GCSE	Graphic Products	D	2012
4	GCSE	English Lit	E	2012
4	GCSE	Science	E	2012
4	GCSE	Additional Science	E	2012
4	BTEC L2	Diploma in Sport	M	2012
4	GCSE	PE (Double)	BC	2012
4	GCSE	Graphic Products	D	2012
4	GCSE	English	C	2012
4	GCSE	English Lit	D	2012
4	GCSE	Science	C	2012
4	GCSE	Additional Science	C	2012
4	BTEC L2	Diploma in Sport	M	2012
5	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2012
5	GCSE	Science	E	2012
5	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2012
5	OCR Nat	Short Course Award in IT	Pass	2012
5	GCSE	Science	D	2012
5	GCSE	Science	C	2012
5	GCSE	Science	B	2012
5	GCSE	Mathematics	B	2012
5	OCR Nat	Short Course Award in IT	Pass	2012
5	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2012
5	GCSE	Science	F	2012
3	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2011 Nov
4	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2011 Nov
1	BTEC L3	National Certificate Business	DM	2011
1	BTEC L3	National Certificate Business	DM	2011
1	BTEC L3	National Certificate Sport	PP	2011

MUFC Cohort	Qual Type	Subject	Grade	Date Attained (June)
1	BTEC L3	National Certificate Sport	PP	2011
3	GCSE	History	C	2011
3	GCSE	Science	B	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	B	2011
3	GCSE	Mathematics	A	2011
3	GCSE	PE (Double)	BB	2011
3	GCSE	English Lit	B	2011
3	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2011
3	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	GCSE	Science	C	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	C	2011
3	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2011
3	GCSE	PE (Double)	AB	2011
3	GCSE	English Lit	C	2011
3	CiDA L2	Cert in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2011
3	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	GCSE	Science	D	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	D	2011
3	GCSE	Food Technology	C	2011
3	GCSE	PE (single)	C	2011
3	GCSE	English Lit	C	2011
3	CiDA L2	Cert in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2011
3	GCSE	Geography	D	2011
3	GCSE	Science	D	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	E	2011
3	GCSE	English	C	2011
3	GCSE	PE (Double)	BC	2011
3	BTEC L2	Diploma in Sport	M	2011
3	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2011
3	GCSE	Science	B	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	C	2011
3	GCSE	English Lit	C	2011
3	GCSE	PE (Double)	BB	2011
3	CiDA L2	Cert in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2011
3	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	GCSE	PE (Double)	BC	2011
3	GCSE	Science	C	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	D	2011

MUFC Cohort	Qual Type	Subject	Grade	Date Attained (June)
3	CiDA L2	Cert in Digital Applications	Pass	2011
3	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2011
3	GCSE	English	B	2011
3	GCSE	English Lit	B	2011
3	GCSE	Food Technology	B	2011
3	GCSE	Graphic Products	B	2011
3	GCSE	PE (single)	D	2011
3	GCSE	Mathematics	B	2011
3	GCSE	Science	C	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	C	2011
3	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2011
3	GCSE	Statistics	B	2011
3	GCSE	PE (Double)	AB	2011
3	GCSE	English	B	2011
3	GCSE	English Lit	B	2011
3	GCSE	Mathematics	B	2011
3	GCSE	Science	B	2011
3	GCSE	Additional Science	B	2011
3	GCSE	Geography	C	2011
3	BTEC L2	Diploma in Sport	D*	2011
5	NVQ L1	Spanish Language Units	Pass	2011
5	ABC Award	L2 Cert Personal Health & Fitness	Pass	2011
5	GCSE	Statistics	D	2011
5	ABC Award	L2 Cert Personal Health & Fitness	Pass	2011
5	GCSE	Statistics	C	2011
3	GCSE	English	B	2010 Nov
3	GCSE	English	C	2010 Nov
3	GCSE	English	C	2010 Nov
3	GCSE	English	C	2010 Nov
3	GCSE	English	C	2010 Nov
3	OCR Nat	L2 First Award ICT	Pass	2010
3	GCSE	Statistics	A	2010
3	GCSE	RS (short)	B	2010
3	GCSE	Statistics	B	2010
4	GCSE	French	E	2010
4	GCSE	Statistics	C	2010
1	GCSE	English: C	C	2009 Nov
1	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2009
1	GCSE	Science	C	2009
1	GCSE	Additional Science	C	2009

MUFC Cohort	Qual Type	Subject	Grade	Date Attained (June)
1	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2009
1	GCSE	Mathematics	D	2009
1	GCSE	Science	C	2009
1	GCSE	Additional Science	E	2009
1	AiDA L2	Award in Digital Applications	Pass	2009
1	GCSE	English	C	2009
1	GCSE	Mathematics	D	2009
1	GCSE	Science	E	2009
1	GCSE	Additional Science	D	2009
1	GCSE	Graphic Products	E	2009
3	GCSE	Spanish	E	2009
3	GCSE	Spanish	F	2009
3	OCR Nat	L2 First Award ICT	Pass	2009
3	GCSE	Spanish	E	2009
4	OCR Nat	L2 First Award ICT	Pass	2009
1	GCSE	English	C	2008 Nov
1	GCSE	Applied PE (Double)	AB	2008 & 2009
1	GCSE	Applied PE (Double)	AA	2008 & 2009
1	GCSE	Applied PE (Double)	AB	2008 & 2009
1	GCSE	RS (short)	D	2008
1	GCSE	English	C	2008
1	GCSE	RS (short)	E	2008
1	GCSE	RS (short)	F	2008
1	GCSE	PE	C	2009
1	GCSE	Spanish	C	2009
1	GCSE	English Lit	E	2009
1	GCSE	Mathematics	C	2009
1	GCSE	Science	D	2009
1	GCSE	Additional Science	D	2009
1	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Pass	2009
1	GCSE	English Lit	D	2009
1	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2009
1	GCSE	English Lit	D	2009
1	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2009
1	GCSE	English Lit	E	2009
1	BTEC L2	First Diploma Sport	Merit	2009
1	GCSE	ICT (short)	C	2008
1	GCSE	Bus St (short)	C	2008

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