

The National Association of Disabled Supporters

Promoting a Level Playing Field for all Football Fans!



ABOUT THE CHARITY – 2009/10

REGISTERED CHARITY NO: 1079740

PO Box 2909
Reading
RG1 9LD

0845 230 6237
info@nads.org.uk
www.nads.org.uk

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THE 2008 WINNER IS KNOWN!!!

The European Football Supporters Award 2008 will be presented to the National Association of Disabled Supporters on 28th March in Wembley Stadium



Photograph by Phil Colvin from 'All for One' reproduced in shared agreement between NADS and the National Football Museum

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1. Introduction

This document sets out to give an overview of NADS, the work that we do and what is required to ensure an equality of supporter experience in the future. We also aim to underline the clear and unique value that NADS adds to the football family in its support of disabled people.

2. About NADS

The National Association of Disabled Supporters (NADS) was established in 1998 and is the only national registered charity representing all disabled football supporters. Our objective is to promote an inclusive agenda and ensure an equality of supporter experiences for all fans. NADS represents the views, issues and concerns of disabled football supporters to football and governmental authorities and provides independent advice on disability issues as they affect the football community. NADS also heads up the disabled branch of England fans.

NADS is an umbrella organization recognised as the representative and co-ordinating body of all disabled football supporters and their carers/advocates. We estimate that 30,000 disabled fans regularly attend football matches in England and the success of the disabled branch of England fans shows that this passion naturally extends to the national team.

NADS is regulated by the Charity Commission and is also a member of the Fundraising Standards Board. We prepare audited accounts each year and have an Inland Revenue charity reference number.

3. Key achievements to date

NADS conducted an appraisal of disabled facilities at all Premier League, Football League and Conference stadia at the invitation of the Football Foundation. This culminated in the publication of the findings in the "*NADS Guide to Grounds*" in 2002.

The charity played a pivotal role in the publication of "*The Accessible Stadia Guide*" which came into existence because NADS and the Football Licensing Authority identified a need for a minimum standard that all facilities should meet. The Accessible Stadia Guide was imbued into Part M of Building Regulations in 2004.

NADS initiated the pilot and first full implementation of the *Level Playing Field* campaign in 2004/05. The national disability awareness campaign is endorsed by the football authorities.

We published the State of the Game - Premier League (preliminary report) which was presented to the Parliamentary All Party Football Group in October 2007.

NADS worked with the Parliamentary All Party Parliamentary Football Group with an Early Day Motion (Facilities for Disabled Supporters EDM 615) tabled in December 2007. We have encouraged disabled supporters to write to MPs with 123 MPs signing the EDM.



NADS gave evidence on behalf of disabled supporters to the All Party Parliamentary Football Group's Inquiry into Football Governance in 2008.

We were invited by the Football Association to consult on the FA Strategic 5 year plan on behalf of disabled supporters in 2008.

NADS worked in partnership with the FA and leagues in delivering the first Disability Equality Seminar at Wembley with 120 delegates in attendance in 2008.

NADS won the European Football Supporters Award 2008 for its works for disabled fans in football. This award supported by UEFA, the IOC and the European Union among other bodies was originally known as the Brussels International Supporters Award. It recognises the importance of the role of supporters in football stadiums and fully appreciates the originality of an award that encourages ethics in sport.

4. Aims of NADS

- To be a voice for supporters of all disability groups
- To campaign for equality of supporter experience
- To enrich lives of disabled people through football
- To raise disability awareness

5. What make NADS unique

If you mention the word disabled, most people will first think of someone in a wheelchair. However disability is diverse and to ensure that we are truly representative and inclusive, NADS now has a management committee, administrator and volunteers that reflect all major disability groups. So far this year we have co-opted representatives for fans with learning difficulties, mental illness conditions and hearing impairments. They are now working alongside representatives with ambulant disabilities, visual impairments, wheelchair users and carers.

Further all involved are football fans supporting teams across the leagues and national sides. This is important in understanding the issues and challenges that disabled supporters face and gives us a unique understanding of the fans that we represent. We have taken care to encourage volunteers that bring the required skills and experience to the management team. This year, NADS has also recruited new Vice Presidents, Advisors and Patrons from the football, political, commercial, PR and legal sectors. We are proud that these include Sir Trevor Brooking and Lord Richard Faulkner of Worcester. (A complete list is contained in Appendix Two.)

6. Who we represent

It is estimated that more than 30,000 disabled fans regularly attend a professional football match and it is unknown how many more follow the game from home as 'arm chair' fans.

There are currently around 60 Disabled Supporter Associations with varying levels of activity across the leagues. Experience has shown that disabled facilities and services tend to be better where there is a strong and open relationship between a club and their disabled supporters.

We have three tiers of voting membership; Disabled Supporters' Associations and Individuals, Football Clubs, plus non-voting affiliated organisations (such as the Football Supporters Federation and Supporters Trusts) with affiliates totalling more than 140,000. So far this year, 27 Football Clubs have joined NADS and it is our aim that all 92 professional clubs should become members. Our associate and individual membership is growing rapidly and now sits at 4,250 with more than 15,000 associated disabled supporters.

NADS also runs the disabled branch of Englandfans representing both tiers of fans; those who follow the team at Wembley and those that travel away with England. There are currently 499 disabled Englandfans.

That said, NADS represents all disabled supporters, their carers and advocates and offers support to all stakeholders irrespective of membership status.

7. What we do

NADS works closely with the football authorities, national stadia, clubs, politicians, other disability charities and supporter organisations. We also attend forums, disability events and working groups related to disabled supporters.

NADS rebrand

In ensuring that we are identified as representative of all disabled supporters we decided that we should have a fresh new logo that emphasizes the inclusivity of the charity. NADS approached the design team who gained recent notoriety for their alternative Olympic 2012 logo to see if they would donate their services. They kindly came up with a number of suggestions and having consulted with various stakeholders we were delighted to launch the new NADS logo at Wembley, with the help of the FA in October 2007.

Mediation and Advice

We are uniquely placed to act as mediators and advisors often providing an understanding link between disabled supporters and football clubs. NADS has the experience and strength of relationships to discuss issues and challenges that may occur and to offer advice and share best practice between clubs and stadia. Often a disabled supporter prefers to discuss an issue with NADS and will ask that NADS approach the club. This is understandable for various reasons which include; not wanting to fall out with the club, not being seen to appear ungrateful for facilities that do exist and being unable to confidently raise the issues at club level. Some disabled supporters will contact us as well as complaining to the club, venue or football authority.

Club and stadia disabled supporter information resource

NADS also provides a database of information of club and stadia disabled facilities and services and travel for disabled fans and their carers. We currently rely on volunteers and feedback from the disabled supporters themselves along with information provided by clubs. It is important that NADS is able to review and update this database on a regular basis. For a disabled person accurate pre-travel information is vital in planning their journey. We have an adage that all information is important ‘the good and the bad’ so that a disabled person can plan for all eventualities. This can make a profound difference to the matchday experience of a disabled supporter, if they know what to expect. Every aspect from travelling to the ground, reaching the ground, disabled parking and ‘drop off’ points, access within the stadium, refreshment bars, disabled toilets and disabled seating and supporter provision must be included.

New Stadia Consultations

NADS also plays an important consultative role in the design and build of new stadia and stadia improvements with experience showing that this involvement has a real benefit. The new Wembley is an excellent example of a stadium that has incorporated the needs of disabled supporters into its design. NADS was consulted throughout the design, planning and building stages and was able to highlight the required facilities throughout. The result is a modern stadium with world class disabled facilities, standing as a benchmark of best practice to which others must aspire.

As part of the agreement, clubs that receive grants from The Football Stadia Improvement Fund are required to consult with NADS throughout. This is something that NADS would like to see extended to all new stadia and improvements and extensions of existing stadia regardless of grant funding.

Support and advice

Many clubs come to NADS for advice ranging from disabled policies, ticketing, carer provision, disabled travel and facilities and services. We are able to share our experience and knowledge in a positive and constructive way. Services include a NADS pro-forma policy document that many clubs have used and tailored to their own needs. We also offer advice and encourage clubs to produce accessible media and communications, including club publications, web sites and TV. Club contacts mainly include disabled liaison officers, ticket office staff and customer services personnel.

Disabled supporters often turn to NADS for advice on what is acceptable and reasonable and use our services to discuss their concerns and issues. We also receive positive feedback from disabled supporters about clubs and venues and their staff. NADS always passes this praise on to the relevant bodies as we understand the value and importance of positive feedback. Many clubs and their employees provide an excellent service sometimes in more challenging

environments and older facilities. This can make a big difference to the overall experience of a disabled supporter.

Disabled Supporter Associations (DSAs)

Approx. 50 clubs now have DSAs or organisations with NADS helping to set up 5 new DSAs in the last 12 months. They vary considerably in their activities and duties, with some representing their disabled supporters at fans forums and to club representatives and others having a more social aspect to their agenda, organising events and parties for their members. Some have organised rooms and refreshment areas for their fans and some publish newsletters and run web sites.

Where DSAs exist there is almost always a better relationship between the club and their disabled supporters and facilities and services tend to improve considerably.

NADS aims that all clubs should have a DSA and offers support and advice to any fans wishing to start their own association. We also offer ongoing support to DSAs providing an information pack on setting up and running the association. NADS attends DSA meetings around the country and holds regular regional Disabled Fans Forums which has proved very useful for both sides. It also strengthens relationships between disabled supporters and NADS.

Communications

NADS has a 0845 helpline and info@nads.org.uk which is open to all supporters and clubs irrespective of membership. We currently take around 80 to 100 external calls and 120 emails per month. The calls and emails vary in content including; general disability questions, requests for information about venues and facilities, information about englandfans, issues and complaints related to ticketing and carer provision, disabled policies and facilities and services. We answer each request and aim to do so within 7 days often getting back to people within 2 working days. The demand for these services is growing rapidly and we will need to increase our resources to continue to provide this service.

We also have a dedicated fully accessible website. This is currently provided to NADS as an in-kind donation and allows fans to leave comments. Going forward we need to make this even more user friendly, intuitive and interactive. It is important that all users can share their experiences and information with us as easily and accurately as possible. This will take considerable resource to achieve, however it will provide a vital service especially to disabled supporters, their carers and advocates and football clubs.

The website provides an information resource with a library of policy documents and advice, disability news and links to other disability organisations and information resources. It also holds a club database with details of their disabled facilities and services and dedicated contacts. The website currently receives in the region of 108,000 unique visits and 1.32 million hits per annum with traffic increasing rapidly.

NADS also produces a monthly e-newsletter with the latest NADS, disability and football news and information. This is circulated to all members and affiliates along with all contacts within the football family, government and media - in particular disabled supporters and those working directly with disabled supporters and disabled communities.

We have suspended the NADS Gazzetta magazine in the short term, however as soon as funding allows (perhaps via a commercial sponsor) we plan to introduce a NADS annual with a mix of disability and football information and a season review including a summary of the Level Playing Field.

Level Playing Field

NADS also runs the Level Playing Field (LPF) campaign, which is now in its fourth full year with the first pilot in 2004/05. This campaign aims to raise disability awareness and promote improved facilities and services for disabled supporters. The LPF will be discussed more fully later in this document.

UEFA

We also have regular dialogue with UEFA and have raised various issues that affect disabled supporters who travel into Europe with club and country. NADS is in discussions to deliver several key projects in partnership with UEFA including a European network of disabled supporters, a European disability seminar (similar to the Disability Equality Seminar recently held at Wembley in partnership with the FA and leagues) and a best practice guide for disabled supporters for all 53 UEFA members.

NADS advises UEFA on disabled supporter issues, including for the UEFA and Champions League cup finals and most recently met with the Poland 2012 team to begin arrangements for the UEFA 2012 European Tournament. NADS Vice President, James Froggatt sits on CEN (European Committee for Standardization) and has recently produced a European Technical Report – CEN/TC 315 (similar to the Accessible Stadia Guide) for European Stadia. This report will be published and available in spring 2009.

NADS has recently been awarded the 2008 European Football Supporters Award for its achievements for disabled supporters and the Level Playing Field Campaign. This award is supported by UEFA, IOC and EU among other prestigious organisations.

8. Lobbying for change

NADS has a responsibility to campaign on behalf of disabled supporters, raising disability awareness and striving for an equality of supporter experience. It is also important that we encourage more disabled people of all ages and disability groups to get involved in football. Going to a game of football can quite simply be life changing for a disabled person.

We have many testimonies of how following football has had such a positive effect on the life of a disabled person, offering a sense of belonging, pride, passion and belief. Two of these case studies are included in Appendix four. Strides have been made over recent years to improve facilities for disabled fans that most of us take for granted – as simple as equal access to tickets, a decent view, under cover and seated with your own fans, accessible toilets, bars, club shops, museums and accessible media (club TV and literature) and web sites. In most cases however there is still a clear deficit between the matchday and overall supporter experiences of disabled and able-bodied fans.

State of the Game

NADS recently published a preliminary review of the Premier League with an overview of disabled seating provisions and audio descriptive commentary for the visually impaired and a more detailed focus of disabled facilities and services on a cross section of 4 Premier League clubs. This document has served to provide a snap shot of the deficits that remain within football in terms of supporter equality.

A way forward now needs to be defined involving all agencies and NADS has recently proposed a 5 year plan to achieve this. What is important is that this project is seen as a positive long term solution for clubs and that financial and multi-agency support will be provided where needed. It is also vital that best practice is shared and celebrated where it already exists. The project will need to be tailored to each individual club and the outcome, as well as ensuring 'DDA compliance', should be to reach an equality of supporter experience in line with the NADS Blueprint and within the spirit of the Accessible Stadia Guide including:

- a decent view, including shelter from the weather and ball
- facilities for the sensory impaired
- a choice of seating and able to sit with your own fans
- a parity of seating numbers
- accessible media and communications
- parity of experiences for arm chair fans

Following a meeting between the Rt Hon Gerry Sutcliffe and the NADS President and Chair in October 2008, the Sports Minister asked the NADS Chair to provide him with further and more detailed evidence on the State of the Game. This document has not yet been published and has been made available to the football chiefs and DCMS only at this time. A series of meetings are now underway to look at progress.

All Party Parliamentary Football Group - APPFG

NADS meets regularly with the APPFG to discuss the issues and challenges for disabled supporters. An Early Day Motion 'Facilities for Disabled Supporters (EDM - 615)' was tabled on 18th December 2007 and was signed by 123 MPs. As a direct result of this support, a number of debates and questions have been raised in both the Houses of Lords and Commons concerning disabled supporter facilities.

NADS gave evidence on behalf of disabled supporters to the APPFG Inquiry into Football Governance in June 2008 and their final report is expected in early 2009.

Clubs and stadia owners have an evolving duty under the DDA to offer an equal service to their disabled fans and the Accessible Stadia Guide has been identified as the best practice guidance to which clubs should aspire. NADS is also discussing the need for a central fund for disabled supporter improvements at football clubs.

Media and Public Relations

NADS is working with the media in a positive way. Our aim through the media (local and national) is to promote disability awareness (encouraging more disabled people to follow football) and to promote the good works and best practice as we work together for equality within football. We have a dedicated press officer who is building positive media relationships with the guidance of our PR and Media Advisors. NADS took part in the Victoria Derbyshire Radio 5 Live programme and often appears on local radio shows. We also feature regularly in football, disability and charity magazines and website articles.

Level Playing Field (LPF) campaign

This disability awareness campaign is now in its fourth full year with 80 clubs taking some part last year. The campaign runs over a 2 week period each season. It provides a platform for clubs to showcase their disability works in the community, disabled football teams and to promote their disabled supporters facilities and services.

For the 2007/08 season we gave the LPF a theme for the first time with the aim of raising awareness of sensory impairments. In partnership with SoccerSight, we launched a competition to find future audio descriptive commentators for each club. SoccerSight is an RNIB initiative which aims to have full audio described commentary for visually impaired supporters at every football club.

Feedback from clubs after last year's campaign included requests for more notice and support. In particular they wanted banners and other support materials, more information, menus of ideas and template text/articles for their publications, along with logos in pdf format. We have been able to provide most of these, although campaign banners and materials currently remain beyond our budget. However we are clear that there is a strong value in keeping the LPF club driven. It is important that clubs see the campaign as something positive that they can control and take full ownership of in their communities.

We evaluated last year's LPF at the end of the campaign and in particular the value and effect of giving it a specific theme. This proved to be a good decision with clubs keen to find out more about SoccerSight and how to better support their sensory impaired supporters. Several clubs told us that they wouldn't use the sensory impaired theme as they already had audio described commentary. This proved important in encouraging them to advertise this service. Many supporters were unaware of the service provided and we expect there to be an increase in usage of headsets at these clubs going forward. We were also able to highlight other sensory impairments and the needs of those fans.

Some clubs used the halftime period to showcase their visually impaired teams and how they play football, which was enjoyed by all supporters. It was particularly powerful this season with the Blind Squad heading out to represent Great Britain in the Beijing Paralympics. NADS sees this as an important part of the Level Playing Field as it breaks down barriers, encourages discussion and improves awareness overall. We also have a responsibility to promote disability football and encourage disabled supporters to get involved.

The theme for 2008/09 aims to raise awareness of the challenges for people with learning disabilities and difficulties. NADS believes that they are often overlooked and hopes that by choosing this focus there will be an improvement in both awareness and the services to these fans. NADS is working in partnership with Mencap to produce a guidance booklet for sports clubs and stadia with the launch planned to coincide with the LFP.

9. The Future

NADS looks to the future with excitement and a firm belief that together with the football family we will reach an equality of supporter experience. This must include all areas of being a football fan both on a match-day and as an 'arm chair' supporter following your team.

Every professional club should provide an equality of supporter experience and working together with NADS, disabled supporters, football authorities and politicians - we believe this is achievable. We will need to share areas of best practice and expertise, finding tailored solutions for each club and their stadium. It will take commitment and patience from all involved and the support of all fans.

It is important that we encourage more disabled people to follow the beautiful game and ensure clubs see disabled fans as valued customers with a market worth.

It is evident that there is a need for research into the numbers of disabled people with an interest in football and what is needed to encourage them to attend matches. There should also be a focus on several key areas including;

- the ageing population and the demand this will place on disabled facilities
- how many disabled children follow the game
- the ethnic diversity of disabled supporters

NADS also recognises the importance of encouraging more disabled children to follow football as supporters and players and we hope to establish a youth branch of NADS as soon as resources allow.

NADS also plans to work with likeminded organisations in Europe to establish a European disabled supporters' network sharing best practice and information.

For more information go to www.nads.org.uk, call our helpline on 0845 230 6237 or email us at info@nads.org.uk

Appendix I NADS Management Team

NADS is run by a Board of Trustees as elected by the membership. Within the Board, there is a Management Trustee committee of four (usually the Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer and Secretary).

Since 1 February 2007, NADS has had the benefit of a paid part-time Administrator (25 hours per week) who assists the charity in raising disability awareness and other day to day administration functions. This post is funded with a 5 year sliding scale grant provided by the Football Foundation.

The Trustees act as volunteers in carrying out all NADS works with the support of the Administrator.

Management Trustees

The role of the Management Executive Committee is to manage NADS' affairs in accordance with charity law and for the wider benefit of disabled football supporters and their carers/advocates.

Members of the Management Executive Committee hold position for a term of 3 years and can stand for re-election at the conclusion of their term.

Trustees

Trustees are accountable to the membership and must ensure that the organisation complies with its governing document, charity law, company law and any other legislation or regulations. The trustees are required to give strategic direction, setting overall policy, defining goals, setting and agreeing targets. They have a duty to safeguard the good name and values of the organisation and ensure the financial stability of the charity. Trustees provide a local point of contact for members, representing their views, issues and concerns to the Management Committee. The trustees must ensure that the NADS Management Committee is provided with timely feedback from all meetings, and that all relevant NADS initiatives and mandates are presented for consideration and debate by NADS Management Committee and membership.

Trustees hold position for a term of 1 year and can stand for re-election at the conclusion of their term.

Co-opted members

These are individuals who for one reason or another are not currently trustees but who bring in specific skills or awareness of disabilities not represented on the committee.

Administrator

The NADS Administrator reports directly to the Chair. The duties include updating policy and governance documents, maintaining the charity's contact database, records and minutes of all trustee meetings, manning the NADS helpline and info@nads.org.uk, disability awareness, coordinating the Level Playing Field campaign, fundraising and other general administrative duties.

Patrons/Vice Presidents/Advisors

NADS has also recruited outside specialists to advise the charity in areas where the Management Executive Committee and Trustees feel there is a need. These areas include football, politics, commercial, media and PR and legal arenas.

| Management Board | Name: | Appointed (re-apptd): | Re-Election date: |
|------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Executive Committee: | | | |
| Chair | Ms Joyce Cook | 2007 AGM | 2010 AGM |
| Vice Chair | Mr Jamie Polk | 2007 AGM | 2010 AGM |
| Treasurer | Mrs Janet Ireland | 2008 AGM | 2011 AGM |
| Secretary | Ms Eleanor Ellison | 2007 AGM | 2010 AGM |
| Trustees: | | | |
| | Ms Ross Hovey | 2008 AGM | 2009 AGM |
| | Mr John Garbett | 2008 AGM | 2009 AGM |
| | Ms Jeanette Dodd | 2007 AGM | 2008 AGM |
| | Mr Paul Jamieson | 2008 AGM | 2009 AGM |
| | Ms Hazel Dudley | 2008 AGM | 2009 AGM |
| | Mr Keith Graham | 2008 AGM | 2009 AGM |
| | Ms Victoria Archbold | 2008 AGM | 2009 AGM |
| Co-opted members: | | | |
| Learning Difficulties | Mr Ian Sterland | 2007 | |
| Mental Illness Conditions | Mr Neil Midgley | 2007 | |
| Transport | Ms Jeanette Dodd | 2008 | |
| Administrator: | | | |
| Self-employed contract | Mr Gary Deards | 01.02.07 | Renewed 31.01.08 |

Continued ... /

| | Name: | Appointed: |
|---|--|-------------------|
| Honorary Officers & Advisors: | | |
| President | David Bernstein (Chairman Wembley National Stadium) | 2008 |
| Vice Presidents | | |
| Politics, football, charities | Lord Richard Faulkner of Worcester | 2007 |
| Football, commercial | Mr Andrew Shaw (Board member of the Football Conference) | 2007 |
| Football, media and PR, commercial | Mr Chris Bird (Chairman of Bird Consultancy) | 2007 |
| Football, legal | Mr Chris Farnell (Senior partner of IPS Law) | 2007 |
| Disability, charities | Mr Phil Friend, OBE | 2008 |
| Stadia Access and Design and Europe | Mr Jim Froggatt | 2008 |
| Ambassadors | | |
| Football, ex-player | Danny Wallace (Southampton, Manchester United and Birmingham City) | 2008 |
| Disability Football, England amputee team | Steve Johnson | 2009 (tbc) |
| Patron Level Playing Field campaign: | | |
| Football | Sir Trevor Brooking | 2006 |

Appendix II NADS Blueprint

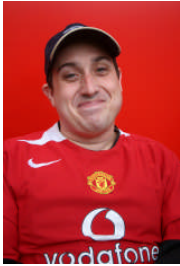
1. All supporters must be able to enjoy equality of experiences when attending a football match or event and following their team from home.
2. All club staff and officials should have received disability equality training and each club should appoint a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer (DLO).
3. Clubs should encourage their disabled supporters to set up their own Disabled Supporters Associations (DSAs) and ensure an ongoing and open dialogue with them on facilities and services, policies and all future plans.
4. All clubs should have a disability policy that details the clubs' guiding principles, practices and procedures for all aspects of the clubs' operations. This information should be publically available.
5. All clubs should have fully accessible information services that include web sites, TV channels, and information that is available in alternative formats.
6. All clubs should meet all aspects of Accessible Stadia Guide, including the recommendations for seating numbers for disabled people in each category.
7. A senior member of the management board at each club should have overall responsibility for all disability issues.

Minimum Standards

1. Every disabled supporter to have the opportunity to sit with/alongside their own supporters
2. All disabled people to be treated with respect by all members of the club staff and match day stewards
3. Wheelchair users;
 - a. unobstructed view of the pitch at all times,
 - b. to have shelter from the weather,
 - c. all seating areas to be positioned in safe areas
4. Visually Impaired;
 - a. choice to sit anywhere in the ground,
 - b. all clubs to provide a dedicated audio descriptive commentary with suitable equipment,
 - c. clubs to make provisions for Guide Dogs,
 - d. information available in alternative formats
5. Hearing Impaired;
 - a. choice to sit anywhere in the ground,
 - b. text phone in ticket office and induction loop in ground,
 - c. provide written information and notices on scoreboards and in hand-outs
6. Ambulant;
 - a. a recognised definition of an ambulant disability,
 - b. accessible seating, with good sightlines and extra leg room.

Appendix III Case studies

Gareth Clarke



Gareth is a 28-year-old man who loves his football and has followed Manchester United ever since he can remember, although he never dreamed that it would be possible to actually get to the games. He has Spina Bifida and uses a wheelchair to get around.

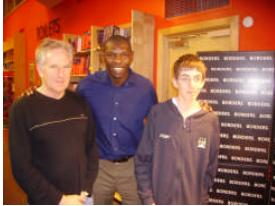
In 1998, he contacted Manchester United Disabled Supporters Association and armed with the knowledge that he'd be able to get into the stadium in his wheelchair he began to go to matches. Gareth says that going to watch United play has turned his life around. The matchdays give him something to look forward to and he enjoys getting together with other fans for a chat.

Gareth soon found that being a member of MUDSA gave him opportunities beyond those of going to football matches and he began going to the social events that MUDSA hold. He found that he was making friends and really starting to enjoy life, his confidence was growing and things were on the up. He started venturing out on his own, something he'd never felt happy to do and a few years ago he finally moved into a place of his own. He's now living with his partner Rachel; they are happily engaged and plan to marry in 2007, as soon as they can save enough money for the big day.

At a matchday last season, Gareth was given a flyer from Learn Direct who were running courses to help disabled people to gain skills towards finding employment. He was quick to grab this opportunity and within one week he was enrolled to do courses in IT, Maths and English. He has now completed these courses and has the qualifications to show this. Gareth hopes that he'll soon find a job, which will make saving for that wedding a little easier and in the meantime feels pleased to have improved his skills.

Gareth says that his life has never been better and he reckons that he is the happiest man alive. He feels that disabled supporters facilities are really important and that club's should do more to enable more disabled fans the sorts of chances that he's had from following United. Lots of disabled people would like to go to football and things need to change, so that everyone feels safe, included and part of the beautiful game.

Thomas Johnson



Thomas was born 17 years ago and has Cerebral Palsy. He was 8 weeks premature and spent 5 weeks in the *Special Care Baby Unit* at Withington Hospital. His destiny was sealed when the first song that was played on the radio in the unit was “Mr Blue” and the fact that his Dad is a life-long City fan!

He has always loved football but has never felt confident or competent enough to compete. He loves nothing more than a kick around with his mates at home.

He was able to go to a couple of games at Maine Road with his Dad, but was really impressed with the new stadium at Eastlands and never dreamt that he would become a season ticket holder. Thanks to the National Association of Disabled Supporters who kick-started the process and helped guide us along the way he now has his very own season ticket and attends all City’s home games with his Dad. Thomas feels that this has given him fun in his life and something to look forward to. He loves the ritual of matchdays – the walk to the ground, the buying of his programme and sitting in his seat with a brilliant view of the match. It has also given him confidence and something to talk about and discuss with his mates and fellow students at college.

Being involved with football as part of Manchester City’s Disabled Supporters group has given Thomas a focus in his life and offers social opportunities and, through City’s Disabled Community Training scheme, the chance to train and play with people of similar abilities.

Joseph Wrattan



Joe Wratten is part of the furniture at West Ham United. A season ticket holder, he first saw a game of football when he was two and even at this early age caught the bug. Now 17 he is known at Upton Park not just for his loyalty and passionate support but also his strength of character. He suffers from Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma, a type of cancer of the blood that affects the white blood cells, which are usually involved in protecting against infection. Joe has used a wheelchair since birth, struggles with constant breathing problems and is tube fed. As his Mum June says “he has a very sick body but a very active brain.” His passion in life is football, and everything revolves around his beloved Hammers. Like most football mad young men his bedroom is covered with posters, flags and pictures. But it goes beyond that. Every conversation is about football, even with his teachers, as June explains. “His tutor at school is fortunately a West Ham fan. Every lesson Joe went to he somehow converted to football. If it was drama it was “*so we were at a match and this guy came up to me...*” or maths it was “*how many players in the team*” and so on.” Over the years Joe has been to 18 grounds and although facilities for disabled fans have improved, it can still be a bit hit and miss. Because of his condition Joe needs two carers and occasionally (and worryingly) even this adjustment has caused problems, even at the biggest of Premiership clubs.

However Joe's recent experience up at Middlesborough shows what can be done and what a positive impact a good experience at the football can have. After a long drive and a recent bad experience at another club, June was understandably apprehensive as to how the day would go. "We got to the ground and after parking really close the disability steward met us at the gate. We followed him through and he was brilliant. He took us down the player's tunnel, we were with him on the side of the pitch during the warm up and he took some pictures for us with the players. Because the away section wasn't full he asked us whether we'd prefer to sit behind the goal or elevated. We chose elevated and the view was great. He then sent someone to ask us if we wanted tea or coffee and he even gave me an extra jacket because someone thought I looked cold! Middlesborough's hospitality was beyond anything Joe and I had ever experienced before. Joe was absolutely over the moon. He told me there was nothing that could have made the day better."

The facilities at The Riverside are good but could still be improved. However this is a shining example of how a club and its staff's attitude towards disabled fans can make such a difference. Both West Ham and Middlesborough have a dedicated Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) and it is no coincidence that Joe's experiences at both clubs have been so rewarding. NADS urges all clubs to listen to their supporters, listen to positive experiences like Joe's and understand their unique impact on the lives of their disabled fans. Improvements still need to be made.