



**E**dinburgh's Hutchison Vale is an excellent example of what a youth team can do for the senior game in Scotland. Between 1978 and 1983 seven of their players went senior. John Collins (Hibs, Monaco, Celtic, Fulham, Scotland), Eddie May (Dundee United, Youth Coach at Falkirk), Joe and Gordon McLeod (Dundee United), Grant Fairley and Gordon Leitch (East Fife) and John Laidlaw (Rangers and then back to Hutchison Vale as a coach in the 1990s).

Today Hutchison Vale is still going strong and producing tomorrow's players for senior clubs, along with the likes of Perth City AC, Woodside BC, Tynecastle BC, Syngenta Juveniles and many more. Clubs like these are proving that they can provide leisure pursuits with good discipline and desirable social practice, as well as an opportunity for young talent to develop to a level of proficiency where senior youth academies will recognise them as ready, willing and capable of being tomorrow's stars.

For me, this is what youth football is all about:

- 1) Providing a facility for young people to extract the physical benefits of an athletic pursuit.
- 2) Creating an understanding of the game that helps to produce tomorrow's fans and, very often, people who will find a career in one of the many support careers essential to the sport.
- 3) Recognising those who have the correct attitude and talent and bringing them to an acceptable level of awareness, understanding and technical ability to be capable of making best use of whatever opportunities the sport presents to them.

Unfortunately, the names of those youth clubs which have produced successful players are often pushed under the

carpet and forgotten about as the senior clubs take the plaudits from them. Hutchison Vale, for example, has produced more senior players than most professional youth academies with virtually no budget. Over in Glasgow, meanwhile, Drumchapel AFC can be credited with providing the game with the likes of Sir Alex Ferguson, David Moyes, Walter Smith, Archie Gemmill, John Wark and many other stars who at one point formed the greater percentage of the Scotland senior national team!

Youth football depends on voluntary support and this invariably comes from well-intentioned parents who never fail to amaze me with their willingness. More often than not these dedicated individuals end up not working on football matters but fund raising through a myriad of social gatherings, sponsored walks, raffles and cake sales.

The professional game needs this grassroots enthusiasm to create the first spark and it needs people like Craig Brown, SFA Chief Gordon Smith and Falkirk Manager, John Hughes, who are very pro-community. However, when a senior club takes a player from the youth ranks we need something in return. Sure, money would help but, if it isn't available, how about a coaching session, some of last year's kit or maybe the manager or a star player making a personal appearance? Is it really that much to ask?

There is no doubt that Scottish youth clubs have to improve and move on with the times and an increasing number are doing this now following the new introduced SFA Quality Mark Scheme, but there is still no level of support from the senior clubs and without this youth clubs will lose identity and credit.

Over the coming months I hope to bring you a variety of articles and features from Scotland highlighting these and other youth football issues, including the unfortunate decline of Scottish schools football.

## Vale of Hope

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### MEET RORY NICOLL

Rory has spent the last 10 years as a coach working with pro youth, women's, girls, youth and senior football. Brought in as Senior Chief Scout at Clyde FC Rory was responsible for the open auditions that led to out-of-contract pros and undiscovered youths being recruited and competing in the Scottish First Division. Mark Hateley, Brian Laudrup, and even SFA Chief Executive Gordon Smith, are typical of the pro players and senior figures Rory has had the privilege of working with and discussing the bridge between community youth and pro youth football. Rory is now dedicated to the Scottish youth scene and particularly the differences between fun and serious application for pro status.