

Sporting Champion Sue Smith inspires young people through Sportivate

sporting champions

Sue Smith has 90 caps for England and has scored 16 international goals. She won Nationwide International Footballer of the Year in 1999 and 2001 and was voted a member of the FIFA All Star team in 1999. While still competing for Lincoln Ladies FC, Sue is also inspiring the next generation of sporting talent. Sue became a **Sporting Champion** because she wanted to give something back to community sport and to encourage young people to live a fitter and healthier lifestyle.



Sporting Champions is a Sport England initiative bringing world-class athletes face to face with young people to inspire and motivate them. The scheme is aligned to the Sportivate programme and offers County Sport Partnerships visits by champions that aim to encourage more young people to take part in sport, motivate them to continue and successfully transition into clubs.

Tackling the teens

Sue visited a football coaching programme held at **Ellowes Hall Sports College** in Stourbridge. The Sportivate sessions were based around game play but also aimed to raise awareness of blind football. The young people who took part all had an opportunity to participate using blindfolds and a blind football regulation ball. Discussions led by the young people raised an interesting debate about equality issues in the men's and women's game. Sportivate coach Tom Postings said "**The male versus female football debate inspired by Sue was a real highlight of the day**".

It was Sue's friendly attitude and professional approach that in particular appeared to win over a fifteen year old girl at the session. The girl was known to her teachers as being very good at sport but troublesome in the classroom and outside of school, but she surprised them by really engaging with Sue and being keen to find out how to progress in the sport. Reflecting on the session Sue said "**I really think I made an impact on this girl, she wanted to know about club football and how she can get into it, the teachers were impressed by this and hope I have made an impact on her outlook**".

Both the coaches who led the session were impressed by the effect Sue had on the rest of the project especially on the girls who reacted really positively to her as positive role model; "**there was definitely a difference with Sue's visits, they tried harder, concentrated more on the activities, ran harder and showed off, they are basically more motivated**".

A different ball game

Not one to pass up a challenge, Sue took on a coaching session at the **Seven Stars Netball Club**. Although initially daunted by the idea of coaching netball, Sue's coaching style and creativity saw her deliver a successful session. **The girls knew I was footballer and I was out of my comfort zone but this didn't matter - it was a fabulous session.**



Taking inspiration from her time at Doncaster Rovers Sue delivered a warm up session which enabled the young players to see a relationship between the skills required for netball and football. The different approach taken by Sue during the session inspired the coaches to consider fresh ideas **“Sue's warm- up was excellent. I can take what I have seen and apply this to my sport; I have definitely learnt something new”.**

As well as taking part in the coaching session the young people were keen to hear about Sue's experiences competing at the highest level and how she had become an international player. Not only did she have a positive impact on the young people who took part but also the coaches **“It was fantastic to have Sue attend our sessions. She delivered two coaching sessions for the group which gave both the participants and the coaches a new experience. The participants were very excited after the session when they saw Sue on TV knowing they had been coached by her”.**

Feeding back to young footballers

Sue held a question and answer session at a Sportivate programme in Sefton and spent time with a group of young participants and their young volunteer coaches. They were keen to find out more about how she got into football and whether she had an opinion on the differences between the men's and women's game. Sue also brought along her England Caps and medals for the young people to have a look at. It was clear from the reaction of the young people that they were impressed by her experiences and playing career. **“I really liked the fact that I had an impact on the volunteer coaches, they asked about the value of other roles such as coaching and refereeing and I think they valued my answers.”**

As well as the question and answer session, Sue observed a session where the young footballers could display their skills. Sue offered advice and guidance on ways in which the young footballers could improve their performance, all of the advice was gratefully received and gave the players a renewed confidence in their abilities. **“The visit from Sue was very inspiring for the young people especially the girls who saw her as a role model”**



All of the Sportivate project hosts agreed - Sue's visit both inspired and motivated the young people to continue to take part in sport through identified exit routes.



Key findings

- Sportivate organisers believe that they were more likely to retain a young person on a programme if a Sporting Champion attended
- Sporting Champions have an impact upon exit routes. Host organisations believed that the champions raise awareness of exit these routes and the young people are more like to ask questions about these.
- Sporting Champions not only get young people more motivated but they also get them to debate social issues such as equality in sport
- Female role models such as Sue Smith have a great impact by inspiring and motivating young females to explore further opportunities to play sport
- Winners medal and trophies brought to sessions by the Sporting Champions encourages questioning and inspires young people
- Sporting Champions not only inspire young people, but also the wider coaching workforce such as coaches, teachers, and volunteers
- The programme enables professional athletes to seem more accessible to young people
- Not only do Sporting Champions such as Sue raise awareness of their own sport but also sport in general.

Points for consideration

1. **Host organisations should work more closely with Creating Excellence to set objectives for the visit and to clarify the role they want the Sporting Champion to play during the session**
2. **The host organisation should think carefully about what messages are likely to be effective for the particular teenagers and/or young adults who are going to attend the session**
3. **More tracking should be done to measure the longer term impact of Sporting Champion visits.**