

# Sporting champion Alistair Patrick-Heselton

*Empowering disadvantaged youth through football*



**Sporting Champions** is a Sport England initiative that brings world-class athletes face to face with young people to inspire and motivate them to participate in sport. Coventry, Solihull and Warwickshire (CSW) Sport invited Alistair Patrick-Heselton along to their Sportivate Innovation Fund project with the aim of engaging the area's disadvantaged young people in a 6 week programme of activities.

## The Sportivate Innovation Project

The Sportivate Innovation fund is used to give young people a six week taster of an activity they may not have had access to within their community before. CSW sport used the innovation fund to provide sessions, free of charge, to 11-19 year olds in the Cars estate area and included sports such as squash, dance and football.

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## The Sporting Champion

***“Every athlete has a duty to give back and this is my opportunity”***

Alistair Patrick-Heselton is a Paralympian who after a car crash in 2006 competed in CP football (for Cerebral Palsy or brain injury sufferers). He represented Team GB in 2012 and scored in the play-off game against Argentina. Previous to his injury he was a semi-professional footballer playing for teams such as QPR and the Dutch 1st Division side Helmond Sport. Alistair uses his experiences to inspire young footballers and states **“it doesn't matter where you came from, you have to work hard to achieve your dream, just like I did”**. Alistair attended the football sessions at the Cars Estate twice from 7-8pm on 21st August & 4th September 2014 - the 4th and 6th session out of 6.

## The area & the young people

The Cars Estate has high levels of economically inactive residents and minimal pupil attainment, with contributing factors such as unsuitable further training, a lack of financial support, and inadequate opportunities. These factors have had a knock on effect as levels of personal and social development in the area are at an all time low. Participation in sport has been proven to have the **“power to cross barriers and create communities”**. The innovation funding was required for young people in the area to provide opportunities to access different sports and to develop both socially and personally within the community, by using sport as a tool to improve team work, dedication, and leadership skills.



*(Solihull Observatory, 2013; SportsandSocialChange.org, 2015)*

## Key Demographics

All 14 of the participants were male.

The majority were aged 11-13, with the oldest being 17.

92.9% of those that attended were from a white British background.

## What impact did Alistair have on the young people?



"Alistair makes me want to play more football, to become better at football so I can join a team. I also want to teach football like him today, because he said I would be good at it".



"After being coached by Alistair its made me want to play more football because what he has been through inspired me."

" I really liked the football game today and Alistair taught me how to keep the ball .. with my feet. I want to be as good as him so I'm going to practice"



**Theo Thompson**, the project coordinator for the Big Local, promoted the 6 week project through social media and felt Alistair had a positive effect on the young people and the area: "I think it really benefitted the area, as in, giving people a positive role model, especially the young kids. I mean, they loved it, they really looked up to Alistair. They listened to everything that he was saying, specifically because of the background he's come from. And also, they're meeting someone that's done it first hand. He really built up a positive relationship with the kids in a short amount of time, and they're very eager to see him again if possible".



## Alistair was challenged nevertheless...

Alistair came across many challenges at the sessions. The goals had been broken, the coaches hadn't turned up due to a breach of safety the session before, and the young people didn't want to listen. Alistair didn't let this ruin the session. He used the goal bags as goal markers, took control of the drills and the participants took notice—it was as if it was all planned!



"I already know a lot of the young people from the area but for Alistair to come from an outsiders perspective and build a relationship so quickly it is really good. He didn't just teach them football, he also offered mentorship as a lot of the disciplines he was teaching they could then take on to life in general. I reckon he built up a relationship quickly so that they all listened and paid attention" (Theo Thompson)

## ... So what can other Sporting Champions Learn?

### Be relatable >>>

Alistair did the drills himself, played in the game at the end (even though injured) and talked about his experiences so the young people related to him. This was a great way of building up a relationship as they only wanted to play a game so to motivate them Alistair did the drills himself and used past experiences to prove that practice is necessary.

### Be prepared >>>

Alistair chose to take the lead because the coaches hadn't turned up. He had to use his experience to make up drills on the spot. Alistair attempted to fix the goals but with no luck, used his initiative so he didn't waste time. For the second session Alistair had it planned out just in case to ensure the session ran smoothly.

### Be patient >>>

He was patient with the session and set ground rules throughout which, with a few hiccups, the participants finally adhered to. The relationship with each of the children was paramount in the success of the session as they respected him and his knowledge and wanted to learn.



## What did the Sporting Champion think?

*"When the kids are out there playing football you can see them all cheering and playing and having a laugh. One of the kids said he'll see me at the next event which is great for me to hear that they want to come back. This programme highlights to me where I came from and everything I achieved along the way to get me to be where I am now, and even though I am doing some great things and have played in some great stadiums I can never forget where the dream started and what helped me to get there in the end—so I'm happy to pass those experiences on".*



## Wider impact

By the Sporting Champion attending the Sportivate Innovation fund project it inspired and encouraged the young people to attend door step opportunities. This will in turn allow for individual progression routes to be enhanced. Opportunities for the young people to engage with other agencies through these opportunities for mentorship and support changes the behaviour and the outlook that the community now have. Alistair will be attending a third exit route session in the New Year.



## Critical success factors

- ⇒ Sporting Champions provide young people in areas with little opportunity and high unemployment the motivation to succeed.
- ⇒ The programme allows professional athletes to seem more accessible to young people.
- ⇒ Sporting Champions inspire young people to not only participate in more physical activity but to pursue other areas of sport such as coaching.
- ⇒ The programme allows Sporting Champions to mentor young people within the sessions in order to build confidence in themselves.
- ⇒ Sporting Champions need to be flexible and prepared when it comes to visiting sessions, especially in areas of low socioeconomic status.

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