# THE MEN WHO MADE IT HAPPEN

# The Last Forty Years

The fact that Northumberland Schools’ Football Association has been such a vibrant and successful organisation over the past 100 years comes down to the enthusiasm and dedication of the hundreds of voluntary workers, prepared to look and work beyond their own teaching situation to provide and promote schools football. They have given time, effort and enthusiasm in organising inter-school matches as coaches, referees and mentors to their students. Many of these teachers have also been prepared to offer the opportunity of football for the more talented players at district and County levels, whether as team managers or administrators, orchestrating the programme of fixtures around the County.

The Executive Committee of NSFA has met on the first Monday of the month during the season to oversee the programme. A feature of the group has been the friendship and camaraderie between the representatives from the various areas of the County drawn together to share their common interest in schools football. There have been several Executive Committee members who have made outstanding contributions to the operation of NSFA over the years, they have guided the organisation in many differing ways and left their mark on our history.

In the early 70’s the amalgamation of the Northumberland Schools’ FA with the Northumberland Senior Schools FA was completed despite some mutual mistrust and the combination of Jack Love as Hon. Secretary and Malcolm Berry as the first Chairman of the united body, guided the organisation smoothly forward. Malcolm went on to become the outstanding figure of schools football locally and nationally. He became NSFA Secretary, taking over from Jack Love in 1977 and served for two years before replacing Bob Wilks as ESFA representative for the area on the national body. His missionary zeal for schools football was infectious, driving up standards and coaxing others to give more to the cause. He was ESFA Chairman in season 1989-90. He left his teaching post in Newcastle in 1991 to take up the top job as Chief Executive of the English Schools’ Football Association in Stafford. A post he filled with distinction until his retirement in 2000. Schools football was his passion and his contribution has been enormous and influential. He was hugely respected by officials of the FA and the Premier League, though often a thorn in their side, as he fiercely campaigned for ESFA in the wider football family.

Alan Heads’s interest in the senior age group of schools football developed from his involvement with first eleven teams at Monkseaton High School. This extended to Northumberland County and later in 1987 to ESFA Council and a position as national selector for the ESFA Under 18 team. His enthusiasm for the senior age group and his ability as a shrewd football administrator was rewarded with the Chairmanship of ESFA in 1997-98. Monkseaton High School became a strength at senior level, winning several ESFA national competitions and seven players were selected to represent their country at Under 18 level. The team management of Malcolm Taylor and Danny Olsen, supported by Alan made an impressive contribution to national competitions. During Alan’s period as a national selector twenty Northumberland players represented England

During season 1985-86 there was severe unrest in teaching and union guidance was to disrupt voluntary school activities run by teachers as a lever for better pay and conditions. Volunteer County team managers decided to join the boycott and in order that the players of the year did not miss out on representing their County, Alan Heads ran the U18 squad and the then County Hon. Secretary Dennis Fulton operated the U15 squad. This was done with the blessing of the “proper” team managers. Dennis was County Secretary for twelve years before joining ESFA Council in 1991, rising to ESFA Chairman in season 2002-03. He has made a very significant contribution to the administration schools football in the area over the past forty years.

Stuart Todd put this Association on a sound financial footing thanks to his entrepreneurial ability and foresight. He organised special NSFA trains taking local kids to watch schoolboy international matches at Wembley Stadium during the 1980’s. Taking hundreds of pupils from many different schools was a daunting task, but Stuart’s had phenomenal organisational ability. He carried out his “wheeler dealer” task with aplomb and banked the profits for future generations of Northumberland Schools’ players. Stuart, a Killingworth head teacher, left the area to tackle problem schools in other areas of the country as a “trouble shooter”. No doubt he was a success there too, but it would be interesting to hear what they made of his rich Northumbrian accent.

Every successful organisation needs its “grafters”, people who keep things going over a long period. People who do the jobs that others wouldn’t, the behind the scenes tasks that our Association couldn’t function without. Chris Newman has been “a brick” for NSFA. He has been our Hon. Treasurer for nearly twenty years, guarding our funds conscientiously. He has refereed hundreds of games at all levels, organised and trained our referees and collected much needed income from reluctant spectators at County matches whilst the majority of us enjoyed watching the event. David Staplyton ran his very successful 1st. XI side at St.Cuthbert’s HS for many years, but also found time to do his weekly schools’ football column in the Chronicle to keep us and the public informed of our activities and report on individual successes. Neil Pont found time despite being a teaching head to run district teams in South and West with full fixture programmes all over the North of England, offering a terrific experience for his squads of players. He has grasped the nettle of sports administration, being a very well organised County Secretary, an ESFA Council Member and a leading member of the Tynedale Sports Association, whilst also managing to be a talented artist and choral singer. Peter Tracey’s boundless enthusiasm for schools’ football is infectious and he has fulfilled several roles within our organisation including referee, referees organiser, County Secretary and Under 18 League Secretary. He also has made a brave attempt to get female PE staff sufficiently committed to operate County girls football competitions. He built on the vision of Nigel Shields, who championed the cause of girls’ football in Northumberland and nagged us to get it operational. As a result of their efforts the standard of girls’ football has blossomed in Northumberland and June Lomax, as Girls County Team Manager, is further building on their groundwork.

County team managers have fielded teams of our best young players and several have experienced success in regional and national competitions. Many County players have gone on to have successful careers in the professional game and more is written on this topic elsewhere in this publication. Bobby Charlton, Alan Shearer, Trevor Steven, Michael Carrick, Andy Sinton, Lee Clark, Steve Bruce, Brian Laws etc. Being a County team manager offered the opportunity for young teachers to work with the cream of local talent, but none worked for so long in post as Malcolm Denham. Malcolm took over as County Team Manager from his Marden High School Head of Department and mentor David Harrison. Year after year Malcolm built County squads from scratch and made them into into competitive teams, supported by regular assistants Owen Aiston and Bob Hamil. His Northumberland teams were twice ESFA national inter-county champions and more frequently Northern Counties Champions. According to his County Team Manager reports at Executive Committee meetings, Malcolm often made managerial decisions that were decisive to the outcome of matches. He has made a very valuable contribution to this Association with his work as a County Team Manager and as a competition secretary for the Blake and Diball Cups.

Andy Littleton has been a stalwart of this organisation, making a massive contribution locally and nationally as a referee, North Tyneside Secretary, competition secretary and Association Hon. Minuting Secretary. His humour in the minutes never fails to raise a smile from even the most mundane meetings. His work as organiser of the ESFA North Tyneside Under 11 Festival for the past 26 years has been much appreciated by the young players who have participated and the Team Managers who regularly return with their teams. He has been greatly supported in this work by “The Wallsend Supremo” John Farnie.

A figure that few will recognise, but whose name is well known in the County is that of Wilf Renton of Berwick Schools’ FA. He has been Berwick Hon. Secretary since Noah was a lad. Working with a small school population, Berwick district teams struggle to be competitive with other larger Associations but Wilf and his small band of helpers continue to offer the youngsters of Berwick and District a stage for their talents. Being retired from his post as Head of a First School does not appear to have diminished his enthusiasm for schools’ football.

Schools’ football could not continue without referees and several have made huge numbers of appearances up and down the County in all conditions. That band of long serving schoolteacher referees includes Andy Littleton, John Farnie, Chris Newman and John Watson. John went on to referee in the then First division of the Football League including games where he officiated his own ex-Benfield students Steve Bruce and Lee Clark. The contribution of referees Bob Thompson , Dave Martin and Andy Mitchell as referees in schools’ football in Northumberland is simply outstanding. Between them they must have covered thousands of matches. Who will emerge to replace them?

Highlighting the contribution of these individuals from the last forty years only scratches at the surface. Many people have helped in many ways during the first one hundred years of NSFA, providing golden memories. Education is changing, but in the future hopefully teachers will still find the time and energy to provide schools’ football for youngsters.

## Dennis Fulton

County secretary 1979-91.

ESFA Council Member,

Chairman ESFA