

News Charity

# Club gives kids



Two men who grew up on a rough London estate know the vital role played by mentors, **Murad Ahmed reports**

On a freezing December night, Tobi Makinde, 24, is overseeing six young boys as they play football. The kids, aged about 12, have formed two teams of three as part of a training match. The objective is to keep passing the ball to their team-mates, while their opponents try to retrieve the ball.

Mr Makinde lets the game go on for a couple of minutes. It's a bit of a mess. The 12-year-olds bash into each other with intensity. There is little room for manoeuvre or passing.

Mr Makinde, looking the part of a professional football coach in his smart tracksuit, exudes authority. He stops the game. "You need to find space," he says to his young charges, motioning his arms out to his sides. The players have focused their passing in a small corner of the pitch, meaning the game has become congested. He instructs the players to spread out.

The children respond instantly. The boys with the ball form a large triangle and start using the whole width of the pitch. Suddenly, tackling is not so easy. The passing gets better, and a recognisable game of football breaks out.

Mr Makinde understands these children. He was once one of them. When he was a youngster, he too played at the club where he is now a coach: Greenhouse Bethwin FC.

The club is run by the Greenhouse charity, and made up of 27 teams of various age



Matthew Shobande and Tobi Makinde

are both coaches at Greenhouse Bethwin FC, a club that prides itself on good behaviour as well as its results

groups and abilities, with boys and girls from around the South London area.

Ten years ago, there was just one team, Bethwin FC, before it merged with the Greenhouse in 2005. The club organises training sessions and matches for children. It also pays for coaches such as Mr Makinde to attend professional courses so that they also improve.

On the night I go to visit, there are dozens of children of all ages, all playing on a floodlit ground on a high-quality astro-turf pitch. Several Greenhouse coaches are watching over them. Mr Makinde

# some space, and not just on the pitch

grew up on the nearby North Peckham estate, a notorious block in South London where there are dangerous gangs and high levels of deprivation.

He was brought up by his mother, Adeola, and said that although he knew "the bad guys on the estate", he found an outlet for his energies by joining the football club, something he was encouraged to do by other players.

"I started playing for Bethwin when I was in Year 7," he said. "I was a right back. I remember my first game still. I had a shocker. I played with this guy called Julian. He was a very good player. I looked

**'I was a bit of a wild child. I wanted to come back and let the youngsters know there is a way out too'**

up to him. He kept me in check, telling me what to do. After a season, I got the hang of it. I was one of the best players."

Mr Makinde says he was relatively lucky as a child. He had role models including his mother, friends and team-mates such as Julian. He is now studying at London South Bank University, and hopes to become a professional football coach. He has come back to Greenhouse Bethwin because he feels a connection with these kids and wants to be a role model for them.

Another coach on the ground that night is Matthew Shobande, 24, who also grew up on the North Peckham estate. He

admits to having been a bit of a wild child. "Growing up on the North Peckham estate was rough," he said. "One of my favourites [pranks] was playing 'knock down ginger'. I would throw stones at people's windows and run. Sometimes I'd break people's windows."

Again, under the direction of his strong-willed mother, Olusheye ("Typical West African parent, always banging on at me," he says), he found focus through football at Greenhouse Bethwin. Mr Shobande is now studying at the University of East London, and hopes to make a career as a sports therapist and masseur.

Both Mr Makinde and Mr Shobande say the coaches are not there to improve the children just as players, but also as people. There is a lot of excitement at Greenhouse Bethwin, which already has plenty of league titles and cups in its trophy cabinet, about a different kind of record for the club. So far, not a single player in any of its teams has picked up a yellow or red card this season.

"I had a kid join my team recently, just cause his dad liked the ethos we have here," Mr Makinde said. "The ethos is attitude, attendance and punctuality. The parent said 'You know what? That's how I want my kids to be brought up' and brought him down here. It's more than football results, it's about learning and making sure these kids are growing."

Mr Shobande adds: "I wanted to come back, and be a voice for the kids. I want to help them improve, let them know there is a way out too. There are other things apart from football. I am someone they could talk to, a mentor. I didn't have that."

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