



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

St Mary's University

FA Women's High-Performance Football Centre Newsletter

JANUARY 2024

DATES FOR THE DIARY

Thursday 4th January | 8-9am

Female Coaches' Call

Monday 8th January | 5.45-7.30pm

GK Centre @ Alec Reed Academy

Wednesday 10th January | 8-9am

ETC Lead Regional Call

Monday 15th January | 5.45-7.30pm

GK Centre @ Alec Reed Academy

Thursday 18th January | 10am-4pm

ETC Regional Cluster Meeting

Monday 22nd January | 5.45-7.30pm

GK Centre @ Alec Reed Academy

Monday 29th January | 5.45-7.30pm

GK Centre @ Alec Reed Academy



Welcome to the January 2024 edition of the FA Women's High- Performance Centre newsletter

As the focus shift to a new year and supporting a new volume of coaches through personal coaching development and qualifications, December saw staff from the St Mary's and University of Essex FA Women's High-Performance Football Centres lead on the first female-game UEFA C in the London region at Gunnersbury Park. Along with courses running parallel in both Nottingham and Manchester, participants on the cohort were selected specifically from working within the female talent pathway and FA Women's National League, which further highlights the investment in the growth of the game across at levels at the current time.



@StMarysWHPFC



@SportStMarys



One participant on the current female-game UEFA C of particular interest to some readers is Orla McComb. Orla is a current student of St Mary's University and is also coaching at Brentford's new ETC programme.

Having recently completed Module One of the course and with further modules in February and April, Orla talks about finding 'the first few days very insightful and working with other coaches of a similar background to us very beneficial.'

Orla further describes her experience so far as 'thought-provoking' and goes on to say that she is 'really looking forward to building relationships with not only my peers but mentors. I feel this course is going to be very beneficial and I'm looking forward to the next two months.'



As a FA WHPFC, we are really glad you're on the programme, Orla, and we look forward to continuing to support your development.

For any other student coach looking for additional support for the remainder of the current season, please contact **craig.taylor@stmarys.ac.uk** to discuss further.



JANUARY 2024



Another key area of focus which is often less spoken about is on transitioning from living in the UK into working and coaching overseas. This month, Gareth Crewe, on sabbatical from his role as Assistant Head of Sport Development at St Mary's University, shares his insight into finding work and coaching opportunities overseas for any students considering this option after finishing their studies.

Like many coaches who will be reading this, I have spent time coaching abroad, spending 18 fantastic months working in north-eastern USA in 2014/15 when I finished my undergraduate studies. Like many coaches reading this, the itch to go abroad again has also never really gone away!

Three months ago, I had an opportunity to begin a sabbatical and spend some time in Hong Kong, alongside starting a postgraduate degree at St Mary's. It hasn't always been plain sailing but I've tried to summarise a couple of key bits of advice based on my experiences in the hope that it may encourage coaches to broaden their horizons and consider the opportunities that may be available to them, either to further their educational background, or consider pursuing international opportunities.

1. Research and prepare

Even compared to when I last lived abroad, there is so much more information available online nowadays. Despite this, and even though football is a popular sport in Hong Kong, it's been harder than I thought to find information that is both relevant and current, particularly post-COVID.

From a coaching perspective, when I told contacts at home I would be in Hong Kong, they provided some useful pointers and ideas. League Wikipedia pages, club websites and club social media pages have all been helpful in describing the different clubs and private coaching companies out there, and they have allowed me to build a better picture of what the landscape is here and who the key people are to contact.

From a studying perspective, I had always thought about postgraduate study, and the sabbatical seemed like a great opportunity to explore this as I would have more time to focus on studying. I was, however, aware that not being able to come onto campus, as well as an 8hr time difference from the UK would inevitably bring challenges and potentially end these thoughts before they'd properly begun.

Craig was able to point me in the direction of colleagues at St Mary's, and the MRes in Sport, Health and Applied Sciences seemed like a great option. All lectures are broadcast live online and recorded, and with it being mainly research-based rather than taught, it makes the course very flexible. I spoke with the staff before applying for the course to make sure I wouldn't miss out on anything by doing this from abroad, and they were confident that it wouldn't be an issue. Whilst it can make things a little more difficult (for example, I can't simply go up to my lecturers to ask questions in person at the end of a lecture), there has always been a way to adapt.

2. Be persistent

As coaches, we tend to be adaptable to circumstances changing all the time, but you realise quickly when you go abroad that your home networks, links, and understanding of "how things work" aren't always relevant.

Whilst I was able to do a lot of research online, gathering email addresses, social media accounts and LinkedIn contacts, Many hours have been spent sending out messages or emails that haven't led anywhere.

Before I arrived, I probably contacted 20-30 clubs, coaches and other staff, with an initial response rate of less than 5%. That certainly increased when I arrived and could call and meet people in person. It sometimes took a few messages, emails or calls to make breakthroughs, and whilst it was a little disheartening at times, finding that balance between giving people time to respond and being persistent with my follow-ups was important.

I had a few responses from individuals at Hong Kong Football Club, one of the three clubs I'd identified with a men's and women's first team in the top division, and managed to meet with their Technical Director, Chancy Cooke, who has been incredibly welcoming and kind during my time here. Over the last few weeks I've started volunteering with their women's first team and hope to begin getting more involved with them with my MRes lectures coming to an end at Christmas.

On top of the professional opportunities, the personal ones are priceless. Having only been to Asia once before (and that was earlier this year!), travelling and living on a new continent brings constant new experiences, people and opportunities that can't be found at home. It's only been a short space of time but I've already been able to get out to Macau and Thailand, with trips to South Korea and The Philippines upcoming. It definitely wouldn't be as easy to do that from the UK! For anyone who wants to know more, feel free to get in touch on my student email at 2312934@live.stmarys.ac.uk or via LinkedIn.

Contribution by Gareth Crewe
Assistant Head of Sport Development
– On Sabbatical