

**Football Labour Migration: An Analysis Of Trends and Experiences of
Northern Irish Players**

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**A Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfilment Of The Requirements Of Liverpool
John Moores University For The Degree Of
Master Of Philosophy**

June 2017

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Director of Studies Dr Martin Littlewood for his guidance and support throughout the production of this major project in fulfilment of Master of Philosophy (MPhil). Without your continued support and encouragement this major project would not have been a possibility and for this I am extremely grateful.

I would also like to thank my wife Claire for her support and motivation throughout the completion of the thesis. Without your love, support and assistance this thesis would never have been a possibility. I would like to also thank Lynda Gallogly for her assistance; this was greatly appreciated and I am extremely grateful for all your help.

In memory of Samuel Douglas Beacom

Abstract

Rationale – Academic literature regarding football (and labour migration) to date has examined factors that influence migration trends and explanations as to why players potentially migrate (see Magee & Sugden, 2002; Elliott & Weedon, 2011). Whilst others (see Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Elliott & Weedon, 2011) have examined player acquisition trends of clubs at specific time periods. However, there is a lack of research examining player acquisition trends over a longitudinal period thus prompting the current research and the perceived implications for indigenous home-grown players (and specifically Northern Ireland players).

Study 1: Method / Results – A categorical database was created using both Excel (utilised for descriptive statistics) and the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS V.22; utilised for coding and refining of data) which enabled the efficient management and analysis of data (5072 players). Data was obtained for all players from Rothmans Football Yearbooks (1990-2004) and Sky Sports Football Yearbooks (2004-2010). Results indicated an intra-confederational player migration to the EPL between 1990 and 2010 with each regional affiliation of FIFA represented; UEFA was most dominant (88%) whilst CAF (4.3%) was most dominant outside UEFA. Indigenous home-grown players represented 66% of player acquisitions and 65.6% of accumulative player appearances from 1990 to 2010 despite witnessing a decrease between 1990/91 (88.4%) and 2009/10 (45.1%). Foreign player appearances increased between 1990/91 (11.1%) and 2009/10 (47.3%) surpassing indigenous home-grown players between 2007 and 2010. Non-indigenous home-grown player acquisitions and appearances increased between 1990 and 2010.

Study 2: Method / Results - Six players engaged within the interview process. Accessing players beyond those included within the study was difficult however this was to be expected given the reluctance of players to engage in research which explores issues connected to personal and professional challenges associated with their playing careers (Nesti, 2010; Roderick, 2013). Although interviews followed a proposed deductive structure, an interactional approach was adopted to enable a conducive interview environment to be established that encouraged an informal and conversational approach (Patton, 2002). The deductive development of the proposed

interview schedule was based upon previous research regarding player migration (see de Vasconcellos Ribeiro & Dimeo, 2009; Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012) and career transition literature (see Pummell, Harwood & Lavellee, 2008). Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and were audio recorded. All interviews were transcribed verbatim with key themes identified. Commensurate with previous research, Northern Ireland players interviewed regarding their migratory experiences moved to England for the 'love of the game' and improved performance opportunities (Bourke, 2002). Players who migrated to England found the transition to be smooth. Any associated processes of dislocation or bio-graphical disruption as alluded to by Elliott (2013) were unsupported within the current research. It was clearly evident from interviews conducted that challenges players experienced did not appear to be (a) the initial migratory process (b) time at their respective clubs, but the opportunity to progress within these establishments to first teams within English professional football and subsequent release; albeit some players were unfazed by this process.

Key Words: *English Premier League, indigenous home-grown, non-indigenous home-grown, foreign, acquisitions, appearances, intra-confederational, UEFA, FIFA, player migration*

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List of Abbreviations

FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Association
UEFA	Union of European Football Association
CONCACAF	Confederation of North, Central American & Caribbean Association Football
CONMEBOL	Confederation of South American Football
AFC	Asian Football Confederation
CAF	Confederation of African Football
OFC	Oceania Football Confederation
EPL	English Premier League
FA	The Football Association
FAPL	The FA Premier League
PFA	The Professional Footballers Association
EPPP	Elite Player Performance Plan
IFA	Irish Football Association
FAI	Football Association of Ireland
EU	European Union
ECJ	European Court of Justice
IPU	International Players Union
BT	British Telecommunications

Glossary of Terms

British Isles and Republic of Ireland – A set of countries including Scotland, Wales, England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. These countries may also be referred to as home-nations.

Celtic Periphery – A set of countries which include Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Football Academy – Football academies are pre-requisites for all clubs entering the FA Premier League. These systems were formed as a consequence of the F.A.'s 'Charter of Quality'.

Indigenous Home–Grown - Any player that has been trained by a club or by another club in the same association for at least three years between the ages of 15 – 21 years.

Non–Indigenous Home–Grown - A player that has been trained at a club between the ages of 15 – 21 years, for at least three years, in a different nation to their original nationality and therefore has an inherent claim of recognition to that of the club’s nationality.

Foreign - Any player born outside of their club’s country without any inherent claim of that nationality.

European Players – Players who reside within countries of the European Union.

Non-European Players – Players who reside within countries outside the European Union.

Player Acquisition – The movement of a player from one professional club to another.

Sport (Football) Labour Migration – The movement of sporting talent to and within countries for the purposes of their work i.e. football.

CHAPTER 1

1.0 Introduction

The migration of Irish players (including Northern Ireland players) to England to pursue a career in professional football remains to be one of the most established migration processes within global sport, and indeed football (see McGovern, 2000; Bourke, 2002; Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2012). Irish players (to date) continue to migrate to England to test their abilities and further their own progression and development, whilst seeking inflated salaries as opposed to plying their trade in the Irish leagues that are considered to be economically and culturally less attractive than the EPL (Elliott, 2014). In addition to the 'love of the game' (Bourke, 2002), a range of processes contour player decisions to migrate, and are typically associated with cultural and pre-existing migratory ties, in addition to the ability to speak the language (Weedon, 2011). Given such processes, it could be suggested that players should not experience 'biographical disruption' (i.e. an interruption to the players narrative coherence) or 'symbolic displacement' (i.e. cultural / inability to speak the language) during the migratory process (Brown & Portrac, 2009). However, although limited, previous research examining Irish players has noted that player's experience dislocation, including homesickness, loneliness, self-doubt and decreased self-esteem (Bourke, 2003). Such challenges highlight the complexity of 'acculturation', the migratory process, and the perceived psychosocial implications for players in search of success within soccer (Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012).

Despite Irish players being highly visible within the globalisation process in professional football, research examining Irish player migration motives, experiences, and the effect upon players has largely been ignored within sports, and more specifically the literature within football labour migration (McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014; Curran, 2015). Current academic research has explored the development of football within Britain (see Russell, 1997), the de-skilling of Irish soccer and its implications for the 'garrison game' (see Bourke, 2011), and club recruitment processes (see Bourke, 2002). Despite such work, there still appears a requirement to better understand the migration related challenges of those young Irish players that are de-selected from the professional game in England and subsequently return 'home'. This is an area that is relatively underdeveloped, irrespective of the time period of previous work (i.e., within-career, deselection or retirement; see McGovern,

2000; Elliott, 2014; Curran, 2015). In that sense, it is felt that the current research is required that focus on life-span perspectives when examining athletic (player) transitions and associated experiences.

1.1 Literature Review

The migration of elite football talent is amongst some of the most pervasive within global sport (Elliott & Weedon, 2011) and is considered to be one of the defining features of globalisation within association football. Professional football clubs are increasingly acquiring players from a diversifying range of countries (see McGovern, 2002; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011) and it has been argued that this process may impact on the development and progression of indigenous home-grown players within England (Maguire & Peaton, 2000a; Dobson & Goddard, 2001; FIFA, 2008; The FA, 2008 & Niemann & Brand, 2008). In addition, it has also been noted that this may adversely affect the future viability and success of the England national squad (see Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Bullough & Mills, 2014).

The wider context of the challenges within English professional football is connected to the concept of globalisation, due to increased player mobility (Stead & Maguire, 2000). Although professional football is a labour intensive industry, it is, by contrast, one where employment is offered by immobile forms of capital to increasingly mobile forms of labour. Within the football industry, it is, the employers who are fixed to specific geographical locations (i.e. the English Premier league), whilst the employees (i.e. players) move between cities, countries and continents, a process that has accelerated in recent years (McGovern, 2002). In that sense, globalisation appears to be tightening its grip on football, altering the landscape (Poli & Ravenel, 2008) through liberalised player markets that have been facilitated as a result of the Bosman ruling (Maguire & Stead, 1998; Alvarez, Forrest, Sanz & Tena, 2010). The Bosman ruling is a 1995 European Court of Justice (ECJ) decision which has lubricated player mobility within the European Union (EU), whilst also prohibiting domestic football leagues in the EU and Union of European Football Association member states (UEFA) from imposing quotas on foreign players. As a result, this led to the abolishment of the '3 & 2' rule in February 1996 (Goodbody, 1996; Frick, 2009; Gardiner & Welch, 2011; Binder & Findlay, 2012) which had enabled teams to only

play a maximum of three foreign players plus a maximum of two additional foreign players who were classified as assimilated players in that they had been registered in the relevant National Association for at least five years. However, this rule was declared to be an unlawful constraint on freedom of movement and was contrary to European discrimination law thus leading to its abolishment.

Football has been revolutionised post-Bosman, due to the global mobility of players (Ben - Porat, 2002) and the increasingly diversified stratification processes employed by clubs (Binder & Findlay, 2012), thus leading to the development of cosmopolitan workforces (Millward, 2007). This is highlighted by Maguire and Pearton (2000a), who observed six years prior to the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup in France (1998), that there were 11 foreign players in the EPL. However, the following season there were nearly 200 players from 56 countries. Further to this, on the 26th December 1999, Chelsea FC, became the first EPL team to field an entirely foreign starting line-up, a trend which was replicated by Arsenal FC in February 2005 (Northcroft, 2007).

These trends epitomise the globalisation of the EPL confirming it as a main purchaser of elite soccer talent (see Maguire & Pearton, 2000a) and resonate Gordon Taylor's comments, who is the Chief Executive of the Professional Footballers Association (PFA), that there are "now more non-nationals than nationals within the Premier League" (*Sunday Times*, 6 June 1999, p. 5; Cited in Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). This increased cosmopolitan face of English football has also lead to frequent references being made, such as, the "foreign legions" (*Daily Mail*, 3 January 1997, p. 77; Cited in Stead & Maguire, 2000) and the "foreign invasions" (*The Guardian – Sport*, 14 February, 1997, p. 4; Cited in Stead & Maguire, 2000). However, despite the perceived globalisation of the EPL, it is worth noting that the migration of players to the EPL is not a new phenomenon (Magee, 2002; Gardiner & Welch, 2011). After all, the EPL is the oldest and largest employer of professional footballers in the world (McGovern, 2000) with the movement of Scottish (see Moorhouse, 1994) and Irish (see McGovern, 2000; Bourke, 2002) players amongst some of the steadiest migration trends in the world with 917 Irish-born (500 Republic of Ireland and 417 Northern Ireland) players making one or more appearance within the EPL or Football League between 1945 and 2010.

It is evident that migratory routes into the EPL, which is considered to be the 'top league in the world' (Anagnostopoulos & Senaux, 2011), have diversified and accelerated exponentially post-Bosman (Weedon, 2011). Players have become even more nomadic, seeking to ply their trade at the 'core' of the football world, the EPL, which is the most prolific, lucrative and viewed league in the world (Dennis, 2002; Binder & Finlay, 2012; Elliott, 2014) with cumulative club revenues around £3.26 billion (Wilson, 2015). The EPL's prodigious growth and financial expansion (see Magee & Sugden, 2002) has been facilitated through sponsorship, merchandising (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne & Richardson, 2010) increased gate receipts, corporate hospitality (Barros & Leach, 2006) and clubs alliance with Rupert Murdoch's Sky Television network (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a) with broadcasting revenue increasing from approx. £49 million in 1996/97 (Symanski & Kuypers, 1999) to £568 million in 2007/08 (The Political Economy of Football, 2008) with figures reaching £957 million in 2009/10; a figure which will inevitably be surpassed since Sky TV's and British Telecommunications (BT) partnership which will provide an estimated 70% increase in revenue. This service also promises to extend internet services (Fielden, 2012). In this respect, it is clearly evident that the EPL is moving towards a whole new global dimension (Bond, 2012).

Football is undoubtedly a lucrative business with clubs operating as service enterprises (Vaeyens, Coutts & Philippaerts, 2005) thus contributing to heightened performance expectations and reduced tolerance for failure. The EPL is a results and performance orientated environment (Gammelsaeter & Jakobsen, 2008) with an average tenure of a manager spanning 2 years (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). As a result of performance expectations this further contributes to globalised player migration trends employed by clubs (Frick, 2009). In order to obtain immediate results within a challenging environment, clubs (and managers) seek to acquire high profile 'finished' and 'complete' players from a diversifying range of countries in order to achieve immediate results (Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2005; Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne & Richardson, 2010). It is inferred that these processes are intensifying due to the perceived direct link between spending in the transfer market and success (Chaplin, 2005a). However, an implication associated with such club acquisition procedures is the reluctance of clubs to invest in indigenous home-

grown players (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Chaplin, 2005a). It has been argued that this may contribute to the stifling of indigenous home-grown talent progression opportunities, as the acquisition of foreign players are perceived as obstacles for developing youth (Agergaard, 2004). These concerns resonate with Richardson, Littlewood and Gilbourne (2005) who stated that with an ever increasing influx of foreign talent into the host country (i.e. England and the EPL) it may mean that young locally sourced players will struggle to gain and/or hold down an academy place, let alone make a first team appearance.

Although fallacious to recruit foreign talent rather than investing in indigenous home-grown talent, managers insist they have little option but to scour the continent for cheaper foreign imports, as it is inferred that a ramification of the Bosman ruling has been to inflate the value of prosperous indigenous home-grown players (Frick, 2009; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011) as they are offered lucrative contracts by clubs in fear of losing them on a free transfer (Maguire & Pearton, 2000b; Fee & Meuhlheusser, 2003), thus increasing the attractiveness of foreign imports (McGovern, 2002). Player fees have led various individuals within the footballing community to emphasise their concerns and the implications for indigenous home-grown players. Former Manchester United Chairman, Martin Edwards, who is now Honorary Life President at the club stated that “the more transfer fees and players’ wages rise here, the more our clubs are going to look abroad” (*Rothmans Year Book*, 1996, p. 550). These sentiments were further re-iterated by PFA Chief Executive, Gordon Taylor, “I think we should bare in mind what happened to English cricket. Not enough attention was given to our talent. I am worried fees like Sutton’s are forcing clubs to look abroad” (*Rothmans Year Book*, 1996, p. 550). However, although player fees may impinge upon player development and progression, it is important to note that with an increasingly cosmopolitan managerial workforce within the EPL, this could further thwart indigenous home-grown player progression as managers are more likely to recruit players of their own nationality, further contributing towards foreign player acquisition (Adamson, 2000; McGovern, 2002; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011). It is inferred that such trends are now stifling clubs Academy systems, which is further exacerbated due to foreign staff (Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011).

The EPL is clearly a favoured destination for the internationally mobile player (Magee & Sugden, 2002) who has become an important facet and natural process of the footballing landscape within the Premier League (Ben - Porat, 2002). Despite the high level of debate, the foreign migrant has engendered as a result of club stratification procedures, the acquisition of foreign players have perceived benefits. These include, enhanced host nation player performances through the circulation of skill and tacit knowledge, which is developed through player interaction, thus improving the overall standards of performance (Richardson & Littlewood, 1999; Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Elliott & Weedon, 2011). It is argued that this can increase human capital which is important, since players are seen as 'marketable assets' (Alvarez, Forrest, Sanz & Tena, 2010). It is worth noting here that despite such benefits, it has also been inferred that club acquisition strategies and recruitment processes have led to the apparent deskilling of donor countries as players are required from periphery nations to the EPL (see Darby, 2000, 2007). This process has been referred to as the World Systems Approach (see Wallerstein, 1974).

As a result, National and International organisations such as UEFA and FIFA, have sought to protect indigenous home-grown players. These organisations have argued for quotas to be introduced, due to the perceived lack of emerging talent within UEFA Federations and the EPL (Taylor, 2007; Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Gilbourne & Richardson, 2010; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011). Although the appropriate implementation of player quotas is axiomatically beneficial for football, the introduction of playing quotas that do not contravene EU law is seen as righting the wrongs of the Bosman ruling effects (Gardiner & Welch, 2011).

Indeed the continued debate regarding player quotas within European leagues is not new and has led to what is termed "*Eurocentric Brouhaha*" (Madichie, 2009, p. 27). As long ago as 1993, the PFA, called for tighter controls and checks on the playing credentials of foreign players (*Mail on Sunday*, 24 January 1993, p. 95; Cited in Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). Quota rhetoric has sought to encourage clubs to invest and develop youth following concerns expressed by UEFA, FIFA and individuals within the football industry regarding the perceived lack of progression opportunities for indigenous home-grown players and the reluctance of clubs to invest in youth

development (see Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2005; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011). Steve Heighway, the former Academy Director at Liverpool F.C. stated, “football is a very competitive industry. Because of foreign players in our game there are fewer opportunities for them [home-grown players] they’ve gone as far as they can” (Calvin, 2001, p. 122).

In order to eradicate ramifications of the Bosman ruling and to encourage clubs to recruit from within (see Dastmalchian & Blyton, 1992), UEFA introduced a proposal in March 2000 termed “out of control” soccer, which limited 5 non-nationals per squad with the aim of allowing home-grown talent to flourish (*The Times*, 18 March, 2000, p. 27; Cited in Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). Following this policy, July 2004 witnessed the beginning of UEFA’s campaign to create a level playing field within their respective competitions (i.e. Champions League and UEFA Cup) through implementing a European wide policy on the utilisation of home-grown players. UEFA envisaged that these directives should be embraced by its member associations (i.e. English Football Association) at a domestic level (Richardson, Littlewood, & Gilbourne, 2005).

These rules established clubs entering UEFA competitions in the 2006/07 season were required to register at least two players trained by the clubs own football academy (i.e. any player registered by the club for a minimum of 3 seasons between the ages of 15-21) and a further two places for players trained by other clubs within the same association (i.e. any player registered by the club or by other clubs affiliated to the same association for a minimum of 3 seasons between the ages of 15-21) within their 25 player “A” list squad. In the following two seasons, one additional place for a club trained and association trained player was reserved on the “A” list squad, so that from the 2008/09 season, clubs entering UEFA competitions would have 4 club trained and 4 association trained players in their “A” list squad (Chaplin, 2005a).

Therefore, based upon the criteria presented a home-grown player can be identified as any player registered by a club or by other clubs affiliated to the same association for a minimum of 3 seasons between the ages of 15-21. Similarly, in 2009, as encouraged by UEFA, the EPL announced that from the 2010/11 season each club

would have to name at least 8 home-grown players (a player registered for at least three seasons at an English or Welsh club between the ages of 15-21) within their 25 player squad. In addition to UEFA policies, it is important to note that FIFA had also proposed the 6+5 rule with the aim of improving equality, financial balance between clubs, the promotion of junior players with the aim of improving national squads, whilst strengthening the regional and national identity of clubs. However, player quota restrictions contravened EU law, leading to the abandonment of the policy in June 2010 (Minderhoud & Oosterom – Staples, 2011). These proposals sought to further placate those countries whom have experienced the apparent de-skilling of promising youth (Gardiner & Welch, 2011).

As discussed UEFA's policies did not specify player nationality, to move to ensure that quota proposals are compatible with EU law. However, it is anticipated that this will further exacerbate the acquisition trends of youth as clubs engage in transnational scouting (Minderhoud & Oosterom – Staples, 2011). As a result, the general sentiment infers that indigenous home-grown players are more likely to be home-nationals (Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2005), as clubs look to the (soccer) periphery rather than domestically to discover talent (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Harrison, 2007). This hindering indigenous home-grown talent progression (Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2005) who now have to compete alongside non-indigenous home-grown players to progress (Weedon, 2011).

The migration of elite players (including youth) has clearly become a salient feature of the football landscape. However, player migration implications are more than just the impact upon indigenous home-grown player development and the de-skilling of less developed countries (see Darby, 2007; Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012). Player progression opportunities appear to be diminishing within association football, and more specifically, within the EPL. As a result of intense competition for places (Bourke, 2002) it is perceived that that this has led to 'high wastage' with an estimated 85% failure rate amongst players (Brown & Potrac, 2009). Such figures are even more alarming amongst Irish (Northern) players with 87% of players migrating to England (or Scotland) returning home within two years (Curran, 2015). Despite this, the migration of Irish (including Northern Ireland) players to

England remains a prevalent feature of the professional game's global employment market (Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2012).

Previous academic researchers have examined the development of football within Britain (see Russell, 1997), the de-skilling of Irish soccer and its implications for the 'garrison game' (see Bourke, 2011), and club recruitment processes (see Bourke, 2002). However, despite Irish players being highly visible within the globalisation process, research examining Irish player migration motives, experiences, and the effect upon players has largely been ignored within sports and football labour migration literature (McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014; Curran, 2015). For some, the migratory process may be enjoyable and unproblematic, whereas others may encounter multiple challenging life experiences and critical moments (Magee & Sugden, 2002). It is beneficial therefore that we better understand the lived experiences of those players involved in the migration process from a mixed-methodological perspective.

Ireland has been seen as a source of readily available talent for English clubs for decades with players being recruited to England every season since 1946 (McGovern, 2000). Such migration trends have been facilitated by the development of 'nurseries' by English clubs to recruit players (Bourke, 2002). In this respect, the extension of English clubs youth policies in Ireland has deepened the apparent 'Brawn Drain' (McGovern, 2000). The 'Brawn Drain' is a process in which athletic or sporting talent of lesser developed countries (i.e. Northern Ireland) is siphoned off. In this case, it is Irish (Northern Ireland) football players who have been siphoned off by professional football teams within England and specifically the EPL (Bale, 1991; McGovern, 2000).

Although potentially detrimental to the development of soccer within Ireland, the migration of Irish (including Northern Ireland) players to England remains a prevalent feature of the current football landscape as players seek to test their abilities and further their own progression as opposed to playing their trade in Irish leagues which are less lucrative, competitive and attractive than the EPL (Elliott, 2014).

As previously outlined Irish (including Northern Ireland) players migrate to England (and the EPL) for numerous reasons with previous research (although limited) indicating players experience cultural dislocation (i.e. difficulty adapting to new surroundings, environment etc.), including homesickness, loneliness (i.e. missing family, home, peers etc.), self-doubt and decreased self-esteem (i.e. increased pressure to succeed and questioning ability) during the migratory processes (Bourke, 2003). Such challenges highlight the complexity of 'acculturation', the migratory process, and the perceived psychosocial implications for players (personally) in search of success within soccer (Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012). It is worth noting that such challenges may be even more significant for those aged 15 to 16 (see Weedon, 2011), whilst the dislocation from family and peers further affects players during the migratory process (Brown & Portrac, 2009) whom are perceived to be pivotal within the transitional process (Pummell *et al.*, 2008). As a result of such challenges, UEFA has sought to protect minors by introducing player registrations bans on those aged 18 and under (Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012).

It is clearly evident that the migratory process that a player may encounter could potentially impact their psychosocial development. Players are having to adapt to new environments particularly football clubs, contexts and sometimes without the support of family and peers which is integral to ensuring a smooth transition. Players may be unprepared for such a process and are relying upon their hosts (i.e. clubs) to provide the support required from managerial, coach (See Martindale, Collins & Daubney, 2005) and host families. The overall success of a player's transition is dependent upon coping with each specific demand and barriers and the resources available to ease the transition thus ensuring success, i.e. alleviating fears associated with loneliness, home-sickness etc. (Morris *et al.*, 2015)

However, as the aforementioned research examining Irish player's experiences is relatively underdeveloped, irrespective of time period (i.e., within-career, deselection or retirement; see McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014; Curran, 2015) it is felt that the current research is warranted. Wylleman and colleagues (Wylleman, Alfermann & Lavalley, 2004) have expressed the need to focus on life-span perspectives when examining athletic (player) transitions and experiences encountered. In this respect, there is a requirement to examine player migration journeys to collate a more

contextually rich understanding of migratory experiences. Therefore, in order to gain a greater appreciation of Irish (specifically Northern Ireland) player migratory transitions to England and upon their return, it is imperative to explore 'individual player experiences'.

1.2 Rationale

Previous academic literature regarding football (and labour migration) to date has examined factors that influence migration trends (see Maguire & Stead, 1998; McGovern, 2000; Maguire & Pearton, 2000a; Magee & Sugden, 2002; Elliott & Weedon, 2011) and explanations as to why players migrate (see Magee & Sugden, 2002). Maguire and Stead (1998), Maguire and Pearton (2000a), McGovern (2000) and Elliott and Weedon (2011) have examined player acquisition trends of clubs at specific time periods, however there is a lack of research examining player acquisition trends over a longitudinal period to specifically examine the impact of club recruitment strategies particularly upon the perceived lack / reduced opportunities for indigenous home-grown players. Through exploring acquisition trends over a longitudinal time period this will provide a clearer understanding of the perceived 'Brawn Drain' which relates to the siphoning off athletic talent (see Bale, 1991; McGovern, 2000) and the potential impact upon Northern Irish soccer as players migrate to England (EPL) in search of inflated salaries and increased playing opportunities.

Research to date indicates that clubs acquisition procedures have become increasingly diversified as players are acquired from across the globe via various recruitment methods, for example, transfers, academies, nurseries etc. (Binder & Findlay, 2012), which is significantly influenced by the financial changes that have emerged within the EPL, along with political, historical, geographical and cultural factors which have further affected the migration process in English soccer (Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012). Although UEFA have sought to protect youth players as a result of clubs exploitive recruitment (Gardiner & Welch, 2011) the EPL is seen as a 'finishing school' for players from across the globe who are recruited to clubs and academies potentially at the expense of indigenous home-grown players trying to further their careers (Taylor, 2007). It is the perceived

emergence of non-indigenous home-grown players as a result of such acquisition profiles which further hinders indigenous home-grown player development and progression. In that sense, this highlights the requirement for the current series of research studies. As a result of the EPL becoming a 'finishing school' for the internationally mobile player, research regarding player progression and their actual lived experiences is limited and forms the basis of the current research project.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

In order to address the issues outlined within the literature review, the following research objectives will be addressed: -

Study 1: - A longitudinal examination of the player migration within English professional football (1990 – 2010)

Through conducting a longitudinal time – period study this will provide an overview of the football landscape (including the perceived lack of opportunities for indigenous home-grown players) and seek to explore the potential 'Brawn Drain' within Irish soccer.

- A critical exploration of indigenous home-grown player recruitment and progression from 1990 to 2010 through examining appearance trends.
- A critical exploration of non-indigenous home-grown player and foreign player recruitment and progression from 1990 to 2010 through examining appearance trends.

Study 2: - An examination of the lived experiences (pre, during and post) of Northern Ireland players that migrated to English professional football

As aforementioned the migration of Irish (including Northern Ireland) players to England (and indeed the EPL) is not a new phenomenon, however, research examining player trajectory experiences is limited therefore;

- A qualitative examination of indigenous player (Northern Ireland) migratory processes and lived experiences prior to, during and post-migration to an English professional football.

CHAPTER 2

2.0 Methodological Introduction (Study 1 and Study 2 Overview)

This section aims to demonstrate the philosophical underpinning of the research studies and more specifically the stages involved in the methodological construction of Study 1 and 2. In order to accurately explore the specific aims and objectives of the studies, there were a number of variables and characteristics that needed to be considered during the data collection process across both the quantitative (Study 1) and qualitative (Study 2) studies. This was required in order to critically analyse the presence of indigenous home-grown players in relation to the influx of foreign and non-indigenous home-grown players and the perceived implications associated with these acquisition trends for young Northern Irish player's pre, during and post migration.

From a methodological perspective the current research adopts a mixed method design. In that sense, Study 1 is located in a positivistic research paradigm that applies specific criteria to the nature of its inquiry. These are associated with notions of validity and reliability (Biddle *et al.*, 2001). More specifically, this deals with internal validity (i.e. the degree to which findings correctly map the phenomenon in question), external validity (i.e. the degree to which findings can be generalised to other settings similar to the one in which the study occurred), reliability (i.e. the extent to which findings can be replicated, or reproduced, by another inquirer), and objectivity (i.e. the extent to which findings are free from bias) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). To contextualise this point, it was considered important within the design of the broader research question, to firstly understand the actual migration patterns within the EPL over the time period, with a specific focus on indigenous (including Northern Ireland), non-indigenous and foreign players. The systematic and objective markers that are associated with positivistic inquiry enable researchers to understand the 'what' with respect the research question, which then enable more qualitatively designed studies to better capture the social-context and the 'why' and 'how' associated with Northern Ireland players' decisions to migrate, the psychosocial challenges during migration, and experiences post-migration. Studies that have adopted mixed methodological designs of this nature are currently lacking in the literature with respect to identifying migratory based trends over time and capturing the unique and rich social context of the participants involved directly with this process.

The paradigmatic position that was therefore adopted for Study 2 was connected with constructivist, which assumes that realities are socially based and are local and specific in nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The traditional positivistic criteria that were utilised in Study 1 (i.e. validity & reliability) were replaced by notions of *trustworthiness* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In that sense, Lincoln and Guba (1985) discuss the important considerations in this approach to qualitative inquiry. They suggested that *credibility* (i.e. equivalent to the internal validity of quantitative research) where researchers are encouraged to engage in an eclectic mix of techniques ranging from prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, negative case analysis, referential adequacy and member checks are important. *Transferability* (i.e. external validity) can be achieved through providing thick description and providing a database for reader judgement of potential transferability. *Dependability* (i.e. reliability) was achieved through demonstrating credibility, multiple methods, stepwise replication and inquiry audit. Although research should aim to acquire as many facets of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria, studies have been conducted that have not captured all of these components (e.g., Côté *et al.*, 1995; Gould *et al.*, 1996; Bloom *et al.*, 1998). The present research in Study 2 aimed to ensure that a deductive approach (see Biddle *et al.*, 2001) from the associated migration literature was utilised to develop the interview schedule and subsequent engagement with the participants in the study. The following sections outline the specific stages involved in the research design of Studies 1 and 2.

2.1 Study 1 Data Collection Process, Procedures and Analysis

A categorical database was created using both Excel and the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS V.22). These specific packages enabled the efficient management and analysis of the large amounts of player acquisition variables collected during the investigation. In total there were 30 specific variables for players sold, whilst there were 28 variables for players acquired. In total, the categorical database included 5072 players in relation to players acquired that explored 26 variables in total. Excel was utilised to conduct descriptive statistics on specific variables within the categorical database (i.e., appearance record), whilst SPSS (V. 22) was employed due to its simplicity of coding and defining the extensive volume

of categorical data for other variables (i.e., players acquired per FIFA confederation etc.); thus enabling the analysis of the categorical database. An advantage of utilising SPSS was its ability to manage and organise the data, whilst also enabling the exclusion of variables that did not meet specific requirements, due to the numeric coding of categorical variables that simplified the process.

Official match and player acquisition data providing information on each player's place of birth, date of birth, nationality, FIFA affiliation (see Table 2.2), method of recruitment and year of recruitment were obtained from the Rothmans Football Year Books (1990/91-2003/04), and the Sky Sports Football Year Books (2004/05-2009/10). These books provided a detailed overview of player profile characteristics and have been utilised by previous researchers within association football (Maguire & Stead, 1998; Richardson & Littlewood, 1999; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011).

Further to this, first team appearances per season for all players, and the total number of appearances and goals for players sold were collated from the data sources. This data was collected for indigenous home-grown, non-indigenous home-grown and foreign players (see Table 2.1). It is important to note that only appearances and goals for Premier League games were included within the study (i.e. excluding cup fixtures; Richardson & Littlewood, 1999). Similar to a recent study conducted by Littlewood, Mullen and Richardson (2011), players originating from the United Kingdom (i.e., England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) and the Republic of Ireland, were all classified as indigenously home-grown in the context of the EPL (providing they were acquired between the ages 15 – 21 years).

Each professional football club that had remained present within the former 1st Division (1990/91-1991/92) and the current F.A. Premier League (1992/93-2009/10) over a 20 year time period were included within the current investigation. Each individual club was given a categorical database code (see Table 6.1 in Appendix).

In order to distinguish between player types, three categories were generated. This unique robust macro-analysis further discriminates between indigenous home-grown, non-indigenous home-grown and foreign players. This provided a comprehensive

examination of player acquisition trends and potential implications for indigenous home-grown players. The various player types are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Player type

Code	Type of Player	Definition
1	Indigenous Home-Grown	Any player that has been trained by a club or by another club in the same association for at least three years between the ages of 15 – 21 years.
2	Non-Indigenous Home-grown	A player that has been trained at a club between the ages of 15 – 21 years, for at least three years, in a different nation to their original nationality and therefore has an inherent claim of recognition to that of the club's nationality.
3	Foreign	Any player born outside of their club's country without any inherent claim of that nationality.

In order to examine the inward migration patterns of non-indigenous home-grown and foreign players acquired to English Professional football (and the EPL specifically), it was necessary to differentiate between their respective continents and countries. In order to achieve this, players were categorised into one of six regional confederations as advocated by Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) the world football's governing body (Littlewood, Richardson, Lees, & Peiser, 2000). This is illustrated in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2 Regional Affiliates of FIFA

Regional Affiliates	Abbreviation	Code
Union of European Football Association*	UEFA*	1*
Confederation of North, Central America & Caribbean Football Association	CONCACAF	5
Confederation of South America Football	CONMEBOL	6
Confederation of African Football	CAF	7
Asian Football Confederation	AFC	8
Oceania Football Confederation	OFC	9

*UEFA also has sub-groups of countries

Given that the European Union is the largest member state of FIFA, thus making it soccer's core economy (Maguire & Stead, 1998), sub-groups of this region were created to provide a more detailed overview of player migration. These sub-groups included the British Isles and Republic of Ireland, Scandinavia, Western Europe and Eastern Europe (former Eastern bloc countries). The countries represented within these sub-groups and the five remaining confederations are displayed in Tables 7.2 and 7.3 (see Appendix; Littlewood, Richardson, Lees, & Peiser, 2000).

In order to achieve the objectives/aims of the study, differences across time were explored, therefore the playing seasons 1990/91-2009/10 were examined thus providing a detailed 20-year analysis (see Table 7.4 in appendix).

A further variable entered into the categorical database was associated with selection. This variable was coded as illustrated below (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Selection

Code	Selection
-1	Retired
0	Transferred
1	Acquired

In order to achieve each objective aforementioned, the data was analysed using descriptive statistics (i.e. frequencies, descriptive) within SPSS, V.22, producing a range of frequency data.

2.2 Study 2 Data Collection Process, Procedures and Analysis

This study aims to understand the impact of player recruitment strategies on individuals that were involved in professional football clubs in the English Premier League. More specifically, it aims to understand the impact on indigenous home-grown players, with a specific lens on players from Northern Ireland. Player migration experiences were explored and subsequent processes of acculturation, displacement, were investigated for individuals that had migrated in pursuit of a professional football career in England.

In order to elicit rich in-depth qualitative data appropriate to the research objective, a purposive sampling strategy was employed (Patton, 2002). Six players engaged within the interview process that had previously migrated to an EPL club. Identifying and accessing players beyond those included within the study was difficult, however, this was to be expected given this hard to reach population (Roderick, 2013). Previous researchers have also described the challenges associated with accessing individuals for research purposes, especially for research that explores issues connected to personal and professional challenges associated with their playing careers (Magee & Sugden, 2002; Nesti, 2010; Roderick, 2013).

Although interviews followed a proposed deductive structure (see Table 2.4), an open, active, interactional approach was adopted to enable a conducive interview

environment to be established that encouraged an informal and conversational approach (Patton, 2002). The deductive development of the proposed interview schedule was based upon previous research regarding player migration (see de Vasconcellos Ribeiro & Dimeo, 2009; Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012) and career transition literature (see Pummell, Harwood & Lavellee, 2008). Please refer to Table 7.9 (within the Appendices) for a robust overview of questions per section.

Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes, and were audio recorded. All interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Table 2.4 Summary of Interview Schedule

Phase 1: Introduction and Football History

Aim: Outline interview structure, research objective and duration. Reinforce aspects such as participant confidentiality.

Phase 2: Inward Migration Experience

Aim: To critically explore player migratory experience from ‘approach phase’ to migration to Premier League Club (i.e. post-arrival appraisal; feelings, emotions and behaviours experienced during this phase) to the day to day experiences at the new club (i.e. living away from home, relationships, culture etc.) and support network provided during this transition.

Phase 3: Outward Migration Experience and Current Football Background

Aim: To critically explore player experience(s) during ‘outward’ migration phase (i.e. returning home) and plausible explanations for release (or failure to succeed) and current football participation (including level).

Phase 4: Coping Mechanisms and Player Identity

Aim: To critically explore player support networks throughout the migration process and to evaluate the impact of the player's career journey on them as an 'individual'.

Phase 5: Other Significant and/or Critical Experiences and Future Recommendations

Aim: To critically explore any other significant factors which may have contributed towards player release (including factors which may have impinged on their progression). Future recommendations to enable a more effective transition throughout all aspects of the process.

Phase 6: Closure

Aim: Express sincere thanks and gratitude to player for engaging within the interview process and for giving up their time and ascertain future correspondence or dialogue.

In order to elicit rich in-depth qualitative data appropriate to the research objective, a purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify a number of players from Northern Ireland who had migrated to England in order to pursue a career within professional football (Patton, 2002). Six players engaged within the interview process that had previously migrated to an EPL club. Although interviews followed a proposed deductive structure (see Table 2.4), an open, active, interactional approach was adopted to enable a conducive interview environment to be established that encouraged an informal and conversational approach (Patton, 2002). Players who engaged within the interview process had previously played football at various local clubs within Northern Ireland, gradually progressing through the development systems at their respective clubs (mainly Irish Premiership teams), prior to migrating to England to pursue a career within the EPL. It is worth noting that the football environment is generally quite a closed environment and one that is

rather sceptical about the presence and/or role of outsiders (Parker, 1995). Therefore it was critical to guarantee player confidentiality prior to engaging within the interview process in order to help put players at ease to enable them to talk openly and freely regarding their migration experience in the pursuit of the ‘field of dreams’.

Table 2.5 Player Sample Overview

The following table outlines players who engaged within the research / interview process;

Player	Age Migrated (Approx.)	Age Returned (Approx.)	Club (1 st)
Stephen	16	19	Fulham F.C.
Robert	14	20	Manchester United F.C
Brendan	15	24	Liverpool F.C
Finbar	16	20	Everton F.C.
Keith	14	18	Hull City F.C.
Gareth	17	20	Nottingham Forest F.C.

The deductive development of the proposed interview schedule was based upon previous research regarding player migration (see de Vasconcellos Ribeiro & Dimeo, 2009; Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012) and career transition literature (see Pummell, Harwood & Lavellee, 2008). Please refer to Table 7.9 (within the Appendices) for a robust overview of questions per section. Interviewees were sourced through various sources with links to players within Northern Ireland who had migrated to England to pursue a career within professional football. Following the initial contact via phone, which outlined the research purpose and structure, arrangements were made in order to conduct the interviews. A number of interviews were conducted in person; however several were also completed over the phone. All interviews lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

Procedural guidelines from previous academic research authors were considered in relation to the current research process (Scanlan, Ravizza & Stein, 1989; Cote, Salmela, Baria & Russell, 1993). All interviews were listened to, reviewed and transcribed verbatim by the first author as soon as possible to aid interpretation (Burgess, 1995). The transcriptions were then read several times to ensure familiarity was established with the transcriptions and participants, and to provide as an exact a representation as possible of what happened during the interview (Roulston, deMarrais & Lewis, 2003). Transcriptions were then analyzed using the principles of content analysis (Scanlan *et al.*, 1989; Cote *et al.*, 1993), a procedure where the researcher organized raw data into meaningful themes and allowed these to emerge from the participant's own words (Hanton & Jones, 1999). The analysis started deductively based on the pre-determined quotes used in the interview guide and related literature, this subsequently continued inductively, with emerging quotes from the interview (Scanlan *et al.*, 1989). Quotes that clearly identified subjective experiences were identified and clustered into common threads. A tagging system was utilised, which replaced the participants' names with pseudonyms (i.e., alternative names) to retain the participant's confidentiality (Krane, Anderson & Streat, 1997). The process was discussed in order to provide trustworthiness and credibility (Biddle *et al.*, 2001). Representation of data adopted a thematic narrative approach to capture the unique lived experiences of each player, clarify particular moments in the player's story and aid the reader to become fully immersed in each player's journey (Gilbourne & Richardson, 2006; Richardson *et al.*, 2012).

CHAPTER 3

Chapter 3

3.0 A longitudinal examination of player migration within English professional football (1990 – 2010)

This section of the thesis aims to report the findings from the analysis for the specific aims and objectives outlined in Chapter 2. More specifically, this sought to examine the player acquisition trends (including player appearances) within the English Premier League clubs between 1990 and 2010. In addition, it sought to examine the impact upon the presence of indigenous home-grown players that had progressed through clubs' youth development systems (and later Football Academies).

As evidenced within Table 3.1, clubs between 1990 and 2010 within the EPL acquired 5072 players. More specifically, indigenous home-grown players were most commonly acquired (N=3346; 66%), whilst 1240 (24.4%) foreign players were acquired during the time period. In addition to the indigenous and foreign player acquisitions, 470 non-indigenous home-grown players (9.3%) were acquired by clubs during the time period.

Table 3.1 Accumulative Players Acquired 1990 – 2010 within the EPL

Player Type	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Indigenous	3346	66.0	66.0	66.3
Non - Indigenous	470	9.3	9.3	75.6
Foreign	1240	24.4	24.4	100.0
Missing	16	.3	.3	.3
Total	5072	100.0	100.0	-

UEFA (N=4502; 88.8%) as evidenced within Table 3.2 was the most predominant regional affiliation of FIFA represented within the EPL, whilst the acquisition of players from CAF (N=218; 4.3%) and CONMEBOL (N=131; 2.6%) outside UEFA

were the most dominant. The least players acquired from outside UEFA were from AFC (N=21; 0.4%).

Table 3.2 Regional Affiliations of FIFA represented 1990 – 2010 within the EPL

FIFA Confederation	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
UEFA	4502	88.8	88.8	89.4
CONCACAF	93	1.8	1.8	91.2
CONMEBOL	131	2.6	2.6	93.8
CAF	218	4.3	4.3	98.1
AFC	21	.4	.4	98.5
OFC	76	1.5	1.5	100
Missing	31	.6	.6	.6
Total	5072	100.0	100.0	-

The 3346 (66%) indigenous home-grown players that were acquired within the EPL between 1990 and 2010 represented 74% of UEFA affiliated players. As evidenced in Figure 3.1 156 indigenous home-grown players were acquired in 1990/91, however this fluctuated throughout the 20-year period, reaching its peak in 1997/98 (N=221). Since 1997/98 the number of indigenous home-grown players acquired by clubs within the EPL has witnessed a decline, with 134 players being acquired in 2009/10. This being the third lowest number of players acquired during the 20 year period. In contrast the number of non-indigenous home-grown players witnessed a pronounced increase between 1990 and 2010. Overall 470 (9.3%) non-indigenous home-grown players have been acquired, with the largest number of players being recruited in 2007/08 (N=65). The acquisition of foreign players is also a prevalent feature within the EPL, with 1240 (24.4%) players being acquired. Similar to non-indigenous home-grown player acquisition trends, foreign players have also witnessed a pronounced increase during the time period, most notably during the 2007/08 season (N=114).

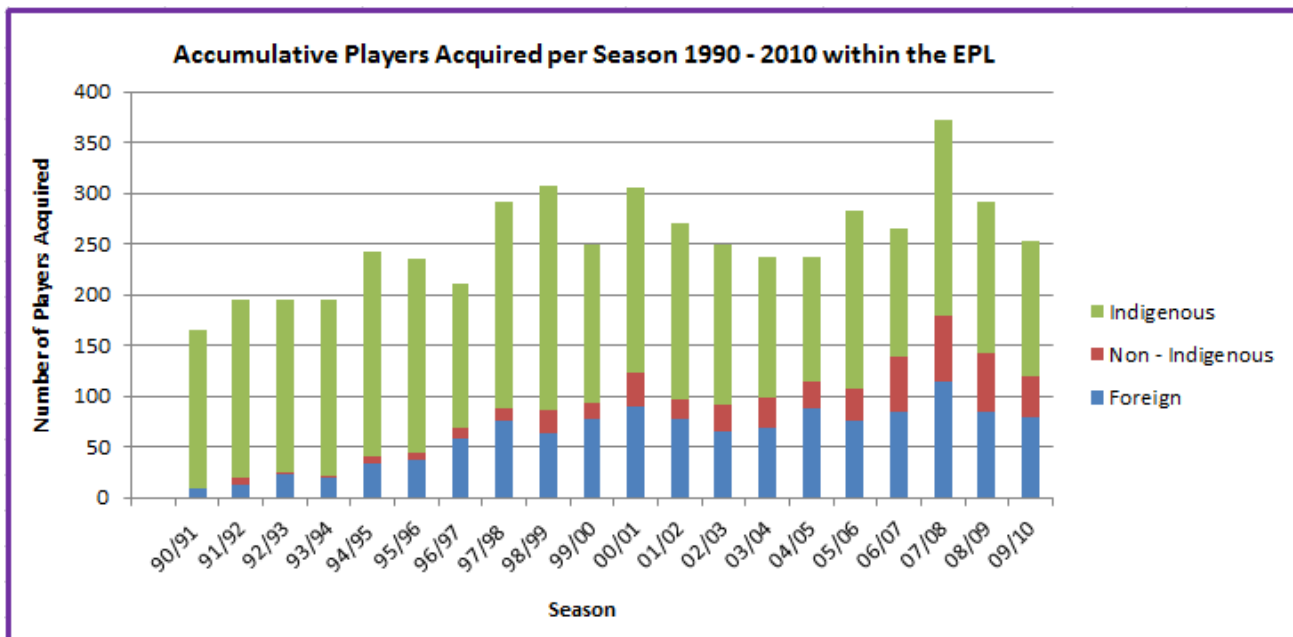


Figure 3.1: Accumulative Players Acquired per Season 1990 – 2010 within the EPL

Indigenous home-grown players as outlined within Table and Figure 3.1 are the most commonly acquired player with the EPL and represent the largest frequency of player acquisitions per season (see Figure 3.1). Indigenous home-grown players are players whom are acquired from each respective home-nation within the British Isles and Republic of Ireland (i.e. England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and Republic of Ireland). The latter four nations are also referred to as the Celtic nations. It is evident from Table 3.3 that Indigenous home-grown players acquired are predominantly English (N=2636). However despite this, the number of English players acquired between 1990 and 2010 has witnessed a decline with 105 players being acquired in 2009/10. This represents the third lowest number of English players acquired throughout the 20-year period, with the largest number of English players being acquired in 1994/95 (N=173). It is evident that the number of players acquired from Northern Ireland (N=119) and Wales (N=128) were the lowest from all home-nations. The number of players acquired from Northern Ireland has however witnessed an increase throughout the 20-year period, with the largest frequency of players being acquired in 2001/2 and 2007/08 (N=12). The number of players acquired from Wales (N=128) witnessed a decrease throughout the 20 years from 9 in 1990/91 to 3 in 2009/10. Despite the number of players from the Republic of

Ireland (N=294) being the largest from all the Celtic nations, the number of players witnessed a decline between 1990/91 (N=16) and 2009/10 (N=13).

Table 3.3 Accumulative Players Acquired per Home - Nation (Indigenous Home-Grown) 1990 – 2010 within the EPL

Season	England	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Wales	Rep of Ireland	Total
1990 / 91	124	5	2	9	16	156
1991 / 92	158	4	4	6	5	177
1992 / 93	144	10	7	4	5	170
1993 / 94	142	12	5	3	12	174
1994 / 95	173	6	6	2	15	202
1995 / 96	163	3	5	7	12	190
1996 / 97	105	7	6	8	16	142
1997 / 98	150	15	7	16	15	203
1998 / 99	169	15	4	8	25	221
1999 / 00	112	10	6	11	17	156
2000 / 01	131	11	6	6	29	183
2001 / 02	130	8	12	5	19	174
2002 / 03	110	14	5	6	21	156
2003 / 04	104	10	4	9	12	139
2004 / 05	105	5	3	5	6	124
2005 / 06	138	6	10	6	14	174
2006 / 07	101	4	2	4	13	124
2007 / 08	156	3	12	6	15	192
2008 / 09	116	6	6	4	14	146
2009 / 10	105	5	7	3	13	133
Total	2636	159	119	128	294	

Non-indigenous home-grown players have become a prevalent feature with the EPL throughout the 20-year time period and have witnessed an increase during this time period. It is evident that the acquisition of non-indigenous home-grown players is

multi-cultural, with players from each of the respective FIFA affiliations being represented, with the largest frequency of players being acquired from UEFA (N=281; 6%). Outside UEFA, as evidenced within Table 7.8 (see Appendix), there is a strong contingent of players acquired from CAF (N=75), with large volumes of players being acquired from Nigeria (N=18), Ghana (N=10) and South Africa (N=8).

Table 3.4 Non – Indigenous Home-Grown Players Acquired per FIFA Affiliations 1990 – 2010 within the EPL

FIFA Confederation	Frequency
UEFA (Scandinavia)	64
UEFA (Western Europe)	189
UEFA (Eastern Europe)	28
CONCACAF	39
CONMEBOL	25
CAF	75
AFC	2
OFC	40
Total	462

As evidenced within Figure 3.2 and commensurate with the acquisition trends presented thus far, the number of appearances by indigenous home-grown players has decreased throughout the 20-year period. The number of appearances by indigenous home-grown players in 1990/91 (N=8415; 88.4%) steadily increased until it reached its peak in 1992/93 (N=9852; 87.3%). However since the 1992/93 season, the number of appearances accumulated by indigenous home-grown players has decreased year after year until 2004/05, which witnessed a slight increase to 5200 (52.4%), in comparison to 2003/04 (N=4903; 51.1%). However the number of appearances since 2005/06 (N=4976; 51.7%) has continued to decrease with a low being recorded in 2009/10 (4399; 45.1%). It is worth noting that the most significant decrease in player appearances by indigenous home-grown players was from 1994/95 (N=9583; 85.4%) to 1995/96 (N=7518; 80.2%), whilst foreign player appearances during this time increased from 1529 (13.6%) in 1994/95 to 1688 (18%)

in 1995/96. Non-indigenous home-grown player appearances also increased significantly at this point from 104 in 1994/95 (0.9%) to 165 in 1995/96 (1.8%). Throughout the 20-year period, the number of appearances accumulated by Non-indigenous home-grown players has witnessed an increase, with the largest number of appearances being recorded in 2008/09 (N=807; 8.2%). Foreign player acquisition trends have witnessed an increase throughout the 20-year period, with the largest frequency of players being acquired in 2007/08 (N=114). As evident with Figure 3.2, it is at this point the number of appearances accumulated by foreign players surpassed those of indigenous home-grown players (N=4536; 46.6%), which continued to rise and peaked in 2009/10 (N = 4618; 47.3%).

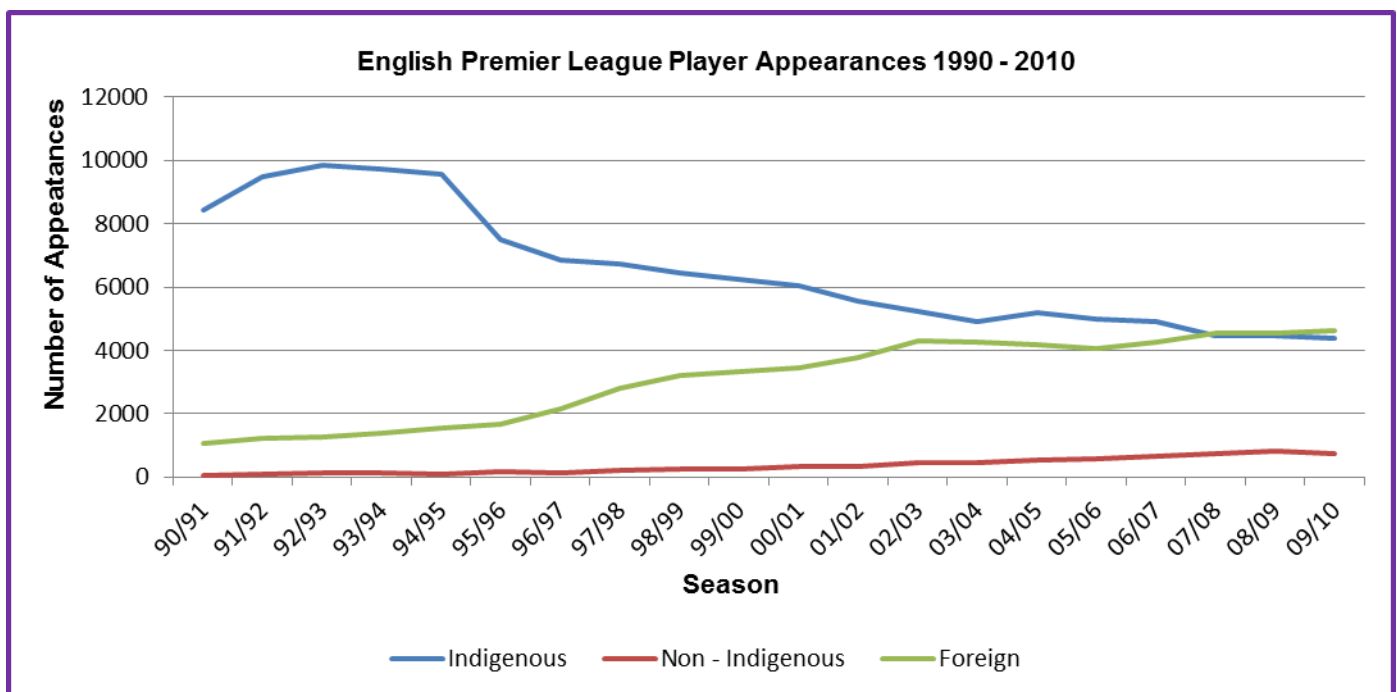


Figure 3.2: Accumulative Player Appearances within the EPL 1990 – 2010

It is evident from Figure 3.2 that the number of appearances by indigenous home-grown players has decreased significantly between 1990 and 2010. In order to gain a greater appreciation of the impact such a decline has had, it was necessary to examine the player appearance trends of home-nations individually (indigenous home-grown players). As exemplified within Figure 3.3 the number of appearances by English players has witnessed the most significant decrease throughout the 20-year period. The largest frequency of appearances made by English players was in

1992/93 (N=8604; 76.3%), however since this the number of appearances by English players has continued to fluctuate and decrease with the lowest number of appearances recorded in 2009/10 (N=3256; 33.4%). Similar to the findings above, the most significant decrease in appearances by English players was from 1994/95 (N=8378; 74.7%) to 1995/96 (N=6559; 70%). It is worth noting that each of the respective home-nations (i.e. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) all witnessed a decrease in player appearances during this time period, with the exception of the Republic of Ireland. This group showed an increase in 10 appearances between 1994/95 (2.3%) and 1995/6 (2.9%). As illustrated within Table 3.3, the number of English players acquired between 1990 and 2010 has fluctuated and decreased, however English players are still the most dominant in comparison to other home-nations. It is worth noting that 1150 (44%) English players that were sold between 1990 and 2010 failed to make an appearance at their respective clubs, with 614 (23%) players being released.

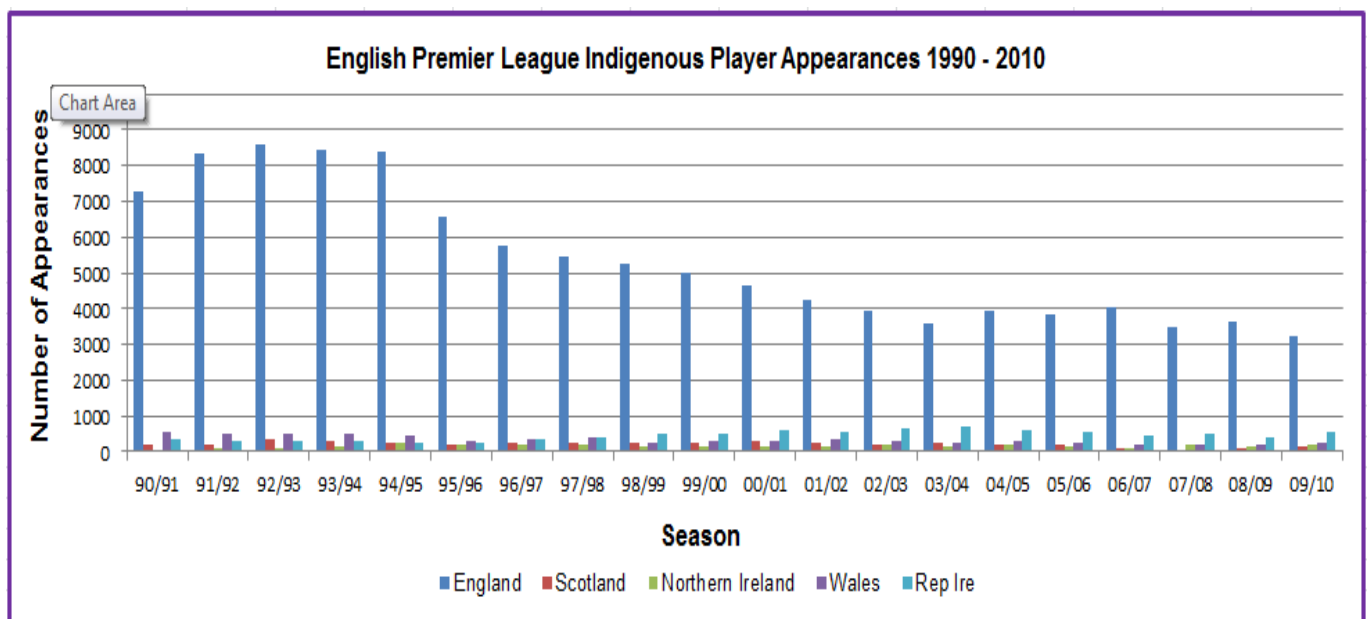


Figure 3.3: Indigenous Home-Grown Player Appearances 1990 – 2010 within the EPL

The number of appearances by Northern Ireland players also fluctuated throughout the 20-year period, however commensurate with acquisition trends associated with this group of players (see Table 3.3), the number of appearances increased from those made in 1990/91 (N=38; 0.4%) to those in 2009/10 (N=191; 2%). Despite this

increase, 47 (52%) players from Northern Ireland were sold between 1990 and 2010 without making an appearance which clearly indicates the perceived lack of playing opportunities within the EPL for indigenous home-grown players (including Northern Ireland players). It is such figures which provides justification to explore Irish (Northern Ireland) player transitions and in particular to develop an understanding of the migration process collectively including returning home to Northern Ireland and the potential impact of release from clubs. Both Scotland and Wales witnessed a pronounced decrease in the number of player appearances during the 20-year period. The overall number of appearances by Scottish players decreased from 211 (2.2%) in 1990/91 to 130 (1.3%) in 2009/10, which was the fourth lowest accumulative number of appearances by Scottish players. Similarly, Welsh player appearances also witnessed a significant decrease. In 1990/91 Welsh players made 534 (5.6%) appearances. This decreased to 262 (2.7%) in 2009/10, which was the seventh lowest figure. The lowest number of appearances by Welsh players was in 2006/07 and 2008/09 (N=189). The number of appearances by Republic of Ireland players fluctuated, however it was the only Celtic nation to witness a pronounced increase in player appearances between 1990 and 2010. Republic of Ireland appearances increased from 340 (3.6%) in 1990/91 to 560 (5.7%) in 2009/10, with the largest frequency of appearances recorded in 2003/04 (N=694; 7.2%); this being the largest number of appearances for indigenous home-grown players, with the exception of those by English players. However, despite increased appearance trends amongst Republic of Ireland players, it is worth noting that in comparison to other Celtic home-nations (see Table 7.7), the number of Republic of Ireland players sold without an appearance for their respective club was much greater (N=151; 60%).

3.1 Discussion; A longitudinal examination of the player migration within English professional football (1990 – 2010)

In line with previous academic research, specifically the work of Maguire and Pearton (2000a) and Elliott (2010), results from the study indicated an intra-confederational inward migration between 1990 and 2010 within the EPL. Furthermore, it was evident that there was an increased propensity to acquire players from within the UEFA confederation, which included non - indigenous home-grown and foreign player acquisitions. The findings indicate clear evidence that the

EPL has become a global recruiter of elite level talent with each of the regional affiliations of FIFA represented in the data set. This supports the observation of Koser and Lutz (1997), who inferred that football has entered a 'new migration' and undergone a process of globalisation (Maguire & Stead 1998). It is reasonable to argue that the 'Europeanisation' of the EPL has been influenced by the Bosman Ruling; a legislative development that led to the abolishment of the '3+2' rule (Goodbody, 1996). The Bosman ruling also prevented domestic leagues imposing foreign player quotas (Magee & Sugden, 2002), a ruling that inadvertently facilitated player acquisition trends within UEFA member states. In that sense it provided players freedom of movement within EU Countries to seek employment without having to justify their eligibility and/or to meet specific eligibility criteria (Lanfranchi & Taylor, 2001).

The EPL has clearly undergone a process of globalisation as evidenced in the number of foreign players (N=1240) plying their trade within the EPL over the 20-year time period. Acquisition trends of foreign players have increased exponentially between 1990 (N=9) and 2010 (N=80), with the largest frequency of player acquisitions in 2007/08 (N=114). These increases have occurred despite non-EU players being subject to selection procedures. For example, these players have to satisfy international status (played 75% of competitive international matches) in order to be eligible to play within the EPL (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). It is worth noting that the Kolpak and Simutenkov cases which applied non – discriminatory provision to a wider range of countries beyond EU borders could have further facilitated such diverse recruitment patterns (Gardiner & Welch, 2011).

Consistent with previous academic research (see Littlewood, Richardson, Lees & Peiser; 2000; Elliott, 2010), foreign registered players from both the AFC (N=19) and OFC (N=36) regions were the least acquired individuals. It is worth noting however that players from these regions have been more consistent since 2002/03, AFC (N=18) and OFC (N=16). Such increases in player acquisitions from each respective Confederation may have been influenced by increased global exposure through representation at the FIFA World Cup Finals in Japan and North Korea in 2002.

Outside UEFA, foreign players from CONMEBOL (N=106) and CAF (N=143) were most prevalent, whilst 54 players were acquired from CONCACAF regions. The acquisition trends of players from CAF regions were commensurate with those observed by Darby (2007), who noted that this migration process serves to systematically de-skill the domestic African game. However, Elliott (2014) argues that African players have no other option but to seek opportunities elsewhere (including the EPL), due to the lack of financial and football infrastructural conditions akin to those in Europe within Africa. European clubs (including EPL clubs) offer economic opportunities to skilled players that simply do not exist in Africa (Elliott, 2014).

The data certainly indicates that there are increasingly diversified migratory routes into the EPL and a continually emerging global dimension to its labour recruitment strategies (Taylor, 2006). What is more, an increase in the importation of players from regional affiliations outside UEFA further suggests that this recruitment is beginning to establish more permanent links within FIFA confederations (Taylor, 2006) and supports Wallerstein's 'World Systems Theory' approach (Magee & Sugden, 2002; Darby 2007).

In that regard, the 'World Systems' approach links together the diffusion (i.e. trade) of football from the core (Europe), to the semi-periphery (South and Central America), and the periphery (Africa, Asia, Oceania and North America) with the development of footballs' migration in the reverse sense, from the periphery to the core (i.e. EPL) as evidenced within the findings. These inward migration trends may also be attributed to a range of 'push' and 'pull' factors identified by Maguire and Pearton (2000a) as alluded to above. For example, players from CAF regions may migrate to the EPL for financial remuneration (pull), which is the most lucrative league within world football (Dennis, 2002) or due to the infrastructure (push) of the game in Africa (Elliott, 2014).

Similar to other migrant players, Irish players are attracted to England in search of inflated salaries (pull factor), as opposed to plying their trade in Irish leagues, which are economically and culturally less attractive than the EPL (push factor), with players needing to relocate to pursue their career in football (see McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014). Although Northern Ireland would not necessarily be at the periphery in

the context of the 'World Systems' approach, the general football landscape within Ireland is not dissimilar to that within periphery nations which encourages player migration as previously outlined.

As discussed, inward player migration within the EPL can be associated with 'push' and 'pull' factors and specific legislative development (Maguire and Pearton, 2000a). However it is also important to consider the financial affluence of the EPL, as Moorhouse (1994) claims that economics and power are central to the migration process.

The EPL is considered to be the worlds 'top league' (Anagnostopoulos & Senaux, 2011), which is not only the worlds most viewed league (Binder & Findlay, 2012), but also the most lucrative (Dennis, 2002), with cumulative club revenue around £3.26 billion (BBC, 2015). Such a prodigious growth has been facilitated through various financial streams including, sponsorship, merchandising, gate receipts, hospitality and broadcasting revenue (see Maguire & Pearton, 2000a, Barros & Leach, 2006; *The Political Economy of Football*, 2008). Such factors have potentially contributed towards an increase in player acquisition trends (Grant, 1998), as players are able to achieve higher wages in comparison to those within their home-nation (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). After all, English soccer has been referred to as the "fields of dreams" (*The Guardian*, 4 March 1997, p. 24, cited in Maguire & Stead, 2000). Such factors aforementioned are also applicable to Irish (including Northern Ireland) players who migrate to England to pursue a career in professional which provide enhanced salaries and development opportunities as opposed to Irish soccer which is somewhat underdeveloped in comparison to the EPL (see McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014).

As evidenced with Figure 3.2, the accumulated number of indigenous home-grown player appearances peaked in 1992/93 (N=9852; 87.3%). However, since 1992/93 the number of appearances accumulated by indigenous home-grown player continued to depreciate with the lowest number of appearances being recorded in 2009/10 (N=4399; 45.1%). The most significant decrease in appearances by indigenous home-grown player was between 1994/95 (N=9583; 85.4%) and 1996/97 (N=6867; 75.3%). In contrast, it is at this stage the number of appearances by

foreign players witnessed a pronounced increase. In 1994/95 foreign players made 1529 (13.6%) appearances, whilst in 1996/97 this figure had increased to 2142 (23.5%). It is also worth noting that such differentiations in respective player appearances coincided with similar observations in relation to player acquisitions (see Table 3.3). It is plausible to assume that the Bosman ruling played a significant role in facilitating the acquisition trends and further supports claims that there are diminishing opportunities for young emerging indigenous home-grown player (Gardiner & Welch, 2011), including a reduction in playing time (Frick, 2009).

As discussed, indigenous home-grown player witnessed a significant decrease in playing opportunities within the EPL throughout the 20-year period (1990-2010), with English players most directly affected. As exemplified within Figure 3.3, the number of English players appearances witnessed a pronounced decrease between 1990 and 2010, with largest volume of player appearances recorded in 1992/93 (N=8604; 76.3%). However, since 1992/93 English player appearances witnessed a fluctuating decline with lowest number of appearances recorded in 2009/10 (N=3256; 33.4%). In this respect, it is clearly evident that the presence of foreign players has had a detrimental effect upon indigenous home-grown player progression with the EPL and English players specifically, concerns which various academic researchers have highlighted. Maguire & Pearton (2000a) have also suggested that such potential trends are adversely affecting the viability and success of the National squad. Although the current data does not yield any clarification regarding such issues surrounding the National team, it is worth noting that although the number of English players acquired over the 20 year period has witnessed a decrease (between 1990/91 N=124 & 2009/10 N=105), English players are still the most acquired home-nation player (N=2636) and the largest frequency in comparison to non-indigenous home-grown (N=470) and foreign (N=1240) player acquisitions.

Furthermore, Frick (2009) concluded that the National teams of countries (i.e. England) were the top division teams have acquired foreign players will suffer in terms of playing strength, as their young players are replaced by foreigners, is not supported. These observations are further reiterated by Binder and Findlay (2012) who noted that the English National team was stronger post-Bosman than pre-Bosman. Binder and Findlay (2012) suggested that England's poor results in *some*

matches, such as during the qualifying for Euro 2008, and to an extent the 2006 World Cup, was due to an inability to '*shine in critical situations*' as opposed to lack of talented players. Indeed, if anything, English player performances should improve through the perceived development of skill and tacit knowledge as a result of player interaction with players from a diverse range of backgrounds (Wilkinson, 1997; Richardson & Littlewood, 1999; Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). However, despite these observations, this area still warrants future research.

As evidenced with Table 3.3 the acquisition of players from the remaining home-nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and Republic of Ireland) remains a salient feature of the current landscape. However, the acquisition of players from these nations is not a new phenomenon (Magee, 2002) with the movement of Scottish (see Moorehouse, 1994) and Irish (see McGovern, 2000; Bourke, 2002) players amongst some of the steadiest migration trends in the world. As exemplified in Table 3.3 players acquired from Northern Ireland (N=119) and Wales (N=128) were however the lowest figures for home-nations. However, despite this, the number of players acquired from Northern Ireland increased from 2 in 1990/91 to 7 in 2009/10; this being the third highest number of players acquired from Northern Ireland during the 20-year period. These acquisition trends are commensurate with Poli, Ravenel & Besson (2012) who noted that Irish players still remain a prevalent feature of the professional game's employment market. Commensurate with Elliott (2010), Republic of Ireland player acquisitions (N=294) remains the second largest nation outside England within the Celtic periphery. An explanation for such acquisition trends between England and Ireland may be due to the geographical closeness of both nations (Maguire & Stead, 1998). Further to this, Ireland is seen as a fertile and relatively cheap source of readily available raw talent (Bourke, 2003) and has witnessed player acquisitions every season since 1946 (McGovern, 2000).

In addition, such migration trends have been facilitated by the development of 'nurseries' by English clubs (i.e. Manchester United and others) to recruit players from within Ireland (Bourke, 2002). Such recruitment methods and the frequency of players acquired would support McGovern (2000), who suggested that Ireland was experiencing a 'Brawn Drain' as a result of English clubs youth policies in Ireland that are detrimental to the development of the game within Ireland. It would seem that

whilst the EPL and clubs have become more cosmopolitan in their recruitment strategies, the employment of Irish players remains a ubiquitous feature of the professional game's employment market (Elliott, 2014). Similar to other migrant players, Irish players are attracted to England in search of inflated salaries (pull factor), as opposed to plying their trade in Irish leagues, which are economically and culturally less attractive than the EPL (push factor), with players needing to relocate to pursue their career in football (see McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014). It is worth noting that out of the Celtic periphery, players from both Northern Ireland (0.3% to 2%) and the Republic of Ireland (3.6% to 5.7%) witnessed (albeit limited) an increase in player appearances between 1990 and 2010, in comparison to those from Scotland (2.2% to 1.3%) and Wales (5.6% to 2.7%).

As discussed and exemplified within the results section, there are perceived lack of opportunities for indigenous home-grown players within the EPL. These challenges are further exacerbated due to heightened performance expectations within the EPL and the reduced tolerance for failure (Reilly, Williams & Richardson, 2008). As evidenced within Figure 3.2 there is an increased propensity for clubs to play foreign players; these appearance trends have become increasingly more prominent in later years with accumulative foreign player appearances surpassing those of indigenous home-grown player in 2009/10. An explanation for such trends is due to the perceived direct link between spending in the transfer market and success (Chaplin, 2005a; Richardson, Littlewood & Gilbourne, 2005). Given that the EPL is a results orientated environment, with an average tenure of a manager spanning 2 years (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a), managers and clubs seek to acquire high profile 'finished' and 'complete' players in order to obtain immediate results within a challenging environment. Results from the current investigation are commensurate with concerns highlighted by Maguire and Pearton (2000a) and Chaplin (2005a) who advised migrant patterns were adversely affecting indigenous home-grown player development as illustrated within Figure 3.2.

However, with an ever increasing influx of foreign talent into the host nation (i.e. England and the EPL), as evidenced within Figure 3.2 it is not surprising that indigenous home-grown player are struggling to obtain a position within the first team

of English clubs and to make an appearance with foreign player appearances surpassing indigenous home-grown player as evidenced within Figure 3.2 in 2009/10.

Although Maguire and Pearton (2000a) insist managers have little option to scour the continent for cheaper foreign imports, as a ramification of the Bosman ruling has been to inflate the value of domestic youth (see Frick, 2009) as players are offered lucrative contracts by clubs in fear of losing them on a free transfer (Maguire & Pearton, 2000b). It is also important to note that the EPL has an ever increasing cosmopolitan work force which could further thwart indigenous home-grown player development and recruitment (see Adamson, 2000; McGovern, 2002). However, this area warrants future research to indicate any correlation between manager nationality and player acquisition / appearance trends.

In response to the perceived lack of emerging talent within UEFA Federations (which includes Europe and the EPL), National and International organisations, such as UEFA and FIFA, have sought to protect indigenous home-grown player through the implementation of player quotas that do not contravene EU law. It was envisaged that such directives would encourage clubs to invest more into youth development and to recruit from within (see Dastmalchian & Blyton, 1992) thus providing indigenous home-grown player opportunities which would be beneficial for the development of football. However, given that any UEFA policy was unable to differentiate and impose restriction upon player nationalities, this has only facilitated clubs acquisition processes contributing to the de-skilling of donor countries within the global periphery (Gardiner & Welch, 2011) whilst reducing playing opportunities for indigenous home-grown player within the EPL as exemplified within Figure 3.2

Foreign players based upon the current observations would appear to be stifling indigenous home-grown player development within the EPL, a trend which is allegedly being replicated within the youth ranks of EPL academies (Elliott, 2014). As an indigenous player is classified as any player that has been trained by a club or by another club in the same association (i.e. F.A.), for at least three years between the ages of 15 – 21 years, this ruling has encouraged clubs to recruit players from across the globe. As a result, the number of non-indigenous home-grown players acquired within the EPL between 1990/91 and 2009/10 witnessed a significant

increase with the largest frequency of players being acquired in 2007/08 (N = 65). It is plausible to infer that such an increase in 2007/08 is a result of clubs having to register four club trained, and four Association trained players with player acquisition trends coinciding with increased playing opportunities for non-indigenous home-grown players (see Figure 3.2) whilst indigenous home-grown player playing opportunities continue to decrease.

3.2 Conclusion; Study 1 - Player Acquisition and Appearance Trends Within English Professional Football 1990 - 2010

The current football landscape within the EPL resonates with previous academic research which has witnessed a contemporary globalisation of professional football (Elliott, 2014) as nation based systems of talent identification give way to club based, which increasingly look to the (soccer) periphery (Maguire & Pearton, 2000a). It is clearly evident that the migratory process is 'speeding up', with results indicating an intra-confederational player migration process with each regional affiliation of FIFA represented. UEFA (88%) as per previous academic research (see Elliott, 2010; Littlewood, Mullen & Richardson, 2011) was the most dominant regional affiliation of FIFA, whilst the acquisition of players from CAF (4.3%) and CONMEBOL (2.6%) were the most dominant regions outside UEFA. Commensurate with previous research conducted by Darby (2000, 2007), there was an increased propensity to acquire players from various nations within CAF; trends which were also replicated amongst non-indigenous home-grown players. Such acquisition processes employed by EPL clubs are further contributing towards the apparent de-skilling of African nations.

Indigenous home-grown player appearances decreased between 1990/91 (88.4%) and 2009/10 (45.1%) whilst foreign players increased from 11.1% to 47.3% during the same time period. It is plausible to infer that such trends have been lubricated as a ramification of the Bosman ruling which 'opened' the labour market. What is increasingly concerning is that the number of foreign player appearances continue to rise with the accumulative number of appearances surpassing those of indigenous home-grown players in 2007/08; a trend which was replicated in the following two

consecutive seasons which indicates that opportunities for the indigenous home-grown players are diminishing (Bullough & Mills, 2014).

Non-indigenous home-grown players have also become a prevalent feature of the landscape within the EPL. Such trends have led the International Players Union (IPU) to reiterate a requirement to protect young players (see Gardiner & Welch, 2011) who are subject to potential exploitive player recruitment process implemented by EPL clubs (Niemann & Brand, 2008).

As exemplified in section 3, it is becoming increasingly evident that the EPL is becoming a dependant development nation (McGovern, 2000) and a 'finishing' school for the rest of the world (Bullough & Mills, 2014) with foreign player appearances surpassing those of indigenous home-grown players whilst non-indigenous home-grown player appearances continue to gradually increase as exemplified within Figure 3.2. In this respect, observations documented would resonate with concerns expressed by Taylor (2007) who suggested that English football is in 'meltdown' as indigenous home-grown player opportunities continue to diminish.

A key priority for the FA must be to eradicate pronounced depreciations in English player acquisition and appearance trends (whilst also facilitating the development of other home-nations). The introduction of the Elite Player Performance Plan (EPPP) can only benefit indigenous home-grown player development, however, it is important to note that a range of processes contour player migration, therefore, it is pertinent that future research would examine EPL club recruitment procedures to determine 'why' there is an increased propensity and preference to acquire players from other nations; what do foreigners possess in comparison to indigenous home-grown youth?

It is clearly evident that the EPL has become a game without frontier and cannot survive without foreign players (Ben - Porat, 2002) who have facilitated the development of the league globally. However, if appearance and acquisition trends over the next 10 to 20 years follow those between 1990 and 2010, there could be

potentially more non-nationals than national players representing British clubs. Is English football in 'meltdown' as alluded to by Taylor (see Taylor, 2007)?

CHAPTER 4

4.0 Results and Discussion; Study 2 - A Synopsis of Northern Ireland players Migration Experiences

The migration of elite players has clearly become a salient feature of the football landscape as evidenced within the current study, whilst the migration of Irish (including Northern Ireland) players has been an ever present feature within the migratory process to the EPL (Poli, Ravenel & Besson, 2012). Despite Irish players being highly visible within the migration process, research examining Irish player migration motives, experiences, and the effect upon players has largely been ignored within sports and football labour migration literature (McGovern, 2000; Elliott, 2014; Curran, 2015). Current academic research has explored the development of football within Britain (see Russell, 1997), the de-skilling of Irish soccer and its implications for the 'garrison game' (see Bourke, 2011) and club recruitment processes (see Bourke, 2002). However, to date this research remains underdeveloped.

For some, the migratory process may be enjoyable and unproblematic, whereas others may encounter multiple challenging life experiences and critical moments (Magee & Sugden, 2002; Nesti & Littlewood, 2013). It is essential therefore that we better understand the lived experiences of those players involved in the migration process. Wylleman Alfermann and Lavalée (2004) also expressed the need to focus on life-span perspectives when examining athletic (player) transitions and experiences encountered. In this respect, there was a requirement to examine player migration journeys to collate a more contextually rich understanding of migratory experiences in order to gain a greater appreciation of Irish (specifically Northern Ireland) player migratory transitions to England and upon their return.

In order to achieve this, it was imperative to explore 'individual player experiences'. The following discussion regarding players migratory experiences have been thematically represented following a review of interview data in which key themes have been grouped to provide contextual meaning to player migratory experiences. It is important to note that gaining access to players was difficult (as experienced by previous academic researchers) and further examination of trends identified is required to further support findings identified.

4.1 Migration Rationale

As previously discussed the acquisition of Northern Ireland players has remained a salient feature of the football landscape within the EPL in spite of an ever increasing cosmopolitan workforce (Millward, 2007); this is clearly evident based upon acquisition trends observed. Commensurate with previous academic research Northern Ireland players interviewed regarding their migratory experiences moved to England for the 'love of the game' and the improved performance opportunities (see Bourke, 2002). The following narrative supports previous observations;

Robert - *"Obviously it was the standard; it's a high standard. The club appealed to me, one of the biggest clubs in the world (Club A). Their set up and stuff like that...that appealed to me and also because I wanted to be a professional footballer. So that was the reason why I went"*

Robert – *"You are playing football at the top level; a very high level ...Definitely high quality level and you're playing with better players all the time...South Africa, Canada, Australia; everywhere...France, Spanish"*

4.2 Acculturation

Contrary to previous research in this area (Richardson *et al.*, 2012), the Northern Irish players who migrated to England found the transition to be *smooth*. It is plausible to suggest that such migratory transitional experiences to England were eased due to the close assimilation (i.e. culture, language and the geographical closeness) between the two nations, and the general recruitment methods employed by clubs prior to the players committing to their respective clubs. For example, Brendan and Finbar suggested that:

Brendan – *"I got a lot of opportunities to go across as a 13 year old, a 12 or 13 year old boy to go across the water to have trials, to see the clubs, to see how it was all done"*

Finbar – *“Every weekend I was going over to (Club B) in the end. I was flying over after school on a Friday and back then on a Saturday evening after the match every weekend since I was 14 to 16 full-time. So that was different. I was more in a plane than I was in a car tell you the truth”*

In this respect, any associated processes of dislocation or bio-graphical disruption as alluded to by Elliott (2013) were unsupported; indeed this was similar for all interviewees, including Stephen, who attributed ease of migration to participation within the *“Northern Ireland Schoolboys”*. It is also important to note that players expressed the importance of Irish players at their respective clubs who were integral to the settling in process.

Keith – *“There was another wee lad from Dungannon over with me, so that was easier rather than just going over by myself...I settled in really quick, I think it was a lot to do with having that wee fella from Dungannon. We were together, wasn't like I was going into the changing room by myself, it was better like that there... There were a right few from Ireland when I was there; there was (Player names). They were all dead on; they help you wherever you went for the first team”*

It was clearly evident that clubs supported players throughout their transition from Northern Ireland to ensure that the complex process of acculturation, which relates to changes in environment (Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead, 2012) was eased. In this regard, it is important to note that players reported never *really* experiencing feelings of home-sickness, loneliness or self-doubt, as previously noted by Bourke (2003).

In stark contrast to previous work, the participants believed that they were well supported throughout the transition as expressed by Robert and Finbar:

Robert – *“Professional in the way they try and show you to bring you up; so definitely”...“treat you very well like”*

Finbar – *“As soon as you get off the plane there is somebody there to pick you up. I was brought to meet the manager and meet the first team and watch the first team*

train. It's a different class you know and then we went and watched the first team match, brought to the hotel. You were never left alone to tell you the truth. There was always somebody looking after you. It was very, very well done"

Each respective interviewee stayed in digs (host club accommodation) at the beginning of their time in England. It is important to note that the stability of a living environment where they felt comfortable further eased their migratory transition with families treating players like their 'sons' as outlined below:

Stephen – *"They looked after me as if I was one of their own and I still have that friendship to this day as well"*

In this respect, although the removal of family and peers, which is considered to be pivotal to players during the migration process (see Brown & Portrac, 2009) could have been detrimental to players, the environment at each of their respective host families was significant in terms of players embedding and assimilating into their new surroundings. Only Robert expressed concerns regarding his digs and the brief impact this had, however he appeared to be a strong *character* personally, which enabled him to adjust during this time period:

Robert – *"I didn't enjoy the digs that I was living in. I had a bit of a hard time, couldn't really get on with the people. It was a big challenge. The first three months and then after that I got sorted out. I changed digs and then the people that I changed with were excellent the second time and so that got me settled down"*

Despite this challenge Robert did not experience home-sickness:

Robert – *"No, I wasn't (home-sick), obviously the home-sick thing was always in the back of your mind but I really couldn't wait to go and get started but no, I just wanted to play football that was it, that's what got me through it"*

4.3 Performance / Progression Related Challenges

It was clearly evident from interviews conducted that challenges players experienced did not appear to be, (a) the initial migratory process and (b), time at their respective clubs, but the opportunity to progress within these establishments to first teams within English professional football. These observations resonate with those outlined within the current study that would indicate a decrease in opportunities for indigenous players. Although Northern Ireland player appearances and acquisitions increased *slightly* between 1990 and 2010, 52% of Northern Ireland players were sold with zero appearances during this time period. What is of increased significance is the number of Northern Ireland players released or ‘discarded’ with zero appearances to unknown destinations (29%) with players potentially football at this level following their release.

In addition to the challenges expressed in relation to progression at each of their respective clubs, players highlighted the increased performance expectations and the pressure to succeed on a daily basis. This highlighted not only the mental toughness required, but also the physical toughness in order to succeed in elite level sport (Crust, 2007):

Robert – *“It was intense the trialling period as well which was a big step for a young kid. You’re going over, you’re not just against the best players in England who they’ve brought over; you’re up against the best players in the world. They were bringing people over from all over, Canada, everywhere, so your trialling against all them, all the kids at your age. So there is a pretty hard step for kids, just every time you go out, your trialling. Every time we played back in my day, we used to play against the trialists or the trialists would play against the team that they already had (Club A team had at that age group). So you used to do that there, you know what I mean and they’re very intense games, you got to perform to try and get yourself a contract. So it was a lot of pressure at that age”*

Keith – *“It was different, just getting used to training every day, I was never used to it, so you were wrecked for the first month but then you got used to it and you were fine...the tempo is just miles faster”*

Gareth – *“Mental preparation; preparing yourself mentally that you have to be ready to make yourself known and make yourself known about the place. It was exciting that way”*

Finbar attributed part of his failure at Club B to the increased pressure on a daily basis...

Finbar – *“I just think my own personal opinion on the whole thing was I probably put too much into it. I can remember my dad saying to me whenever you go just come home with no regrets and 100% of the time I gave you know. I think if I maybe just took a wee chill pill and just let it happen a bit more I think maybe I may have been able to express myself a bit better whereas whenever I was training it was this is life or death”*

EPL clubs are clearly becoming increasingly diversified and the opportunities to progress within these establishments are becoming increasingly difficult. Players' releases amongst interviewees were mainly ascribed to physical attributes:

Robert – *“I'm very small. I'm only like five foot five, five foot four; I'm not very well built. I was only nine stone seven pounds through my whole career. I worked in a gym, they told me to work in a gym, I worked hard in the gym, I tried but I just couldn't get that physical presence. So that's really what hindered my career was trying to get that next step. It wasn't skill level or control, I would have been very high in that standard of passing and stuff like that but it was just the physical element of it”*

Gareth – *“For myself I was centre half position and I was a bit lean, wasn't physical enough. You weren't forced to go into the gym and bulk up and I probably needed to bulk up and be put on a special diet to fill out more and that didn't really materialise. Myself, I could have been 1 ½ - 2 stone less than some of the other players playing the same position, especially centre half, a physical position. I probably needed more to be set on a different type of programme to bulk up”*

Stephen – *“They just put it down to height wise. They had (Club A Player name) who was six foot five and they had (Player name) who was six foot two/six foot three so*

they put it down to you weren't tall enough... it's just really an excuse to get rid of you and an awful lot of the clubs would use height wise or not skilful enough as an excuse to get rid of you"

However the participants believed these were only 'excuses', as clubs were reluctant to give further explanation regarding their release, something Brendan outlined...

Brendan - *"I think out of four years of being at a club I always think a player deserves the decency of somebody giving you ten minutes of their time"*

Brendan also attributed his release whilst at Bristol to managerial changes; *"face doesn't fit" ...*

Brendan – *"I played a few first team games there at the start of the season and done well over about 12/15 matches. At the start of the season I was involved in about 12 of them and the manager got sacked. As the manager goes out the new manager comes in and your face doesn't fit and that's where it all went downhill really with me"*

It is important to note that managerial stability is pivotal to player development and progression (see Giulanotti, 1999) and also evidenced by Elliott (2010). The average tenure of a manager within English football is approx. 2 years, therefore it is difficult for players to make that *leap* into the professional domain, where the cost of failure is now significant. This is due to the perceived link between spending in the transfer market and success, which is heightened due to the results orientated environment within the EPL (Richardson et al., 2012). As a result, this further impinges upon progression opportunities for players...

Brendan – *"For a club the size of Liverpool maybe if they need a player it's maybe more beneficial for them to go and buy the player that they wish"*

Keith - *"It is hard for the manager to put young fellas in, he was always going to use his experienced players; survival was the main thing"*

As discussed, 29% of players were discarded between 1990 and 2010. It is at this stage players witnessed the most significant impact with feelings of unaccomplishment (see Erpic, Wylleman & Zupancic, 2004) in comparison to any other stage during the migratory process...

Keith – *“It’s a lot different, you see when you’re not training every day and you’re just sitting about the house, it’s hard enough to adapt”*

Finbar – *“The toughest time of my life by far you know. All of a sudden you are going from full-time training to having to work every day, just a massive, massive change and you can see why lots of players who come back just basically quit football you know. I know boys from where I live and they have come back and they don’t even play football now and I can see why...It’s just one of them things you just get on with it and you’re lucky enough to get through it but it wasn’t easy, definitely not”*

Stephen – *“It took me a while to get used to not getting a contract and thinking that the whole world was going to end...Struggled in terms that you have gone from people keeping an eye on you to trying to keep an eye on yourself. I’d struggle maybe mentally as well in terms of not coping well with training and the physical aspect because you had people looking after your training and making sure your diet was correct whereas I would have struggled that way. Put on a bit of weight but then lucky enough I had my mum and dad around me and then I also had Kenny at Ballymena and they would have brought me to the side and said here you need to start working harder, you need to start eating properly, you need to start concentrating on your studies whereas I thought it would just automatically happen for me”*

4.4 Player Support Post – Transition / Release

Throughout their careers to this point players were supported by clubs in terms of (a) education, (b) training, (c) housing, and (d) general support, however, it is at the point of release players felt that they really required ‘support’ from their respective clubs and other organisations within the football fraternity to ease such a transition. However such support was perceived to be never forthcoming. It is reasonable to

suggest from player interviews that players were left in ‘*the dark*’ and with a ‘*lack of guidance*’. It is important to accentuate that the Irish Football Association (IFA) may need to involve themselves more within player’s migratory experiences and to offer support at this time. Brendan clearly understands the importance of support at this point and seeks to provide support to local players to ensure that such experiences are alleviated...

Brendan – *“Thankfully now being within a coaching role, an advisory role as such to the players you can maybe pass on a little bit of your information especially till Dungannon United Youth, the local kids that’s maybe going across the water, you can have chats with them, you can make sure they are alright, you can speak to them on the phone while they are over there, via social media you can keep in touch with them...I think it keeps them grounded whenever they have somebody from their past or their background were their beginning, were you get in touch with somebody or you run across somebody and have a good chat and you can keep them sort of grounded... Keep them at their roots and you can give them a wee bit of advice as to where you failed and try to point them in the right direction”*

4.5 Conclusion; Study 2 - A Synopsis of Northern Ireland players Migration Experiences

The findings from Study 2 suggested that Northern Ireland players clearly experienced a range of challenges during the migration process as they sought a career within English professional football. The current study explored a range of factors involved in this migration process, however further research is required within this area, with a larger sample of players, in order to more fully understand the transition process at the pre, during and post migration phases. Future work also needs to potentially explore Governing Body involvement within this adjustment process, i.e. IFA and Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and how they seek to support players (a) prior to migration, and potentially more significant, (b) post-release. It is important to note that the IFA were contacted on several occasions to engage within the current study, however no response was given, further highlighting the challenging nature of research investigating the lived experiences and social support in professional football.

It is evident from the findings that player experiences was not particularly connected exclusively to migration process itself, but akin to previous academic research, was associated with the challenges they experience as they seek to progress to first teams at their respective clubs. Clubs clearly have diversified their recruitment processes acquiring players from a diversifying range of countries. In that sense it is imperative that potential future studies further explore these acquisition processes within clubs themselves, i.e. why are certain players acquired, what attributes are sought and why.

CHAPTER 5

5.0 Applied Implications for the Current Research

The current research has yielded significant findings in relation to player acquisition trends over the 20 – year period (1990 – 2010) with clubs clearly diversifying recruitment approaches. The trends indicate that if migratory and appearance trends were to continue in future years, there may be more non–nationals plying their trade within the EPL than indigenous home-grown talent (inclusive of youth players). This is clearly of significant importance to the home nations within the context of the UK, especially at international level. It is recognised that playing at the highest level in the domestic game (i.e., EPL), is a marker of quality, which may have translational affects to the standard and expectations at the national level. The continued absence of indigenous players competing at the top level within a UK context may impede the long-term progression of National teams and is worthy of ongoing and future exploration.

The current study has not reviewed clubs specific recruitment processes, however this is an area which warrants further research to establish the motivations underpinning talent acquisition and the associated views related to talent development and progression (i.e., indigenous talent progression from youth to senior environments). We have previously noted from Taylor (2007), who stated that English football was in ‘meltdown’ and with clubs clearly recruitment players from around the globe, potentially at the expense of indigenous home-grown player development, future research should examine player characteristics that encourages clubs to acquire players, as opposed to investing in youth and playing those from the within. In addition, it is felt that a more systematic inquiry into the de-skilling of donor nations, in this case Northern Ireland, is required to more fully understand the ‘real’ and ‘long-term’ impact of the talent drain from small nations that are peripheral to the more dominant leagues (i.e., the EPL). The impact of the EPPP and its advanced recruitment practices are not yet fully understood from a donor nation perspective at the grassroots level and it is felt that this would add important knowledge for youth development practices in this context.

Although Study 2 of the current research sought to examine player migratory experiences (with a focus upon Northern Ireland players), the current findings

documented require further academic exploration to support observations; as those evidenced within the narratives appear to not fully support previous academic literature to date. Despite the large volume of qualitative data collated it may not have significantly reviewed the migration experience of players to the extent expected, however it does provide a solid platform for future research. It is noteworthy that the interviewers 'qualitative experience' may have affected the full outcome and inexperience to probe the interviewees further to expand on issues outlined. It may also have been difficult for players to relate fully and retrospective to their migratory experience as this for some occurred approx. 15 years ago and feelings will have changed during this period. Despite these methodological limitations within the study, it is felt that the mixed method approach to this question has provided a broad overview of the current football landscape within the context of labour migration from a Northern Irish perspective, and addresses various key issues in relation to club recruitment practices and the subsequent impact (both quantitatively and qualitatively) upon indigenous home-grown players. However, the area collectively can be progressed to further explore issues also identified throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 6

6.0 References

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CHAPTER 7

7.0 Appendix

Table 7.1 Club Variable Coding

Code	Club
1	Arsenal
2	Aston Villa
3	Chelsea
4	Everton
5	Liverpool
6	Manchester United
7	Tottenham Hotspur
8	Barnsley
9	Birmingham City
10	Bradford City
11	Charlton Athletic
12	Coventry City
13	Crystal Palace
14	Derby County
15	Ipswich Town
16	Leeds United
17	Luton Town
18	Notts County
20	Leicester City
21	Reading
22	Watford
23	Wimbledon
24	Oldham Athletic
25	Nottingham Forest
26	Norwich City
27	Queens Park Rangers
28	Sheffield United

29	Sheffield Wednesday
30	Southampton
31	Blackburn Rovers
32	Wigan Athletic
33	Wolverhampton Wanderers
34	West Bromwich Albion
35	Fulham
36	Portsmouth
37	Sunderland
38	Bolton Wanderers
39	Manchester City
40	West Ham United
41	Middlesborough
42	Newcastle United
43	Burnley
44	Stoke City
45	Hull City

Table 7.2 Nationality variable coding for players represented in English professional football (EPL) 1990-2010.

Code	Nationality	Affiliation Coding
1	England	1
2	Scotland	1
3	Wales	1
4	Northern Ireland	1
5	Republic of Ireland	1
6	France	3
7	Germany	3
8	Italy	3
9	Brazil	6
10	Ghana	7

11	DR Congo	7
12	Faroe Islands	3
13	Sweden	2
14	USA	5
15	Netherlands	3
16	Denmark	2
17	Spain	3
18	Portugal	3
19	Poland	4
20	Trinidad and Tobago	5
21	Guinea	7
22	Finland	2
23	Australia	9
24	Austria	3
25	Switzerland	3
26	Hungary	4
27	Uganda	7
28	Belgium	3
29	Nigeria	7
30	Israel	3
31	Argentina	6
32	Slovakia	4
33	New Zealand	9
34	Iceland	2
35	Norway	2
36	Liberia	7
37	Ukraine	4
38	Croatia	4
39	Lithuania	4
40	Latvia	4
41	Cameroon	7
42	Greece	3

43	Japan	8
44	Ivory Coast	7
45	Czech Republic	4
46	Yugoslavia	4
47	Belarus	4
48	Estonia	4
49	Togo	7
50	Turkey	3
51	Mexico	5
52	Colombia	6
53	Morocco	7
54	Ecuador	6
55	Peru	6
56	Bulgaria	4
57	Russia	4
58	Romani	4
59	Uruguay	6
60	Georgia	4
61	South Africa	7
62	Zimbabwe	7
63	Serbia and Montenegro	4
64	Canada	5
65	China	8
66	Egypt	7
67	Senegal	7
68	Paraguay	6
69	South Korea	8
70	Algeria	7
71	Slovenia	4
72	Mali	7
73	Bolivia	6
74	Honduras	5

75	Macedonia	4
76	Tunisia	7
77	Jamaica	5
78	Costa Rica	5
79	Zambia	7
80	Sierra Leone	7
81	Barbados	5
82	Tanzania	7
83	Grenada	5
84	Malawi	7
85	Vietnam	8
86	Guatemala	5
87	Saudi Arabia	8
88	Iran	8
89	Chile	6
90	Mozambique	7
91	Cyprus	3
92	Gabon	7
93	Cape Verde	7
94	Gambia	7
95	Albania	4
96	Qatar	8
97	Libya	7
98	Somalia	7
99	Malta	3

Table 7.3 UEFA sub-groups and FIFA confederations represented in English professional football (EPL) 1990-2010.

Sub-Groups of UEFA	Countries Included	Coding
British Isles and Republic of Ireland	England (1) Scotland (2) Wales (3)	1

	Northern Ireland (4) Republic of Ireland (5)	
Scandinavian	Sweden (13) Denmark (16) Finland (22) Iceland (34) Norway (35)	2
Western Europe	France (6) Germany (7) Italy (8) Faroe Islands (12) Netherlands (15) Spain (17) Portugal (18) Austria (24) Switzerland (25) Belgium (28) Israeli (30) Greece (42) Turkey (50) Cyprus (91) Malta (99)	3
Eastern (Former Eastern Bloc Countries)	Poland (19) Hungary (26) Slovakian (32) Ukraine (37) Croatia (38) Lithuania (39) Latvia (40) Czech Republic (45) Yugoslavia (46) Belarus (47) Estonia (48)	4

	<p>Bulgaria (56)</p> <p>Russia (57)</p> <p>Romania (58)</p> <p>Georgia (60)</p> <p>Serbia and Montenegro (63)</p> <p>Slovenia (71)</p> <p>Macedonia (75)</p> <p>Albania (95)</p>	
CONCACAF	<p>America (14)</p> <p>Trinidad and Tobago (20)</p> <p>Mexico (51)</p> <p>Canada (64)</p> <p>Honduras (74)</p> <p>Jamaica (77)</p> <p>Costa Rica (78)</p> <p>Barbados (81)</p> <p>Grenada (83)</p> <p>Guatemala (86)</p>	5
CONMEBOL	<p>Brazil (9)</p> <p>Argentina (31)</p> <p>Colombia (52)</p> <p>Ecuador (54)</p> <p>Peru (55)</p> <p>Uruguay (59)</p> <p>Paraguay (68)</p> <p>Bolivia (73)</p> <p>Chile (89)</p>	6
CAF	<p>Ghana (10)</p> <p>DR Congo (11)</p> <p>Guinea (21)</p> <p>Uganda (27)</p> <p>Nigeria (29)</p> <p>Liberia (36)</p>	7

	Cameroon (41) Ivory Coast (44) Togo (49) Morocco (53) South Africa (61) Zimbabwe (62) Egypt (66) Senegal (67) Algeria (70) Mali (72) Tunisia (76) Zambia (79) Sierra Leone (80) Tanzania (82) Malawi (84) Mozambique (90) Gabon (92) Cape Verde (93) Gambia (94) Libya (97) Somalia (98)	
AFC	Japan (43) China (65) South Korea (69) Vietnam (85) Saudi Arabia (87) Iran (88) Qatar (96)	8
OFC	Australian (23) New Zealand (33)	9

*Israel is included as an Associate member of UEFA, this account for its inclusion.

UEFA sub-groups and FIFA confederations and Regional Affiliates of FIFA represent separate columns in SPSS.

Table 7.4 Time Period.

Code	Season
1	1990/91
2	1991/92
3	1992/93
4	1993/94
5	1994/95
6	1995/96
7	1996/97
8	1997/98
9	1998/99
10	1999/00
11	2000/01
12	2001/02
13	2002/03
14	2003/04
15	2004/05
16	2005/06
17	2006/07
18	2007/08
19	2008/09
20	2009/10

Table 7.5 Games available per season.

Season	Games
1974/75	42
1975/76	42
1976/77	42

1977/78	42
1978/79	42
1979/80	42
1980/81	42
1981/82	42
1982/83	42
1983/84	42
1984/85	42
1985/86	42
1986/87	42
1987/88	40
1988/89	38
1989/90	38
1990/91	38
1991/92	42
1992/93	42
1993/94	42
1994/95	42
1995/96	38
1996/97	38
1997/98	38
1998/99	38
1999/00	38
2000/01	38
2001/02	38
2002/03	38
2003/04	38
2004/05	38
2005/06	38
2006/07	38
2007/08	38
2008/09	38

2009/10	38
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Table 7.6 Transfer origins and destinations.

Code	Club/Country
1	Indigenous
2	English Lower
3	English Premier League
4	Unknown
5	Retired
6	Scotland
7	Russia
8	Norway
9	Belgium
10	Italy
11	France
12	Wales
13	Netherlands
14	Denmark
15	Portugal
16	Spain
17	Germany
18	Austria
19	Republic of Ireland
20	Sweden
21	Switzerland
22	Ukraine
23	Brazil
24	Latvia
25	Syria
26	Greece
27	Japan

28	Ivory Coast
29	America
30	Czech Republic
31	Poland
32	Croatia
33	Turkey
34	Yugoslavia
35	Finland
36	Israel
37	Argentina
38	Northern Ireland
39	Qatar
40	Georgia
41	Cyprus
42	Uruguay
43	Mexico
44	China
45	Egypt
46	Australia
47	Iceland
48	Canada
49	Paraguay
50	Hungary
51	Bulgaria
52	New Zealand
53	Romania
54	Saudi Arabia
55	Serbia
56	Africa
57	Slovakia
58	Slovenia
59	Faroe Islands

60	Ecuador
61	Nigeria
62	Iran
63	Zimbabwe
64	Peru
65	Malaysia
66	South Korea
67	Trinidad and Tobago
68	Estonia
69	Cost Rica
70	Colombia
71	Jamaica
72	Chile
73	Gambia

Table 7.7 Indigenous Players Sold and Appearances 1990 – 2010 within the EPL.

Indigenous Players Sold	England	Scotland	Northern Ireland	Wales	Republic of Ireland	Total
Total Sold	2644	151	90	129	250	3264
Total Sold with Appearances	1489 (56%)	75 (49.7%)	43 (48%)	77 (60%)	99 (40%)	1774 (54%)
Total Sold with Zero Appearances	1150 (44%)	76 (50.4%)	47 (52%)	52 (40%)	151 (60%)	1476 (46%)
Total Released	614 (23%)	29 (19%)	26 (29%)	27 (21%)	100 (40%)	796 (24%)

Table 7.8 Non – Indigenous Players Acquired per Confederation 1990 – 2010.

Confederation	Frequency
France	58
Germany	21
Italy	32
Brazil	12
Ghana	10
DR Congo	13
Faroe Islands	3
Sweden	19
USA	15
Netherlands	18
Denmark	14
Spain	13
Portugal	14
Poland	7
Trinidad and Tobago	8
Guinea	1
Finland	11
Australia	35
Austria	7
Switzerland	8
Hungary	8
Uganda	1
Belgium	8
Nigeria	18
Israel	1
Argentina	10
Slovakia	5
New Zealand	6
Iceland	9

Norway	13
Liberia	1
Ukraine	0
Croatia	0
Lithuania	0
Latvia	0
Cameroon	4
Greece	0
Japan	0
Ivory Coast	3
Czech Republic	4
Yugoslavia	2
Belarus	0
Estonia	0
Togo	0
Turkey	2
Mexico	2
Colombia	0
Morocco	0
Ecuador	0
Peru	0
Bulgaria	1
Russia	1
Romania	0
Uruguay	0
Georgia	0
South Africa	8
Zimbabwe	2
Serbia and Montenegro	0
Canada	9
China	0

Egypt	0
Senegal	1
Paraguay	3
South Korea	0
Algeria	1
Slovenia	0
Mali	2
Bolivia	1
Honduras	0
Macedonia	0
Tunisia	1
Jamaica	3
Costa Rica	0
Zambia	0
Sierra Leone	2
Barbados	1
Tanzania	1
Grenada	1
Malawi	1
Vietnam	1
Guatemala	0
Saudi Arabia	1
Iran	0
Chile	0
Mozambique	0
Cyprus	1
Gabon	0
Cape Verde	0
Gambia	1
Albania	0
Qatar	0
Libya	1

Somalia	1
Malta	1

Table 7.9 Interview Questions

Phase 1: Introduction and Football History

Aim: Outline interview structure, research objective and duration. Reinforce aspects such as participant confidentiality.

Introduction: Outline interview structure, anticipated duration and research objective. Reinforce aspects such as participant confidentiality. Outline personal football experiences, academic background and how I become involved within football research.

Questions:

- What is your previous playing history (club(s)/level, including National)?
- What was it like to grow up in _____? and play for the local team?
- Where there any perceived barriers to progression within the game in Ireland which encouraged you to pursue a football career in England?
- What attracted you to England?
- How would you describe your relationship with previous coaches/players?

Supporting Academic Literature:

- Cote (1999)
- Bourke (2002)
- McGovern (2000)
- Elliott (2014)

Phase 2: Inward Migration Experience

Aim: To critically explore player migratory experience from 'approach phase' to 'migration' to Premier League Club (i.e. post – arrival appraisal; feelings, emotions and behaviours experienced during this phase) to the day – to – day experiences at the new club (i.e. living away from home, relationships, culture etc.) and support network provided during this transition.

Questions:

Key Question (Approach Phase) 1:

- Who approached you from the club and what happened next (trial etc.)?
- Who did you contact first to inform them of the clubs approach?
- How did they react? What was their response?
- How did your family react?
- How did your friends react? What did you say to them?
- Were family and friends supportive?

Supporting Q1 (Approach Phase) Questions:

- How did you find out that an English club was interested in you?
- Did you inform your current club?
- Who did you contact within the club?
- How did the person/club react?
- Did the club invite you and your family over?
- Did you have to complete a formal trial?
- If so, how did you react to this? How did you prepare? How did you get on in the trial? How did you feel? What was the training ground/academy like? Did you feel at home or did the environment make you feel nervous?
- How did the club treat any family/friends who had travelled with you?
- What were your family's perceptions? Were they supportive?

Key Question (Preparation Phase) 2:

- How did things progress following the initial contact after informing people/family etc.?
- What was your initial response/thoughts? How did you feel?
- Did you have any hopes or aspirations at this stage?
- How did you start to prepare yourself for the potential move to England? Was there support provided at any stage (IFA, club etc.)?

Key Question (Migration Phase) 3:

Departure:

- On the day you departed, how did you, your family and friends feel? Were they supportive?
- What were your perceptions/thoughts at this stage? Did you foresee any challenges upon arriving to pursue your football career?
- How did things progress throughout the day? (i.e. meeting club representatives etc.)

Club Experience:

- On your first initial day at the club how were you greeted? Were staff/coaches friendly? How did you feel etc.? What was it like?
- How was your first training session? How did you interact with the group? How did you feel? Overall, how well did you think you had done and were there any issues (i.e. language barriers etc.)? Did you speak with anyone afterwards?
- What challenges were you personally experiencing to integrate yourself?
- How was your relationship with (a) coaches (b) other players etc. including those you were living with etc.? Did these relationships ease your transition?
- What was the culture like at the club in general? (welcoming, masculine dominated etc.)?

Supporting Q3 (Migration Phase) Questions:

- Were you approached at any other stage prior to deciding upon your chosen club?
If yes, how did you know that this was the club for you?
- How did your friends feel about you leaving to pursue a career within football?
- Was your family supportive of your decision to pursue a career within football?
- Did any members of your family accompany you? (even as far as the airport/boat?)
- Do you have any siblings? If yes, how many and what are their names
- If yes, how did your siblings react to your decision to migrate to England to pursue a career within football?
- Was your previous club supportive? If yes, please explain.
- On arrival did a club representative meet you at the airport/harbour?
- If yes, who met you and how did they make you feel? Where did you go thereafter?
- If no, did you know this in advance? If not, who left instructions for you and how did you react? Where were you to go?
- Where did you stay?
- What was it like?
- Were you living with anyone else? Were you off the same nationality?
- Were you around the same age as those you were living with?
- Did you feel at home in your new lodgings?
- Was there much difference in the training approaches in comparison to previous sessions at your old club(s) etc.? Was there much support to cope with any increased demands/expectations?
- If you were supported, who supported you and how?
- When did you have your first initial game? Was there any pressure? If yes, was this internal, external or personal?
- Did you speak to your family much at the beginning or members of your previous coaching teams/club(s)?
- Did you feel you were becoming a member of the team/club?
- How did you cope managing your academic studies alongside your training etc.? (if applicable)
- Was the club environment/culture different from what you had previously been exposed too? Were there any language barriers?
- How often did you see your family? Did you ever feel like you were missing out on

social events?

Supporting Academic Literature:

- Cote (1999)
- Griffin & Pustay (2002)
- Bourke (2002)
- Richardson, Gilbourne & Littlewood (2004)
- Bourke (2003)
- Parker (2006)
- Pummell, Harwood & Lavellee (2008)
- Relvas, Littlewood, Nesti, Richardson & Gilbourne (2010)
- Nesti & Littlewood (2011)
- Richardson, Littlewood, Nesti & Benstead (2012)

Phase 3: Outward Migration Experience and Current Football Background

Aim: To critically explore player experience(s) during 'outward' migration phase and plausible explanations for release (or failure to succeed) and current football participation (including level).

Key Question (Release/Departure Experience) 1:

- How did you feel once (i.e. shock) you knew that you were going to be released by your club? Did you speak to anyone in particular?
- Who informed you of your release? Was there any feedback provided?
- Did the club offer you any support at this stage? If yes, please explain.
- Was there any additional external support (i.e. FA, IFA etc.)?

Supporting Q1 (Release/Departure Experience) Questions:

- How did they inform you?
- After you knew you were being released who did you speak to?

- What did you tell them?

- Did you foresee/predict that you may have been released or was the news a shock?

Key Question (Club Experience) 2:

- Upon reflection, what do you perceive were some of the barriers to your progression at the club?

- Do you feel that your experience at an English club has enhanced your football ability?

Key Question (Transition Experience) 3:

- In one sentence, how would you sum up your experience at the club and your migratory transition?

Supporting Q2/Q3 (Club/Transition Experience) Questions:

- What if any challenges did you experience during your transition back into home life?

- How did your family/friends react to you coming home?

- How did you react with them? Did you feel embarrassed that you had been released?

- Are you currently playing for a club? If yes, what level are you playing at?

Supporting Academic Literature:

- Erpic, Wylleman & Zupancic (2004)

- Brown & Portrac (2009)

- Curran (2015)

Phase 4: Support and Player Identity

Aim: To critically explore player support networks throughout the migration process and to evaluate the impact of the player's career journey on them as an 'individual'.

Key Question (Departure Support) 1:

- What, if any, support was provided prior to your departure to England?

Key Question (Club Support) 2:

- During your time at the club, if you experienced a bad day or problem, who could/did you turn to for advice and support?

Supporting Q2 (Club Support) Questions:

- Can you give any examples of issues you may have encountered?

Key Question (Family Support) 3:

- Did you ever turn to your family or members of your previous club(s) when you experienced difficulties?

Supporting Q3 (Family Support) Questions:

- Were the staff at the club supportive?

Key Question (Overall Support) 4:

- In your personal opinion do you believe that there was appropriate support provided to cope with the stresses of the football environment and to help you integrate following your move to England from Northern Ireland?

- If no, what additional support would you have like to have seen?

Key Question (Future Support) 5:

- What could be offered to future players to ease the transition/migration experience?

Key Question (Player Identity) 6:

- Do you feel like the whole experience has had any impact upon you as a person?

Supporting Academic Literature:

- Bourke (2002)
- Erpic, Wylleman & Zupancic (2004)
- Richardson, Gilbourne & Littlewood (2004)
- Brown & Portrac (2009)
- Curran (2015)

Phase 5: Other Significant and/or Critical Experiences and Future Recommendations

Aim: To critically explore any other significant factors which may have contributed towards player release (including factors which may have impinged on their progression). Future recommendations to enable a more effective transition throughout all aspects of the process.

Key Questions:

- Whilst at the club what do you feel were the main barriers/challenges you experienced as you sought a career in professional football?
- Did you ever speak to anyone regarding the perceived challenges?
- If yes, what advice were you given?
- In your opinion, how do you feel the club dealt with these challenges?
- How could support be provided in the future to cope with such challenges?

Supporting Academic Literature:

- Richardson, Gilbourne & Littlewood (2004)

N.B. A number of questions are also in aforementioned sections which are appropriate to this area. Previous academic literature also outlined appropriate to research area.

Phase 6: Closure

Aim: Express sincere thanks and gratitude to player for engaging within the interview process and for giving up their time and ascertain future correspondence or dialogue.

CHAPTER 8

8.0 Interview Transcriptions

8.1 Interview 1 (Robert)

Interviewer - Just starting off, just tell me a wee bit about your playing history and maybe where you started off playing and how did you get on playing within Northern Ireland itself before you moved across to England?

Interviewee - I started off basically in a boys club, Lisburn Youth, so my local boys club; I was with them since I was about seven years of age or somethings like that. So I played with them right till I was under 12, was really the last time I stopped playing for them, under 12. Once I finished with the boys club, Lisburn Youth I got signed, well, I got looked at by Manchester United when I was nine years of age. Still playing for Lisburn Youth but going down to the Centre of Excellence down at Belfast. Trained with them once a week every week, still training with Lisburn Youth and then from when I was about nine, ten, eleven, you just went over and did your trials at Manchester United at Easter time, Christmas time, Summer time. You went over and you did trials and they see whether you were good enough. Then when I was about 12 years of age I think, they told me I was going to get a contract when I was 14. So from 12, Under 12 and Under 13 what I was doing was going over every weekend to Manchester and playing for the Under 13s so instead of playing for Lisburn Youth I was going over every weekend and playing for the Under 13s at Manchester United and when I was 14 that's when I got offered my five year contract at 14. And that's when I went over.

Interviewer – What attracted you across to England in terms of the footballing aspects?

Interviewee – Obviously it was the standard; it's a high standard. The club appealed to me, one of the biggest clubs in the world. Their set up and stuff like that there and that appealed to me and also because I wanted to be a professional footballer. So that was the reason why I went.

Interviewer - You see when you were going across did anybody ever go with you? Like parents or club members?

Interviewee - Yes, you would have your scout Eddie Coulter, who passed away there, Manchester United scout. So Eddie would take you over at the start, say the first two, three times you went over, for your trials. He would go over with you and then after that you were getting used to it and you'd go over with maybe you and your other team mates from here and we'd go over and you'd start going over by yourselves.

Interviewer - You see your family and friends how did they react to your pursuit of trying to get a career within the English football itself?

Interviewee - Yeah my parents, my mum was obviously, it's a very early age to go at 14 years of age to leave home and go to a new school in a different country in England, but they wouldn't stop me. My dad was a big football man and he loved it, so they were very supportive of me.

Interviewer - What was your own thoughts and feelings? Were you nervous or how did you feel about going across?

Interviewee - No, I wasn't, obviously the homesickness thing was always in the back of your mind but I really couldn't wait to go and get started. It is tough at the start when you are there, getting settled in and stuff like that but once you got through that six month stage then you start settling down a wee bit. But no, I just wanted to play football that was it, that's what got me through it.

Interviewer - You see the settling in period, what were the main sorts of challenges for you during that time period at the club?

Interviewee - People that you live with and I didn't enjoy the digs that I was living in. I had a bit of a hard time, couldn't really get on with the people. It was a big challenge. The first three months and then after that I got sorted out. I changed digs and then the people that I changed with were excellent the second time and so that

got me settled down. Obviously your new schools, you got to get through that and then the way you were training. You were training three nights a week and playing your matches on a Saturday, training on a Sunday as well. So it was getting maybe only training over here for Lisburn youth one night a week, Manchester United School of Excellence one night a week maybe only training here two nights a week; so then you were going three nights a week and playing on a Saturday and training on a Sunday so it was adapting to that, more football, more training side of it.

Interviewer - Quite intense then at some stages then?

Interviewee - Aww yeah, without a doubt, you know what I mean. It was intense the trialling period as well which was a big step for a young kid. You're going over, you're not just against the best players in England who they've brought over, you're up against the best players in the world. They were bringing people over from all, Canada, everywhere, so your trialling against all them, all them kids at your age. So there is a pretty hard step for kids, just every time you go out, your trialling. Every time you got a trial, each match, playing against each other. Every time we played back in my day, we used to play and we used to play against the trialists or the trialists would play against the team that they already had Manchester United team had at that age group. So you used to do that there, you know what I mean and they're very intense games, you got to perform to try and get yourself a contract. So it was pressure at that age

Interviewer - A lot of weight on young shoulders isn't it?

Interviewee - Yeah, without a doubt.

Interviewer - You see the first digs you were living in, you were talking about a load of different challenges, what was it like, language challenges, just general sort of stuff, like housekeeping or what? What was the sort of the big issues in your first digs before you managed to settle within your second one?

Interviewee - Dealing with different personalities, like small things, like they had dogs and I never had dogs, you know what I mean. They were a lot stricter than your

parents and (not audible) just things like that you're trying to get used to. I just couldn't warm to them basically.

Interviewer - Found it difficult generally?

Interviewee - Yeah, generally just couldn't warm to them.

Interviewer - Whenever you first went across, you were at the club, who sort of greeted you whenever you were there at the club, your first day? Obviously you done loads of different training sessions but how do you think you interact with the group and obviously the first one you did, how do you feel that went for you generally?

Interviewee - I moved over when I was 14, but I was going over every single weekend from I was under 12 so (not audible) excepted into the group, so I already had my team mates already. I already know my coaches and Dave Bushel who was looking after all the kids with their schooling; they have all that sorted out, it's very good the way they do it. They built it in right from an early age, whenever I was younger as well, Under 12, I was going to like places like America, playing tournaments, Spain, France. I went to Mauritius one year. So I already knew everybody, because I was there from an early age. So going on the first day was fine, it was just obviously meeting new people. You met your new people a couple of weeks before you went and you maybe stayed. It's excellent way that they do it. So when you go you already know everybody.

Interviewer - The club culture, how would you describe the culture of the club whenever you were there for a period of time?

Interviewee - Culture was brilliant, you know what I mean. It's the biggest club in the world. Everybody's friendly but it is competitive and that's what it is, but you are treated very very well like.

Interviewer - Superb. So the IFA, did they ever give you much support. Obviously you were coming from Lisburn boys club, how did they support you through the process and things like that?

Interviewee - (not audible) getting called up for your National team, that's all the dealings that I really had with them, when you were getting called into the squad or whatever it was, Under 15s or Victory Shield or something like that. That's really all the dealings you had with the IFA.

Interviewer - It was relatively in the background?

Interviewee - Yeah, I never really had much dealing with them. Manchester United looked after all that there.

Interviewer – Excellent. Were you ever approached at any stage by a club or was it just Manchester United who was always the one looking for you?

Interviewee - Basically it was just Manchester United, like when I was about nine, ten, eleven, twelve, it was only Manchester United. Manchester United basically warned off other clubs that he's ours and he will be signing a five year contract when he's 14, so there's no point even asking him. I did have West Ham who were very very keen before I signed at 14. They were really really keen on bringing me or signing me and they did offer me a contract as well, but all the other clubs knew I was going to Manchester United so there was really only one club that asked.

Interviewer - You were quite content to go to United as well?

Interviewee - Aww yeah, without a doubt, definitely.

Interviewee - I stayed with the club for actually about 3 years. I stayed with Manchester United and about two, two and a half years left on my contract and then I went to Sunderland.

Interviewer - Was that a decision of your own?

Interviewee - That was a decision of my own. My own personal reasons.

Interviewer - Personal reasons you decided to move club then?

Interviewee - Yeah I just decided to move. I was going into my first year YTS, that they call at Manchester United and I had two and a half year contract of three years left and was sitting at the table ready to sign but I chose not to sign it. I just thought going somewhere else would give me a better opportunity. I wasn't playing for the first team, I don't know whether it was the right decision at the time or not. At Manchester United you were given a three year contract, two years YT you called it, so it was like £120 a week and then in your third year you turned professional. So basically me and my dad and agent really wanted a three year professional contract but when I turned 17 and on my birthday I was away from home and wanted stability from being away from home. So Manchester United only gave me one out of the three so that's when I decided to move where some of the football clubs would give me three years professional contract to play at 17.

Interviewer - Was there much difference between the two clubs in terms of, obviously, you have a different experience at United, how was it when you went to Sunderland then?

Interviewee - They're a big club. When I just went they were in their old training ground so their training ground wouldn't have been as good as Carrington. Carrington was just opening when I was at the back end of my period at Manchester United. It had just opened. Sunderland were in their old one, the academy at Sunderland was just getting built, their new one. So obviously with just different training ground. It wasn't as good as quality at Sunderland as there was at Manchester United but that's the reason why I went to give me a better opportunity, to get me into the first team.

Interviewer - At Sunderland as well, how many years did you stay with them?

Interviewee - Sunderland, I was there for three, three full seasons, as a professional footballer.

Interviewer - And then after the three years what was your experience then? Did you return home or what were?

Interviewee - Yeah after the three years I returned home when I was about 20, I had a few other clubs after Sunderland in the lower League that wanted me to go to them but I decided just to go home and sign for Linfield.

Interviewer - In terms of whenever you were leaving Sunderland, was that decision solely your own?

Interviewee - My contract was up and I wasn't getting renewed, we had just won the Championship at the back end of my three years. I was actually playing reserve team football for about two years and the back end of my contract we just won the Championship, so after my contract was finished I was starting off in the Premiership and Mick McCarthy didn't renew my contract, so I had to go.

Interviewer - Were you shocked or was it something you were expecting or were you hopeful that you were going to get a new contract with the club?

Interviewee - It started off very well at Sunderland for the first year, second year was looking good, third year I was playing reserve team football week in week out but I just didn't get even a chance to even play one game. I was training with the first team quite a lot but I just didn't get that chance. So around February time I seen it coming, I didn't think I would get another contract so I went in around February to ask Mick McCarthy and he said no, he wasn't going to renew it, so once from then March, April, May, I was looking for a new club.

Interviewer - Did he give you any feedback or anything like that as to the reason why the club weren't going to renew it for you?

Interviewee - No he just said, basically the way he put it was, I wasn't going to be in his plans for the move to the Premiership. So that's all he said really, I wasn't going to be in his plans.

Interviewer - Obviously the lower League clubs they weren't of an interest to you at that stage?

Interviewee - Yeah, I went to loads of trials with other clubs, a few of them offered me to stay but it was really lower League, Bristol Rovers and stuff like that, the money wasn't great. You had to get your own accommodation and stuff like that so I thought I'd be better off coming home.

Interviewer - Mick said to you, you weren't in his plans, so obviously did they support you like through the leaving process to prepare you for coming home?

Interviewee - Yeah, they weren't too bad, you know what I mean. They let you go out on trials, to other clubs, they paid your wages upfront. They gave you a settlement for the last three months of your contract so you could go on trials. So the last three months of your contract, which was up about June time, so June, May, April, they paid you upfront so they were very good that way. Did all that, efficient.

Interviewer - Did they really try and get you another club?

Interviewee - Not really, it was basically your agent that had to do that you know what I mean? So that was just the way it was.

Interviewer - Did the IFA or even the English Association then at that stage obviously they might have been aware of players being released, did they ever offer any support or anything like that to you?

Interviewee - The IFA wouldn't have no, as I say your agent at that time would have been trying to look after everything.

Interviewer - So throughout your whole experience and times at the two different clubs, if anything was difficult, you had a difficult day, or even at that time period, was there anyone in particular you would have spoke to? Obviously your agent is going to be a focal point for you, but was there anybody else you sort of relied on or went to have a bit of a chat or anything like that?

Interviewee - Well yeah you could of, you definitely could have. I'm kind of the person that probably just soaks it up. I spoke to my dad a lot about it, at that stage

but I wouldn't really, you could have gone to your coaches. They're all fantastic people at the club you know what I mean, you could have went to them, but I didn't really have any issues you know what I mean, I just enjoyed training, playing.

Interviewer - You were just focussing on the things you wanted to do and didn't really have an impact upon you maybe?

Interviewee - Yeah definitely that's the way to put it yeah. There's just loads of stuff in life that goes wrong but you just get on with it and that's just the kind of person I am. I always thought I'd get somewhere else, another club or something, so that's just the way it was.

Interviewer - And see upon reflection, you were on the reserve team at Sunderland, what sort of barriers do you think were to your progression within the club and obviously making it to the first team, what would you say stands out in your mind as the things that maybe did hinder your progression further?

Interviewee - Mine would probably be my own physical, I'm very small. I'm only like five foot five, five foot four; I'm not very well built. I was only nine stone seven pounds through my whole career. I worked in a gym, they told me to work in a gym, I worked hard in the gym, I tried but I just couldn't get that physical presence. So that's really what hindered my career was trying to get that next step. It wasn't skill level or control, I would have been very high in that standard of passing and stuff like that but it was just the physical element of it.

Interviewer - Do you feel that in your experience in the club improved your ability all round as a player? Like you enhanced obviously from going from Irish football to English football in those five years?

Interviewee - Yeah yeah, without a doubt. Even if you want to call it, your lifestyle and stuff and that, there like, your education. Like I got a big education there at Manchester United. How to deal with money and stuff like that, you know what I mean, you don't realise it. You only realise it now when you're older the things they were doing. So oh aye, your well educated, you know what I mean. Professional in

the way they try and show you to bring you up. So definitely. And then the coaching, was very good, oh yeah, you definitely improve without a doubt.

Interviewer - Excellent, superb. If I was to say to you to sum up your experience, going across to Manchester United then Sunderland and the migratory transition period, how would you sort of sum that whole process up?

Interviewee - Excellent. Like you are playing football at the top level; a very high level. So excellent. Definitely high quality level and you're playing with better players all the time and your team so, without a doubt, yeah excellent.

Interviewer - You see the players that you know you're talking about who are better quality, were they always English or from a wider range of countries, or where would you have said the players were from?

Interviewee - Yeah a wide range of countries, yeah. They always were yeah from a wide range of countries. Probably not as wide range in Sunderland now, there was a lot of local based boys, there wouldn't have been. But at Manchester United they were from all over the place, coming from everywhere.

Interviewer - Was that also the case within the academy as well?

Interviewee - Yes, also.

Interviewer - Where would players have come from within the academy? Even in United, you know, whereabouts across the countries, where would they have been from?

Interviewee - South Africa, Canada, Australia; everywhere.

Interviewer - Everywhere then; just from all over?

Interviewee - France, Spanish, yeah everywhere.

Interviewer - Excellent, superb. Suppose that's all the sort of questions I had there (not audible), just about your experience, you seemed to have a really good time? You know, you had great challenges but you know you've taken a lot from it as well.

Interviewee - Aww yeah, without a doubt. The hard thing is, it's such an early age, your training to be a professional footballer all your life until your maybe 35 and then when you get like myself, about 20. Well I came out of full - time when I was 23, because I was full - time and I came home to Bohemians down south as well, so I came out at 23, so when your training for that and that's all you know it's hard to deal with what do you do after your finished. There is a side to that; see people who are going to have to help the young ones, the ones who come back home. Are they doing enough to help, are they trying to get through it. But you see the sort of character I am, I'm a very positive person and I just pushed it aside and said right that's it, the next step here for me is the coaching. So that was basically it for me. So that's the way my path went.

Interviewer - You said there about the guys that maybe do struggle, you seemed to cope reasonably well with the whole process but for players who don't, what sort of additional support do you think could be given to players, regardless of who the organisation is?

Interviewee - Oh aye, they do need that support, whatever it is. What support they need to get is hard, but there are boys who will go there and can't cope being away from home and they're back inside six months. Or maybe just can't cope with the way the training is, very based on procession and they just not established yet and just can't cope with it and they just do come home. But a lot of kids do come home because they are home sick and stuff like that but they probably need a bit more support. As I said for me, I was built right up from about nine years of age, being at the club and going for maybe three days at Easter and maybe a week at Christmas and two weeks in the summer so I was built well in, so the education that I got through it was excellent, so that what made it easier for me I think.

Interviewer - And you sort of learnt from a very young age that the whole sort of process is associated with it and it's quite maybe a natural thing as opposed to being daunting for you?

Interviewee - Yeah yeah. That's the way they did it, set up. Plus they probably got me at a very very early age which probably helps too. You get some people at a later age and it's much harder for them.

Interviewer - Do you think it's easier if they do get you early enough, that they can go through it with you, as opposed to getting you at 14, 15 it's a bit more difficult do you think?

Interviewee - Yeah yeah, I would say so yeah.

Interviewer - Lastly in terms of barriers in the game within Ireland, have you had any issues when you came home, did you experience any barriers in terms of playing here when you did come home then?

Interviewee - No, not really no. Obviously the standard over here is not as good, nowhere near as good. It is tough here, more physical, you don't get much time with the ball and stuff like that but the standard obviously, the players you're playing with, obviously it's not full - time so, your fitness goes down a wee bit, your just not as sharp as you were when you were full - time so that would be it really.

Interviewer - Because you went to Linfield didn't you say and then you were at Bohemians for a while weren't you?

Interviewee - Yeah.

Interviewer - And have you now completely came away from the game have you?

Interviewee - No well, what I do now I just play say for the Championship. I was at at the start of the season, so I just play be in like the Championship, so I'm only training two nights a week or maybe one, once a week because of my job now. I own my

own company coaching kids, so I'm flat out with that at the minute, so that takes basically that takes up all my time full - time, trying to run my own business, so its flat out with that so I don't just have the time anymore to give up. There's just no money in the game over here, even in the Premiership there's not money in the game, to go out and train two nights or three nights a week and playing on a Saturday, it's just not viable. I'll play as long as I can but it'll just be two nights a week and on a Saturday or one night a week and play a Saturday, that's all for me now.

Interviewer - Superb. That's brilliant, thanks very much for your time.

Interviewee - Not a problem.

- Interview 1 End -

8.2 Interview 2 (Keith)

Interviewer - Just starting off can you just tell me about your experience playing back home in Northern Ireland, where you were at, who you played for?

Interviewee - I was playing for Linfield, I played with them for five years before I went over, since I was about 10 and then got picked up from there.

Interviewer - Who would have been looking at you at that stage?

Interviewee - There were a few clubs. I went over to West Brom and went over to Rangers and then when I was 14 I went over to Hull and then I signed after about three trials.

Interviewer - Did the Hull scout see you back here in Northern Ireland?

Interviewee - Yeah he seen me here and then he brought me over.

Interviewer - Did he take you over for the three trials and the three separate times?

Interviewee - It was on my school holidays, kept going over like that there.

Interviewer - Then you would have been signed for Hull?

Interviewee - Yeah.

Interviewer - How many years did you sign for them?

Interviewee - Signed three years.

Interviewer - What was it like when you first went over?

Interviewee - It was different, just getting used to training every day, I was never used to it, so you were wrecked for the first month but then you got used to it and you were fine.

Interviewer - When you went across, where did you stay?

Interviewee - Stayed in digs with a family, their son played for Hull as well. It was alright, they were a dead on family.

Interviewer - You were alright in terms of living with the family? What was it like living with a player from the same club as well?

Interviewee - Yeah it was good, there was another wee lad from Dungannon over with me, so that was easier rather than just going over by myself, so we signed together sort of at the same stage.

Interviewer - At the club itself, just talk me through your experience there? How it was for you in terms of training, coaches, what were they like?

Interviewee - Straightaway it was brilliant, I loved it from the start. The coach was Scottish, my youth team manager, he knew where I came from, and he helped me settle in real well with training every day.

Interviewer - Did you have any bad days at the club?

Interviewee - Awck whenever you got beat, Monday morning doing a running session, after the Saturday, they weren't the greatest days.

Interviewer - Any difficulties when you were there initially?

Interviewee - No, I settled in really quick, I think it was a lot to do with having that wee fella from Dungannon. We were together, wasn't like I was going into the changing room by myself, it was better like that there.

Interviewer - It was nice to have someone from back home?

Interviewee - Yeah.

Interviewer - Take me through your time at the academy and any first team experiences.

Interviewee - First year apprentice, I signed a two year apprentice on my one year, pro on my third year contract. First year on the apprentice you are just youth team all the time. I was on the bench for the reserves and then the second year apprentice you play on a Saturday and then you play reserves mid-week. Then I signed pro so you were just reserves for the first team all the time.

Interviewer - What was that like for you?

Interviewee - Good, it's a lot different training, like even reserves, the reserves all trained together compared to the first team. The tempo is just miles faster.

Interviewer - Was it difficult to adapt to it all?

Interviewee - First few training sessions with the first team seems like just 100mph but you do get used to it.

Interviewer - Moving through the club and progressing, how were you getting on like playing games, did you have any barriers at furthering yourself?

Interviewee - I played once for the first team on the FA cup, it's just putting those running games together and then I signed an extension for another year and once you are there you need to go out on loan and I could not really get out anywhere on loan. So it was hard. You can't just play reserve football all the time. It's a lot different to first team football. So it was getting out and playing first team games is what I struggled with.

Interviewer - What would have been a barrier to getting up to the first team area? What do you think was hard to make that jump?

Interviewee - At the start it was hard for the manager, to put young fellas in, because they were in the Championship and they were pushing for promotion, so he was always going to use his experienced players. Then once you were in the Premiership, survival was the main thing. It was a good team, very good players.

Interviewer - Where would the players have been from? Nationalities?

Interviewee - All over the place. There were a right few from Ireland when I was there, there was Steven Quinn, Dave Myler, Brady, Paul McShane. They were all dead on; they help you wherever you went for the first team.

Interviewer - Was it nice to have that Irish connection?

Interviewee - Yeah, there was good banter. In the club all the first team were brilliant with you.

Interviewer - Look after you?

Interviewee - Yeah.

Interviewer - Did you see any barriers because there were so many other players from other nationalities?

Interviewee - Well you hear about it at other clubs but at Hull it wasn't. Like you hear about first team players not being nice to the younger lads but at Hull they were all sound. It was good; it was very hard to break into the first team because the first team had so many players, such a big squad.

Interviewer - How many years did you spend with them?

Interviewee - Four.

Interviewer - What happened for you then?

Interviewee - At the end of my second year, they couldn't see me breaking through into the team and that I needed to go and play first team games somewhere else. I went on trial with Notts County after that. I didn't get anything there, so I just came back home.

Interviewer - You were being released by the club did they support you at any time during the process?

Interviewee - Yeah, yeah they did, they tried to get you into other clubs on trial, phoned people for you. They did try to help.

Interviewer - How were you dealing with that whole experience? You were there for a few years and then contemplating coming home again?

Interviewee - It's hard because you don't want to go home. Once you're in that full time football you don't want to come back. To be fair, the Irish League here is a lot harder than reserve football over there anyway; it's a lot better standard.

Interviewer - You did come back home, where did you end up going then?

Interviewee - I went down and trained with Linfield for a while, then got called about coming here, which is only down the road from me. I played a number of games so it was the right move.

Interviewer - How did you deal with that whole experience, how did you find it?

Interviewee - It's a lot different, you see when you're not training every day and your just sitting about the house, it's hard enough to adapt.

Interviewer - Did anybody support you at that time? In terms of you went from training every day and it's a bit different and things like that? Did you have much support?

Interviewee - Yeah, my mum and dad, they were there for me.

Interviewer - Would you have like much other support?

Interviewee - There's not much other people could do for me at the time. Everyone did as much for me as they could. I was happy enough; I didn't feel bad about being released because I probably knew I deserved to be released.

Interviewer - Why did you feel you probably deserved to be?

Interviewee - I was getting older. I was an old reserve I would have been a third year pro there but still playing reserves. I would have been 21 and obviously you want to play first team games and I couldn't see myself breaking into the first team at that time.

Interviewer - Did the IFA ever contact you during that process even going across offering any support?

Interviewee - I was with the school boys before I went across and they got you in doing your strength and conditioning programmes before you went over which was good, when I came home there was nothing.

Interviewer - Would you like to see more of an input from the IFA as the Governing Body to support players?

Interviewee - Maybe yeah when they come home, because I'm sure they have contacts across the water and I'm sure Northern Ireland want to keep their players across the water playing at a higher level. I don't know, maybe. It's a hard one, its hard once you've been released to get another club, especially at my age when you haven't played many first team games.

Interviewer - If you were having a bad time at the club, obviously you had the Irish lads but would have spoken to anybody from back home?

Interviewee - Yeah I would have spoken to my Ma and Da. Spoke to them, probably once a week or something like that on the phone. If I wanted to have a moan about anything I would have talked to them.

Interviewer - Was there anyone ever at the club if you ever did need to have a discussion about anything?

Interviewee - Yeah, the youth team manager. He was always there, you could just talk to him, he was brilliant so he was.

Interviewer - Real supportive?

Interviewee - Yeah yeah.

Interviewer - Superb. That's brilliant, thanks very much for your time.

- Interview 2 End -

8.3 Interview 3 (Gareth)

Interviewee - Basically I grew up in Newry started basically playing for Newry Town Youth Team as it was then. There weren't any great academies working round the

Northern Ireland area as there is now. There's lots of different academies from Under 8s right the way up to the Under 18s or whatever but in them days it was just Under18 team and that was it.

My first experience playing for Newry was when I was 14 or 15 playing reserve football, playing youth football for them and I always played football in the Newry area. I progressed my way through the ages 14, 15, 16, 17 playing youth and reserve team football. Just when I turned 17 coming on 18 I was lucky enough to start to push on to the first team which at the time was the top tier of the Irish League so in them days there was great crowds that went to the games. Played in front of three, four, five thousand in the Irish League, unlike today where the crowds aren't just the same. So I was lucky enough when I was 17 I got into the first team and played for a whole season which was great experience. You were playing part - time football but it was to a reasonable standard and that year we finished off third in the League, just missing out on European football. So it was good standard and I enjoyed it, I was still in College at the time so even from A-Levels I was playing part - time which was great. Three quarters of the way through the season you heard a few wee rumours and whispers that scouts were coming to look at different times; just like everything they are only rumours to something happens, to then out of the blue, I got invited over to the Forest for a week's trial. Basically I got lucky enough to get signed up then.

Interviewer - Whenever you were going across to the trial at that moment in time, how were you feeling about going across? Were you nervous or were you excited or apprehensive as to what would be the outcome or how were you feeling about going across to something like that?

Interviewee - Basically there was no pressure. It was always an ambition to play full - time football. When I went over it was all new, didn't know when to expect really. It was just after 1990 World Cup and you were heading over to Forest and I remember watching plenty of times on TV leading up to that and they were all full of England and International at the time, so you were going over thinking my God, am I sort of in this potentially standard of football? So you just went over, didn't know what to expect, just was willing to go with it and give it your all, give it a good shot. When

those opportunities come along you only get one opportunity so you were going over really determined to do well but not knowing what to expect either. It was exciting. I wouldn't say nervous, more exciting, into the unknown as they say.

Interviewer - Did you prepare yourself in any way for going over across? Do a bit of research or did you pretty much just go with the flow and see how things pan out?

Interviewee - No, just go with the flow and see how things pan out. I remember at the time I had to go and get a new pair of boots and money, there wasn't an awful lot of money around Ireland at the time, and I had to go and get a new pair of boots and you were scrimping and scraping up the money so you could get a new pair of boots at the time. At the time I was earning, I hadn't even a part-time job, I was earning £10 a week at Newry and £10 a week in bonus so it could have been £10, £20 or £30 a week depending on how many games. So it was exciting that you were going over, but you weren't going over prepared it was more of a mental preparation; preparing yourself mentally that you have to be ready to make yourself known and make yourself known about the place. It was exciting that way.

Interviewer - Obviously you were at Newry at the time, did you speak to anyone at the club at the time for any advice or how did the club react to somebody like yourself being potentially scouted to go across to Nottingham Forest at that time?

Interviewee - Well it was all kept hush hush so it was in a way. I was playing on a Saturday and got a phone call on the Sunday morning from the manager basically saying that we were heading away the following week. I think I went over on a Sunday if I remember rightly and was coming back on the Thursday because we had no mid-week game and the Newry Town manager came over with me so it was all kept hush hush but it wasn't publicised too much. I think it happens to a lot of kids that are going across now, a lot of them can be sheltered from too much publicity and the papers just take the pressure off them before they go over and then the club blows it out of the water and nothing else comes from it, so probably in a way they kept it a bit hush hush just for myself.

Interviewer - It was probably a benefit to you?

Interviewee - Yeah I think so. I think within the week most people knew but it wasn't even in the paper until I was away, so it wasn't a bad thing at the time either you know, yeah.

Interviewer - So you said your coach went with you, did they meet and greet you when you first arrived in England or were you left to your own devices to get to the training ground or how did they leave it with you?

Interviewee - It was all done above board and very professional. We went over on the Sunday evening and were picked up by Forest's assistant manager at the time and we went straight to the hotel and basically the hotel was about 3, 400 metres away from the ground and we were there for four nights. We were basically picked up, put in the hotel told be at the club tomorrow morning at such a time, next morning you were straight to the club and you were training. It all happened quite quickly, quite easy, so it was very professional.

Interviewer - Was your family and friends supportive of it or did you keep that away from them? Obviously your family would have knew, your immediate family; your friends, did you tell many of them?

Interviewee - Yeah, I was still at College at the time. I sort of kept it hush hush myself I think at the time, but again I told one or two so, I can't really remember it's that long ago now. It's been a while.

Interviewer - Taking you back when you went for that training session where you were doing your trials, how did you find the environment itself? Did you feel comfortable? How did you react to the stadium?

Interviewee - I always remember walking in that morning going through the carpark and Steve Hodge, Forest midfielder at the time was just walking across the carpark, leisurely just walking across to his car and the previous year he was playing against Argentina in the quarter final of the World Cup. So you just see him dander across and you know you sort of get your eyes opened (Stuart Pearce audio) and you see all these sort of top players about the place and even when you walk into the place, it

was the smell of the place that will always stay with you. The boot room, the laundry room, the whole smell of the changing room area. You know you were walking into something. Like when I went in that morning you were just told to get ready and go in there and I ended up training with the youth team that morning because I think the first team played a match that night and the reserves were away, so I ended up playing with the youth team, it was grand.

Interviewer - So you enjoyed the whole experience?

Interviewee - Yeah it all happened like, I went in that morning, trained with the youth team and I actually played for the reserves that night at Villa Park and the manager at the time, Newry manager, he was told be best you not to come, you can stay and watch the first team game at the City Ground. The reserves were playing Aston Villa down at Villa Park so I just got on the bus and headed down to Villa Park.

Interviewer - You were happy enough with that or would you have like your coach to come with you? Obviously they seen it best that he stayed where he was, or how did you feel after he said that?

Interviewee - Yeah, you are as well going on your own to these things, it worked out well anyway because I played well. You were going down on the bus and there were all these household names on the bus that were on the fringes of Forests first team like Nigel Jameson, Scott Gamble, all these players, Terry Wilson, lots of good players still on the bus, you knew you were going to your trial game and everybody wished you all the best, after being over there it was common for trialist to come regular enough to Forest at the time so everyone just wished you all the best and you just went out and played at Villa Park.

Interviewer - So you went from playing in the Irish League to running out to Villa Park to make a debut for first reserves, it was all good, great experience so it was?

Interviewee - Yeah it was fantastic yeah, I actually really enjoyed it. Played really well on the night and that was probably one of the reasons why they decided they were going to sign me was that performance that night. We won one nil that night

and kept a clean sheet; I was centre half, kept a clean sheet, done it simple and played well. Afterwards everyone had said how well I'd played. So I was happy enough.

Interviewer - You got the offer for contract, did that move quite swiftly thereafter for you for moving over?

Interviewee - That was on the Monday night and then we got back, the Newry manager went to watch the first team and when the reserve manager and scout all came back after the match they were talking already about making it a permanent deal. I met him in the hotel afterwards and he said that this could work out permanent already they were really impressed. I played another match on the Wednesday, flew back on the Thursday and I think I signed the deal on the Thursday morning before I even left, three and a half year contract on the Thursday morning. It all happened real quick then I came back to the Ireland for a week just to sort out a few things then I was back over again permanently.

Interviewer - That was you at 17 years of age or thereabouts?

Interviewee - 18 just turned 18.

Interviewer - So you just signed a three and a half year contract with Nottingham Forest at 18 years of age?

Interviewee - Sounds a bit surreal but that's the way it happened. And at the time they had to pay a bit of money for me as well.

Interviewer - At least the club benefited out of it anyway?

Interviewee - Yeah, they ended up getting about £35,000 at the time for me, which at the time there wasn't an awful lot of money around the club at the time so it really helped them.

Interviewer - When you went back across to start your contact, how did things progress for you then, how was things at the club? If you could just outline that for me a wee bit?

Interviewee - I was injured when I went over at the time, so it took a couple of weeks to clear up a wee thigh injury but it was about March time, the end of the season, so I had about two and a half months. You quickly realised that you were signed and they were impressed. There were 60 other players at the club and all of a sudden it was like they are only impressed with a bit of potential that was it. There's 60 other lads at the club all busting a gut, all looking for the same place. I was centre half at the time, if you included the first team centre half's there was about nine centre half's at the club, there was a lot of competition.

Interviewer - You were trying to break into the team, like if you had a bad day at the club and things just didn't go for you would you have ever spoken to anyone in particular about the experience to try and help you through?

Interviewee - No, there wouldn't have been an awful lot of that. If you had a bad game that was part of the mentality of football, you have to be willing to move on, be willing to get yourself out of it. You have to be brave and tough mentally, handle the knockbacks, so there wasn't an awful lot of being able to talk to anyone in particular. Apart from different mates when I was over there. No one was in the club, if you weren't able, or you weren't up for it, if you were losing yourself there was always somebody else there willing and ready to take your place; is what I would have thought.

Interviewer - Would you have spoken to anyone back home in particular about anything or would you have just spoken to the other players?

Interviewee - I more or less spoke to the guys. When you would have went home and would have been asked what it was like and you would have been saying how much talent there is in the squad, how much competition there is and you can't really rest on your laurels. You just had to get on with it and work hard every day and during the matches you know.

Interviewer - Would you say there was culture at the club? How would you explain or describe the environment when you were there on a permanent basis?

Interviewer - Lively? Quite led back or somewhere you wouldn't really feel that welcome, you had to integrate yourself?

Interviewee - Oh no, from day one, it was definitely open. There were two or three other Irish lads there at the time, it was definitely open, and you were made to feel welcome. The club actually sorted me out with digs straight away and you moved in with a couple of other lads, two other lads were fantastic. You were made to feel welcome and made to feel part of it straight away. They took you and lifted and laid you straight away. I found when I was 18 there was 20, 30 other lads at 18, 19 as well, there would have been great craic, great buzz around the place. There were no great clicks, you were definitely made to feel welcome and feel part of it. If there was anything on, you were taken, you were looked after. So you would have had no complaints, well, I wouldn't have had anyway. There was always great craic around the club, great atmosphere with young lads. There was always people to hang around with, you were never lonely.

Interviewer - And that helped? You didn't seem to get homesick?

Interviewee - No, not really; but initially like a little bit. But I remember once you get the first six months over you, you found Nottingham as your home. I remember I did at the time anyway. It's not like you were missing home and it was affecting me. Maybe initially there was a wee bit of home sickness but after a while it disappeared. You were glad to be over there and glad to have the opportunity.

Interviewer - Would you have been playing with other players from different nationalities, even in the youth set – up?

Interviewee - At the time there was a lot of English, Irish, Scottish, maybe Welsh. There was one Australian fella at the time I remember and the next year or two after there was a couple of Norwegian lads. Scandinavian players started to come in but there wasn't the sort of different nationalities that there would be now in the youth

team changing rooms, it was more still the British Isles. When you walk into like a Premiership youth team changing rooms now there's every nationality in the world sitting there now. No it was still very much English, Irish, Scottish, Welsh.

Interviewer - You were there for your duration, how did things progress then for you?

Interviewee - I ended up playing reserved team football for three, three and a half years and played one or two friendly games and that would have been it. In hindsight I had one or two opportunities of getting close to the first team and I remember I got injured and it just didn't materialise or happen for me. It was nobody's fault bar my own that it didn't materialise for me.

Interviewer - What was the issues that it didn't materialise for you? Couple of injuries, unlucky times?

Interviewee - For myself I was centre half position and I was a bit lean, wasn't physical enough. You weren't forced to go into the gym and bulk up and I probably needed to bulk up and be put on a special diet to fill out more and that didn't really materialise. Myself, I could have been 1 ½ - 2 stone less than some of the other players playing the same position, especially centre half, a physical position. I probably needed more to be set on a different type of programme to bulk up.

Interviewer - A bit more guidance within the club itself?

Interviewee - Yeah, that was coming in sort of at the end.

Interviewer - You were playing reserve games so what happened at the end of the three and a half years for you? Did you move on anywhere else or do any other trials?

Interviewee - I was released and (inaudible) whether to go back to Ireland or not. I had an offer from a team down south in Ireland, called Selbourne. I decided to go and then I got an offer as soon as the season was over from Northampton Town and

I done pre-season with them. I said I'll go over and do pre-season, give it another go. I went over for pre-season and got a year's contract. I played four, five games, I just wasn't enjoying it. Played four, five games and then ended up out of the team again and I wasn't enjoying playing reserve football at Northampton and I ended up coming back home then.

Interviewer - Did you stay home then?

Interviewee - Yeah, I stayed at home and ended up signing for Newry again, my local club. I wanted to get back playing football again. Get the confidence built up. Get back to enjoying football again, because when you're not playing first team football and you're out of it, you definitely don't enjoy it the same way as you do when you're playing first team, and that would be the same anywhere. You need to be playing first team football to be feeling really part of it.

Interviewer - Taking you briefly back, the first time you left Nottingham Forest, did you know you were going to be released that time? Was there any indication or was it pretty much a shock to you?

Interviewee - No, it wasn't a shock, you sort of known in the final year. I knew myself it wasn't going great but in the final year, I knew myself I was getting released. But I remember the last four, five months of the season I actually was playing really well for the reserves and the time Forest were struggling in the Premiership and they just got relegated, that was the season they got relegated and there were a few wee whispers that I was playing that well that I might get a chance to get in but it never materialised.

Interviewer - Did the club offer you any support? You were pushing on, you thought you were going to get a chance and then you were released but did the club offer you any support in terms of like when you were leaving the club to guide you, were the IFA involved in any way, did they support you coming back home?

Interviewee - No, the IFA weren't in contact at all, the first team coach at Forest he was guiding me in the different ways, saying I had a lot of offers in England and

there were a couple of offers from clubs in North and down South in Dublin and he was guiding me what he thought I should do, but there wouldn't have been massive advice coming from anywhere. You were left to yourself a lot.

Interviewer - Would you say that's maybe a bad thing? Would you like to see more support? Even in your time would you have liked to have been a bit more guidance, someone to speak to more about?

Interviewee - Without a doubt, you do need people, it's in every walk of life, when you're doing really well in something, there's lots of people there to give you advice but when you're struggling at something there can be very little there to give you advice. Probably a bit more advice, not saying it would have made any difference because it's still up to yourself. The boys that make it or didn't make it are still getting the same advice as everybody else. It can be a lot of who wants it the most and who gets there. Probably a bit more advice but it's all advice, help, education and more structured plan and diet and gym plans all might have helped but not to be.

Interviewer - When you were coming home, did you find it hard to integrate yourself? You did go and play Irish league and you went to Northampton and different things but did you have any difficulty when you came home integrating yourself back to your family and friends? How did you feel with them maybe in the background again?

Interviewee - Well you're home and you didn't make it over in England and everybody knows that your home and knowing you didn't make it, so you had to come back again. Family were all dead on, glad to see you back, but from a personal point of view, you had to go off and start to prove yourself again in the football side of it, you hadn't made it over in England. You were up for the challenge, you were glad to be back playing first team even though it was Irish League because you do enjoy being part of a team environment and being part of a first team, yeah so it was alright.

Interviewer - How do you think the whole experience has had an impact on you as a person?

Interviewee - I'd say it's been a positive experience. Even though it didn't work out, it has helped me through life. It has given good confidence, all the way through my life. Football's been a big part of my life, even now still. I'm assistant manager down at Newry now, even though I didn't make it, I always feel footballs been very good to me. There's been a lot of knockbacks, a lot of failures in different ways but it's definitely been a positive experience the whole way through.

- Interview 3 End -

8.4 Interview 4 (Brendan)

Interviewer - Suppose the first thing is just if you could outline to me your history of playing at home and you know what was it like and the process you went in terms of getting scouted.

Interviewee - Well I started out here with Dungannon Swifts. It was the first ever Dungannon Swifts Junior side through my dad Joe. I started when I was about 9 years old. We played an Under 12 match against Armagh. It was the first introduction for proper football as such. Going back then you probably had about 24 players turning up for training and one or two balls and that was the height of it. You trained on an old gravel pitch. From there the continuation of Dungannon Swifts Juniors evolved and we went to the Milk Cup and we won the Milk Cup. At Under 14 we won the Scottish Cup, the Ayr International Cup at Under 14 as well so basically a lot of the clubs identified me from the Milk Cup and the Ayr International as there would have been a lot of scouts at them. I got a lot of opportunities to go across as a 13 year old, a 12 or 13 year old boy to go across the water to have trials, to see the clubs, to see how it was all done. You were put on a plane by yourself, you travelled by yourself, you got picked up the other side and you were taken away.

Interviewer - How did that feel for you at 13 years of age?

Interviewee – Do you know what the whole excitement of it, like there was never any fear in me getting on a plane at that age. Obviously now you would be very sceptical about putting your child probably on a plane at 12/13 years of age to travel

to Norwich, or Liverpool or wherever it may have been. So the whole enjoyment side of it, the excitement side of it, I was grand like. I felt capable of getting on and off the plane. I felt capable, I knew where to go to get collected and stuff like that and thankfully there was never any problems. I never went missing.

Interviewer - If you did you got back home anyway. And obviously you went across. Was it a few clubs was it?

Interviewee - I think I went to about 12 professional clubs on trial and I had the option of signing YTS forms at quite a few of them. Some had added in a professional contract within the offer as well so I had a lot of options at an early age. Probably had a lot of avenues which I could have went down but then I chose Liverpool at the end of it. I went to Liverpool as a 15 year old boy turning 16, about 6 weeks before my 16th birthday. The way my birthday fell then I was able to leave school, regrettably maybe, towards the end of fourth year so that was the end of my school.

Interviewer - Obviously you went across to Liverpool.

Interviewer - How was that experience for you whenever you went across in the first initial sort of couple of weeks for you?

Interviewee - Again it was such an experience. Obviously you were straight into pre-season and you would have changed at Anfield and then there would have been a 54 seater bus that would have took everybody down. You would have travelled to Melwood, you would have done your training, you would have all travelled back together so you went from being a lad who was associated with a B Division club in them days to sitting in a bus along with the like of John Barnes, Grobbelaar and people of that era travelling back and forth to training. Your chin was on the floor most of the time. It was a few weeks before you cottoned on to where you actually where you know.

Interviewer – Obviously then what was the sort of process like when you went across? Did you stay with a family or what happened?

Interviewee - I stayed in digs along with Mr & Mrs Prince, an elderly couple who treated me like their son. They were absolutely fantastic.

Interviewer - No issues at all?

Interviewee - No issues whatsoever. There was another house which, whenever I was going back and forth, I would have stayed in when I was over on trial. She was a lovely, lovely lady but I'm not a political person whatsoever, a lot of monuments and what you had in the house, she was a very catholic lady, so they were at my age I sort of thought they were a wee bit daunting to me. I requested that I went and stayed, I had already stayed at Mr & Mrs Princes so I requested that I went there.

Interviewer - And that was good for you then?

Interviewee - It was very good I, as I say she treated me like her son and I had no complaints about staying in digs. I probably stayed in her digs for a good 2 ½ years.

Interviewer - Okay and obviously then at the club you were obviously in the sort of category as John Barnes, Grobbelaar etc. and obviously the training what was that like in terms of the coaches and stuff?

Interviewee - Your Youth Development Officer at that time was Steve Highway who had obviously won European cups with Liverpool. He was one of the best players throughout the years so he was head over us. Training in comparison to what you had here, obviously the vast amount of stuff that you had, the area you had to train on, the surfaces you were training on everything was far superior which you would expect. I don't ever think that Liverpool was a club that ever spoilt anybody. Equipment wise if your boots had burst during the year people would have thought awh Liverpool will get you new boots. You'd have got them sent off to the cobblers and they would have come back with a patch over them.

Interviewer – And they got them sewn up for you?

Interviewee – You'd have got them sewn up and if you wanted a new pair of new boots you bought them. So as a YTS lad in that day earning £29.50 it's not something that you want to have to do is go out and buy your own boots so it was more or less put a patch on them, sew them up and away you go.

Interviewer – And away back out you went again. In terms of moving through the system and getting in around the first team and things like that talk to me about your experience in terms of progression at the club.

Interviewee - Obviously whenever you first went there was two teams - there was an A and a B team. That's what they would have been called then and then obviously there was a reserve team and a first team. Your B team would have been primarily an Under 18 team. Your A team would have been an Under 19 side but you were allowed to play 3 over aged players something like that and then your reserves and your first team. I started of obviously in the B team and progressed through. The furthest I got at Liverpool was to the reserves. I played quite a few matches for the reserves. You would have trained with first team members. Unfortunately I was never called up to train with the first team but you would have trained with first team members who were maybe dropping down or some of the first team was off for the day so everybody sort of would have played a bigger game and what have you and you would have integrated with everybody. You were never left out in the cold. It was a very integrated club. Everybody knew everybody, everybody got on with everybody. Obviously you had your chores to do as an apprentice. You had to clean the changing rooms, brush the stands, stuff like that. You had all that work to do, you were a boot boy for somebody, you had your own specific pro who you had to look after.

Interviewer - Who was your pro?

Interviewee - Ronnie Rosenthal unfortunately.

Interviewer - Not easy?

Interviewee - Some you win, some you lose. Naw, he was alright.

Interviewer – You said you were getting close to the first team. Obviously you went through the B and A up to reserve. What sort of barriers going through that process did you sort of meet in terms of progression?

Interviewee - Obviously whenever you got to reserve team levels I remember playing in a reserve team match and there was only 3 lads who were recognised coming out of the league system and the rest of them were all filtered in with experienced pros who had been Liverpool players for years. So for you to make the leap from that into the first team squad was always very difficult. Very few in that era probably would have done it. Robbie Fowler done it, Dominic Matteo done it, Phil Charnock done it briefly and really out of the 12 boys that I went through with they were the only ones that really made the leap on so for a club the size of Liverpool maybe if they need a player it's maybe more beneficial for them to go and buy the player that they wish whereas if I had maybe made a different choice in going to a lower division club maybe then you would have got more of an opportunity of playing first team level.

Interviewer - In terms of getting in obviously then a few boys did make it up. Was there anything that could have maybe helped you make that leap?

Interviewee - Looking back working a wee bit harder. Being honest whenever I look at my own career I enjoyed the crack, I enjoyed getting away from training, I enjoyed going out for a beer now and again and I was across the water for 10 years and the whole time I was away I probably enjoyed myself a wee bit more than I should have. I did work hard but I didn't work as hard as what I should.

Interviewer - You should just have knuckled down that wee bit more.

Interviewee - It's a short career and at the end of the day if you last until you are 30/35 years of age you have a long time after that where you can go and enjoy yourself so your focus should be football.

Interviewer - In terms of the culture, how would you describe the culture at the club itself?

Interviewee - I always found Liverpool was a wee bit home from home to be honest. Liverpoolians were all great people, all good craic, you fitted in, everybody mingled, everybody got on, people enjoyed going out for a beer. The club side of things as well you made a lot of good friends through it, everybody associated with each other so culture wise there was never any issues, there was never any problems with fitting in.

Interviewer - Yeah and obviously then you got as far as the reserve team. What sort of happened then?

Interviewee - I was at Liverpool for 4 years and whenever the end of my 4 year contract was up you were called in. Roy Evans was the manager at the time and he just explained that you weren't going to be renewing your contract. I felt as if I was close to getting a new contract but obviously I didn't so I moved on from there. Then it was a case if I went and played a couple of trial games here and there. I went to Crewe and played a trial match with Derry O'Grady and boys like that there and clubs like that. I came home and I had spoke to a couple of ex league clubs very briefly. I got in touch with them when I returned home but obviously I wanted to stay in England for as long as I could so I got the opportunity to go back over to Bristol City. When I went back over to Bristol City for a week I ended up signing a two year contract with Bristol City who were then in the old first division which is the Championship now so Liverpool was a good stepping stone then to get a good opportunity. Bristol City were a massive club, a big club and I played a few first team games there at the start of the season and done well over about 12/15 matches. At the start of the season I was involved in about 12 of them and the manager got sacked. As the manager goes out the new manager comes in and your face doesn't fit and that's where it all went downhill really with me at Bristol City.

Interviewer - Going back to the time at Liverpool and you went in to see Roy Evans, did he gave you any feedback as you sort of thought you were close to a contract? Did he give you any sort of guidance?

Interviewee - What probably disappointed me most like was because you couldn't ask any questions because he actually called about six of us in at the same time

which disappointed me in how it was dealt with. I had no problem with Roy Evans, not one bit, but I felt as if he took a very easy option whenever he took six players in sit them down and tell them all as a group we'll not be renewing your contract. I think out of four years of being at a club I always think a player deserves the decency of somebody giving you ten minutes of their time

Interviewer - You were being told that you obviously weren't getting your contract. Did they offer you any sort of guidance or support at that stage? Roy Evans didn't but did anybody after that brief meeting come to you?

Interviewee - The likes of Sammy Lee who was the Reserve Team Manager then would have turned round and he would have told you that he'd spread your word and speak to everybody. The good thing about the English FA is that they have their own database which everybody then would have went on so it would have been circulated around a lot of the clubs. The difference between England and probably here is that they actually can't provide you with data of whose a free transfer or whose an out of contract pro. The FAI can but I think it's a wee bit stale here because if the like of Murph is looking a centre forward and there's only two days of a window to go you can maybe go on and think well there's an out of contract pro from Northern Ireland, he's in Northern Ireland we can maybe have a look at him out of the window but you can never find that information out through the FA.

Interviewer - Maybe something that would be useful.

Interviewee - Very useful.

Interviewer - Yeah, Definitely.

Interviewee - Very useful to catch up with everybody else.

Interviewer - Yeah a wee bit behind. Obviously then you were at Bristol City and obviously then you say it sort of went downhill for a wee bit for you then. What happened after you left Bristol City?

Interviewee - After Bristol City I came home again and played for Dungannon Swifts. Played for about six weeks for Dungannon Swifts more or less finding my feet and then I got an opportunity to go across the water and have a week over at Fulham. I went over to Fulham and Ian Branfoot and Micky Adams who were running there at that time offered me a contract and I signed a contract at the end of that season which was a six month contract and then at the end of that season I signed another two year contract. I spent about three and a half seasons at Fulham which I really enjoyed. It was a completely different experience than anything else because you washed your own kit, you took your kit home, you washed it, you brought it back in the next day, there were no airs and graces, your training ground was a field, they had really nothing but they had a good group of boys and we managed to gain promotion from the old third division into the second division which I managed to score a goal which more or less secured promotion for us so you're sort of remembered for that because the following year then Al-Fayed came in so you seen both sides of it at Fulham because your first half of it was a little bit dilapidated, you know there was minimum wages, you washed your own kit, you looked after yourself, there was no food served to you at lunch time, you had to get everything like that yourself till all of a sudden the second part of my career at Fulham would have been under Al-Fayed where he just came in and I think before Al-Fayed came in Mickey Adams' last sign would have been a guy called Paul Watson who was signed for maybe £30,000.00 in a tribunal and Al-Fayed would have re-appointed Kevin Keegan, their first signing was Chris Coleman which come in about 2.1 or 2.3 million.

Interviewer - So drastic changes?

Interviewee – Massive changes, just changed overnight. The whole thing just flipped. You were arriving in in what you thought was a half descent car and then you were all of sudden looking at your car and it was just sitting wrongly out of place in the carpark.

Interviewer - Did it make you feel a bit uneasy did it?

Interviewee - A little uneasy. It took a little bit of time for that all to evolve you know. It was strange, it was strange at that time because there was one like going out

every week and you were just sort of waiting to see when it's going to be your turn when were you going to be shown the door you know. But it eventually came around and I went to Woking on loan. I had a good three months at Woking. Then I played for Stevenage, I played for Crawley and flitted around non-league clubs for probably the guts of the season, season (inaudible) but I married in England which you could say was just a mistake, it's part of your life but I ended up returning home from it. It ended up that the marriage didn't work out so I was stuck, I didn't know what to do, I was in England, I was by myself, I was on the outskirts of London, the cost of living was crazy so I decided the best thing for me to do through guidance of probably my Da was to come home and see how I got on so I come home to find my feet thinking that I might go back again but I came home and I have enjoyed it since I've come home.

Interviewer - And you've settled at home?

Interviewee – Settled.

Interviewer – Yeah.

Interviewee - Settled yeah.

Interviewer - And how did you find the processes of coming home? You know you came home at a couple of different times. Did you need much support during that? How were you coping you know with the changes?

Interviewee - I think the good thing about coming home is you come home and your friends are always here so you've always got friends around you which help to get through things. Obviously before I went to Fulham I come back and I played for half a dozen weeks for Dungannon Swifts in the, I think was the, B Division which wasn't great but it was football, you got a smile back on your face and you kept yourself fit. Whenever I come back the next time obviously coming out of a marriage, it was a divorce, it was tough and I went to Glenavon and I found it hard to settle, found it hard to find my feet, I found it hard to find form, probably a lot going on in your head, a lot to sort out but I really didn't settle until I came back to Dungannon Swifts again.

Interviewer - So just whenever you sort of came back home officially?

Interviewee - Yeah back home as such. Helped me settle, helped me get my head straight and me Da took over. It was actually in the first division and we were, the Swifts were bottom after 11 games with 2 points and he asked me to come back and help him and play and we managed to get a few other players around us and we gained promotion the following season up into the Premiership and we've been in the Premiership since so for me that is a sense of achievement for Dungannon Swifts and it was an ambition of mine whenever I did come back to try to...

Interviewer - Lift the club

Interviewee - I think we've done alright

Interviewer - Succeeded. Awesome. And through the whole process do you think it has had much of an impact on you as a person?

Interviewee - I think if I had to do it all over again I think I would do much better. Being honest, I did waste opportunities that I'd been given in my career and thankfully now being within a coaching role, an advisory role as such to the players you can maybe pass on a little bit of your information especially till Dungannon United Youth, the local kids that's maybe going across the water, you can have chats with them, you can make sure they are alright, you can speak to them on the phone while they are over there, via social media you can keep in touch with them.

Interviewer - Do you think that networks important for the guys who are over?

Interviewee - I do I. I think it keeps them grounded whenever they have somebody from their past or their background were their beginning, were you get in touch with somebody or you run across somebody and have a good chat and you can keep them sort of grounded.

Interviewer - Keep them at their roots.

Interviewee - Keep them at their roots and you can give them a wee bit of advice as to where you failed and try to point them in the right direction.

Interviewer - And obviously just to sort of finish it up in terms of support, was there much support throughout your whole career in terms of guidance and even when you were coming back home and things did the IFA ever have an input?

Interviewee - I never spoke to anybody whenever I came back home. As I say there was never a database or anything went around the clubs, there was never anybody really, you never got anything emailed to you.

Interviewer - No correspondence.

Interviewee - There was no correspondence so you were sort of home and word of mouth was the only thing that you were trying to get out and about. I think that's something where the IFA could improve on especially with home grown talent that's going across the water, that they can implement it now until all their structures that they have are in place, they can implement that now and try till improve that for the home grown talent that's going across the water so they're protected whenever they come home.

Interviewer -Yeah. Good, good. Well thanks very much. I think you've pretty much summed up everything. Thank you.

Interviewee - No problem.

- Interview 4 End -

8.5 Interview 5 (Finbar)

Interviewer – Suppose the first thing if you were to outline your experience playing back home in Northern Ireland. What you were at and who you were playing for and what it was it like?

Interviewee – Before I went I played for Lisburn Youth Junior Team until I was around 14 and then we played in the School Boys and whenever you play in School Boys for Northern Ireland you are not allowed to play for a club because you are training there all the time. That was until I was about 16, 15 maybe, 15 years of age and then I joined Portadown and played maybe a handful of appearances for the first team before I went to England. So it was good playing at 15 and playing in the Irish League.

Interviewer – You were young at that stage to be playing Irish League.

Interviewee – Yeah

Interviewer – Obviously you were at Portadown and what happened then in terms of getting scouted and things like that?

Interviewee – Well I was scouted when I was 13 playing for Lisburn. I went across to numerous clubs. Middlesbrough and Everton were the main ones that I really liked so I always kept going back to there you know.

Interviewer – Right so they were looking at you on a regular basis?

Interviewee – Every weekend I was going over to Everton in the end. I was flying over after school on a Friday and back then on a Saturday evening after the match. Every weekend since I was 14 to 16 full – time. So that was different. I was more in a plane than I was in a car tell you the truth.

Interviewer – And how did you find it when you were over at Everton? How did that go for you?

Interviewee – It was good, I really enjoyed it. It was three years full - time training. It was a lot different to here but I was playing and training every day which is a big help as you are fitter and stronger. It was really good.

Interviewer – In terms of being at the club how did you find the whole structure after you went across? Whereabouts did you stay and things like that?

Interviewee – I started off staying just like in a big house, a massive mansion really and all the boys stayed there but I didn't like that. It had 12 bedrooms in the house and I just liked to get away from it so I only stayed there for about 4 to 5 months and then I moved out with a family and I preferred that, it was a lot better. I just wanted to get away from it you know whenever I came home from football rather than being with the same boys every day.

Interviewer - Was it just the fact that you didn't like to be with them or was it because there was too much going on in the house?

Interviewee- No it was nothing to do with who I was with it was just the fact that I wanted to switch off. Whenever I got into the bus after training I just wanted to go home and just

Interviewer – Chill out?

Interviewee - Yeah I didn't want to be out messing about just relaxing because that is mainly what we done whenever we were all together, mess about all the time, constantly you know.

Interviewer- Yeah and you never got a chance to chill and focus and obviously then you went to a family. What was that like for you?

Interviewee – Brilliant. I moved twice because the first family I went to they actually lost a son in the Hillsborough disaster and I couldn't have asked for more and the wee woman fell into depression and I had to move out then and move to a different family which wasn't as good but still okay.

Interviewer – Still good like. Obviously then you were playing at the club and how was that for you in terms of the coaches etc.

Interviewee – It was very good. We were lucky enough to have Gary Ablett. I don't know if you know him but he has actually passed away now but he was top notch. Kevin Sheedy was our academy coach as well so there was a few ex-players there which I always like to think is better learning from somebody who has done it rather than somebody who has just come through the textbook or whatever. That was good now and I really liked Gary Ablett. I was actually very close to him, he thought a lot of me and the other way round you know.

Interviewer - And in terms you know at the club if you were having bad days and things like that with training who would you usually have turned to?

Interviewee – There was a girl specifically there for that. She was just there. You would have seen her in the background all the time just watching the players, the younger players I mean, the academy and reserve team players. I can't remember her name but anything you had sort of going on in the background you could have went and spoke to her and she would have gave you guidance or whatever but I never had to do it now but I know a few of the lads did.

Interviewer – When you were at the club and went across in the first instance did the club meet you on the first day you went over or were you left to your own devices?

Interviewee – No, no as soon as you get off the plane there is somebody there to pick you up. I was brought to meet the manager and meet the first team and watch the first team train. It's a different class you know and then we went and watched the first team match, brought to the hotel. You were never left alone to tell you the truth. There was always somebody looking after you. It was very, very well done.

Interviewer – They were sort of accommodating all the time.

Interviewee – Yeah

Interviewer - In terms of your experience at the club how did that go for you? How did you progress at your time at Everton?

Interviewee – Well when I first went, looking back at it now, I probably peaked too early because in my first year I was playing in the reserve team and I just stayed there really for 3 years whereas you might have had other clubs where you would played for the academy in your first year, reserve team second year and loaned out third year whereas I was doing it all very quickly but stayed at the same level if that makes sense.

Interviewer - What was the reason for you going straight in? Was that where they felt was most suitable for you? You went across at 15 obviously.

Interviewee – At 16 I went across. They just threw me in and I was doing well but I never really went on loan or anything. There was one stage with 6 months left on my contract I went up to Falkirk with the view of a loan but it fell through. That would have been the next step obviously but playing reserve team football was a pretty good standard you know you were playing against some good first team Premier League players but I was always just the same from I was 16 from when I went there which in hindsight I think maybe wasn't as good you know, you'd want to be progressing every year really I think.

Interviewer - Did you ever get a chance to be in and around the first team?

Interviewee – Yeah In the second year I started training with the first team, not every day but sort of in a week probably 2 times a week and in the last year of my contract there I was training every day.

Interviewer - How was that in terms of training with the reserves to going to the first team. Was there much of a difference?

Interviewee - Similar in many ways but the only thing that I would say was that you didn't do as much.

Interviewer – Ok.

Interviewee - Whenever you trained with the first team you trained at half 10 and finished at 12. Whereas if you were training in the academy you were doing double sessions every day so we would have done that, got something to eat and went back out again plus the gym first thing in the morning. So really you were probably doing 3 sessions so it was a big shock to go and train and not do as much really. Probably the intensity of the whole training was a lot quicker but you didn't actually do as much you know.

Interviewer – Okay. Obviously then you were sort of progressing. What were some of the barriers for you at maybe that stage of making it a bit further within the first team?

Interviewee – I just think my own personal opinion on the whole thing was I probably put too much into it. I can remember my dad saying to me whenever you go just come home with no regrets and 100% of the time I gave you know. I think if I maybe just took a wee chill pill and just let it happen a bit more I think maybe I may have been able to express myself a bit better whereas whenever I was training it was this is life or death.

Interviewer- Yeah and you were sort of pushing, pushing, pushing?

Interviewee - Yeah and I think if I was to do it again I would just maybe hold back a wee bit and just let it happen you know.

Interviewer – Yeah and did you get into the first team at all at any stage?

Interviewee – No. Yeah pre-season and stuff like that but never played competitively no.

Interviewer – Okay. Obviously with your time at Everton you were there until you were about 20.

Interviewee – Yeah.

Interviewer - What was sort of happening for you then after that?

Interviewee - Well I went to Bristol Rovers for a trial sort of late summer time.

Interviewer - Were you released at this stage?

Interviewee – Yes

Interviewer - At the release stage did anybody speak to you or how did it all go for you?

Interviewee - Well it was about April time, the end of April. I was told actually in January before that that I was getting a new contract so I was just assuming that I was going in April just to be told that you are getting x amount of years or whatever it is. The first team manager David Moyes just said you know for you to further your career I think maybe you will have to go somewhere else because your opportunities will be limited here. Nobody doubts your ability around the club but just to get in the first team you will have to go elsewhere which was a big shock.

Interviewer - Did you see that coming, not really?

Interviewee - Not really because what I was getting on the QT was that I was going to get a new contract from reserve team manager, from first team coach even you know and obviously it didn't work out that way. It was a bit of a surprise to be honest.

Interviewer - How did you cope with that sort of news? Obviously you had built yourself up and thought that you were getting there.

Interviewee – Well to be honest it was a big, big shock because as I say I thought I was going to be there for another couple of years and was thinking to myself right get another contract. They always say that your second contract is the big one really because you get yourself and you can really push then you know and that's what I was thinking about but it never really worked out that way you know.

Interviewer - In terms then of moving on you sort of went towards Bristol. How did that go for you?

Interviewee - Not very well because I flew over I think the end of August and I played two matches. The first match I did okay, the second match first five minutes I took a really bad first touch and a fella came in and tackled me and I had done my shine in then so that was me out for about six weeks and by that stage the whole season had started so it was really trying to get yourself fit and trying to get back across which wasn't going to be easy because everybody had started their season and training was all done and limited opportunities you know at that stage so then I signed for Glenavon it was then to try and get myself fit you know.

Interviewer - And you made the decision to come home at that stage?

Interviewee - I did because as I said people were saying to me come in January and train with us then and do this, do that but that was three months down the line you know. What was I going to do until then? I needed to get fit and I needed to play again so I just thought well if I sign for Glenavon and then if it's meant to be I will get back across but it never worked out that way you know.

Interviewer - When you came home how did you find that whole process?

Interviewee - The toughest time of my life by far you know. All of a sudden you are going from full-time training to having to work every day, just a massive, massive change and you can see why lots of players who come back just basically quit football you know. I know boys from where I live and they have come back and they don't even play football now and I can see why.

Interviewer - How did you get through that period?

Interviewee - Well it's just people around you, you know I think. Just trying to keep going because there was a stage where I was ready for just packing it in just thinking what is the point of playing? I wasn't enjoying it at all. I was playing for Glenavon and very direct football is completely different to what you are used to for the past four or

five years and you just think to yourself what are you doing here you know? It was very, very difficult

Interviewer - Did you attach yourself to anybody at that time to get through it?

Interviewee - Not really no. My dad obviously would advise me and always had done from I was no age but other than dad and my family like no not really, nobody within football circles from around here you know. It's just one of them things you just get on with it and you're lucky enough to get through it but it wasn't easy, definitely not.

Interviewer - Would you have like some extra support maybe from a football context? Obviously your family was important but would you have liked anything else to have been at that time for you?

Interviewee - Yes definitely, I think you know there's people in the Irish League who have either been across to know what it feels like to come home. Lots of managers in the Irish League, I don't know of the top of my head, Warren Feeney is probably at the moment the only one who has probably played in England, I think I'm not sure as I am just talking of the top of my head here, but don't really understand what it is like for young players to come home you know and if there had of been somebody like Rodney McAree there who eventually I did come to because I'm from Dungannon he might have understood where you were coming from you know because he's been there and it's not easy for young players.

Interviewer - From an Irish Football Association perspective did they come in and help you at any stage or anything like that?

Interviewee – No, no, not an awful lot.

Interviewer - Was that something you would have liked to have seen from obviously the Governing Body within Northern Ireland itself? To have somebody there maybe as a point of contact or anything like that.

Interviewee - It would certainly help. I wouldn't see it doing any harm put it that way.

Interviewer – So the whole process just wasn't great for you at any stage?

Interviewee - No. well you have certain friends that you hold onto and they're asking how you are getting on and all but at the end of the day you are here and they are over there you know. It's a phone call really to see how you are but there is nothing that they can really do for you. It's really down to yourself but you do need somebody to talk to you know.

Interviewer – Good, good. That's pretty much everything.

Interviewee – Not a problem.

- Interview 5 End -

8.6 Interview 6 (Stephen)

Interviewer – So I suppose then just starting out if you can just tell me a little bit about your playing history. What you done? What was the club like and what was it like playing football within Fermanagh and locally in Northern Ireland in general?

Interviewee – Well I started off playing for Lisbellaw just the Junior Team and worked my way through their age groups up to 16. Once I reached about 16 I was playing school boys for the Northern Ireland School Boy Development Squad which was 15-16 and then once you became 16 years of age you were then selected for the school boys that play three times a year on Sky Sports with the Victory Shield. So once I became 15/16 playing for them there I also got spotted to play for Larne Youth and that's how I kind of got my chance to move across the water because there was more scouts watching you up in the Lisburn Youth League. Back then you were able to play for two clubs whereas now you are only allowed to play for one club and one club only.

Interviewer – So you were still playing for Lisbellaw at that time as well as Larne?

Interviewee – Yes I was able to play for Larne Youth on a Saturday morning in the Lisburn Youth League and then on a Saturday afternoon I'd then go and play for Lisbellaw Seconds in the Fermanagh Western League. I did that there for a year still playing senior football which kind of toughened you up a wee bit but also still playing against guys your same age but at a higher standard than the Britain (inaudible) League.

Interviewer – And see obviously then you were at Larne and how did things progress from there? You said you went across to Fulham. Who scouted you and what was the sort of process you went through then?

Interviewee - With Larne Youth every Saturday there were scouts watching you.

Interviewer – From a wide range of clubs?

Interviewee – From a wide range ranging from say the likes of Man United down to Peterborough going as far as the likes of your Celtic and your Rangers maybe even going into the likes of Ross County. Clubs like that there. So it ranged from Irish League with Linfield, Glentoran right up to the league with Man United and Arsenal and clubs like that there so they varied from week to week depending on...

Interviewer – Who the game was maybe against

Interviewee – Yeah. There was maybe five or six clubs that came to watch me on a weekly basis. Fulham was one of them. Another club was Nottingham Forest. Obviously in and around that time the foot and mouth disease had just come out so the Notts Forest trial didn't materialise but I was playing for the Fermanagh Milk Cup that summer as well and Fulham had still kept an eye on me and the next thing I just got a phone call out of the blue asking if I'd be interested going on a two week trial to Fulham.

Interviewer – Okay and obviously then you went across to Fulham. Did you go on your own or did anybody go across with you?

Interviewee – There was supposed to be another guy Christopher Breen who was just an ex-Fermanagh GAA player. He was playing for Ballinamallard first team. It might even have been the reserves at that stage but his birthday didn't fall at the right time. He was too old for the age group that they were looking for a goalkeeper so my birthday just fell perfect so they offered me a two week trial. First week was in Fulham, second week was in Milan for a Youth Tournament so it was also a little tester to see how you coped being away from home and also how you were as a professional not only training with Fulham but when you were away as well.

Interviewer - And how did you find it whenever you went across? Did you stay in digs or where did you stay whenever you were there for the two weeks. Obviously you went to Milan as well..

Interviewee - Whenever I first went over I stayed with a family, a Greek family for the first week and they looked after me from doing my washing to cleaning to even getting the dinner or even the tea ready during the course of the day. Whenever we were in Milan we were obviously then in a hotel. So it was still a little tester just to see what you were like away from home but also away from a family so it was kind of like a little test for them.

Interviewer – How did you find that whole environment or even you know the club when you went across for example, on the first day you went across to Fulham when you went to do a training session did you go to the Academy or was it to the grounds itself or how did the whole environment feel for you as well?

Interviewee – Well whenever we first went over luckily enough I had spoken to a couple of players who had been across so they kind of gave you the feel of what it was like. Also being involved in Northern Ireland setup I knew what it was like to stay in a hotel so I kind of already had an insight into that there. With Fulham they had just moved to their new training complex which was owned by the BBC beforehand so there was plenty of football pitches around but the first team, reserves and the academy all trained at one pitch whereas some clubs the likes of Nottingham Forest their first team trained at a different complex compared to the reserves and the under

age so it was kind of different that way but with Fulham it wasn't everything was all based on site in one centre.

Interviewer - How did you find it there? Did you feel it was welcoming or did you feel it was a bit uneasy?

Interviewee – Whenever I first went I was the only Irish person in there at the time both North and South but the players were more than welcoming and welcomed you with open arms.

Interviewer - In terms of the players were they English or were they from all over?

Interviewee – Most of them were all English so they were in and around the London area. There was one Liverpool person Sean Doherty who they just signed from Everton. I think they paid in the region of £250,000.00 for him. There was another guy Matthew Collins that they signed from Swansea and a guy Stewart that they signed from Scotland. They were the only three players along with myself that were from different backgrounds both ethnic and from a different country as well.

Interviewer - In terms of the coaches how did you find them?

Interviewee - Yeah coaches were good. Obviously all our academy coaches were all ex-school teachers. We had a coach back then his name was Paul Clements who is now Assistant Coach at Real Madrid. So he was an ex school teacher and he just progressed up the ladder. He found the wee gaps and was good enough coaching and he is now Assistant Coach to Ancelotti at Real Madrid, Chelsea and PSG and he was there as well.

Interviewer – You went to Milan as well. What was that whole experience like for you in terms of being away from home? Did you ever have difficulties?

Interviewee – No there was no difficulties. Obviously it is good to travel, see different cultures, different environments, sample their different cuisines and stuff. But obviously being with the Northern Ireland Squad I had been around to different

countries before so it wasn't different and you were able to see what the country was like and move around and see the areas and the town that you were in. Being with the Northern Ireland Squad I was away in Finland. I was in Germany. I was in Austria so it wasn't too bad. I think it would have been different if I wouldn't have seen those areas.

Interviewer – You were quite happy?

Interviewee – Yes you just get used to it and travel about.

Interviewer - If you were having a bad day when you were away did you speak to anybody in particular at home or in the club or anything like that?

Interviewee - Normally when I was away I would have phoned and spoke to mum and dad maybe once a day. There were people that you could speak to obviously you could speak to the physios. They were more or less like a second father figure or mother figure because you were constantly seeing them all the time. The coaches were difficult to speak to because you wouldn't want to go and speak to them in case you were kind of showing a sign of weakness. Most people if they were feeling bad would speak to one another, maybe go for a couple of games of pool or golf. Whenever we were in Milan you would have free time so you could go to the Amusement Arcade. You were able to spend time with different people. So you wouldn't go and necessarily speak to the coaches as I said just in case they took it as a sign of a weakness. Especially whenever you were on trial you wanted to give it your all and if you did show a sign of weakness they might think I will not sign him because he is not physically or mentally prepared to make the move or make the grade.

Interviewer – After the trial how did things progress for you then?

Interviewee – Before I went to Milan they brought me into the academy office and they said there is a contract there William for you to sign so whenever I was in Milan the contract was sent over to my mum and dad and my mum and dad signed it and

whenever I came back from Milan I was only home for two days and then I got a flight back to Fulham to play the following weekend in one of their category matches.

Interviewer – How long were you at the academy then for?

Interviewee – The academy for three years from 2001 to 2004, the end of 2001 so going on three years and then obviously the last year I didn't get offered a new contract so I had to go and find somewhere else.

Interviewer – You were there for the three years and you were given a contract and for the duration of the three years where were you staying and living and how did things go for you during that time period for you? Did you think it was going well?

Interviewee – I moved in with a new family. They were good and had a young child who I think had just gone into second year at the time and he liked football so we both gelled really well. So they looked after me same again, looked after my clothes and in terms of my eating as well they'd watch you on a regular basis but also there was a train station around the corner close to the training ground as well and to the house so there was an easy commute everyday to and from training.

Interviewer – You were happy enough with the family as well and you didn't experience any difficulties or anything like that?

Interviewee – No no the family were good. You very rarely seen the family apart from night time or if you came home for tea but any dealings I had with the family were good and they looked after me as if I was one of their own and I still have that friendship to this day as well.

Interviewer – That's good so it is you even got to gel with the kid and obviously then you were at the club. What was it like? You had been across for your trial, you had been to Milan and you had sort of got an insight of the club but did the culture or anything like that change for you or how would you describe that environment when you were there for such a duration of time then?

Interviewee – Well the environment changed. You were still training but you had to get an education so not only were you a professional footballer but you also had to go to college one and a half days per week so that was mainly a Wednesday and a Thursday. So with that there going to College one day a week. I got a National Diploma in Sports, Exercise and Science so that was good to get an education because the odds of you making it as a professional footballer was very slim so they also made sure that you got an education so it was quite difficult to try and adapt getting your education and training wise as well. It wasn't like being back here where you had a teacher giving you all the help. You had to make sure you got all the work done. There was an Education Welfare Officer who was there to make sure you went to College.

Interviewer – Were they supportive as well?

Interviewee – They would always give you a helping hand if you needed the extra help. You would obviously speak to her and she'd get you extra help with the teachers as well and lecturers.

Interviewer – You were there for the three years and then released. Did you know that was going to be coming or did you see it coming?

Interviewee – I didn't see it coming. When I was there I thought I was doing enough to maybe get an extra one year contract. We were doing a coaching education week as part of our course. With Fulham also being part of the EFA they paid for you to go and do a coaching qualification which would be equivalent to a C Licence here or a Level 1 so we were doing that there and we were in the community and about two days before Christmas, our last day, I got called into the office and the manager, the Academy Director were sitting with a blank sheet of paper and you kind of thought maybe that could be a contract but then they just turned round and said, "We're not offering you a contract" and like most kids my age you think the whole world is going to end so it took me a while to get used to not getting a contract and thinking that the whole world was going to end.

Interviewer – That was a difficult sort of time because you thought it was going well.

Interviewee – Yeah I thought it was going well and thought I might have been able to have got an extension on the contract but they obviously turned round to me and said they weren't going to offer me a contract so it was quite difficult because, two days before Christmas you were planning on maybe enjoying your Christmas break but you had to come back and get back into the swing of doing training properly.

Interviewer – After the New Year again...

Interviewee – Yeah it was actually the first time since I had been there that I had two weeks off for Christmas. Normally the first and second year Christmas Eve you would get off then you'd fly home the day after Boxing Day up to New Year's Eve and then they'd fly you back home again but the year I got released was the first time that they gave me a two week break which was the norm for most players. Fulham they brought you into train over the Christmas period as well.

Interviewer – Whenever they were telling you that did they give you any feedback or guidance as to what was the reasoning behind it?

Interviewee – They just put it down to height wise. They had Van Der Sar who was six foot five and they had Maik Taylor who was six foot two/six foot three so they put it down to you weren't tall enough but if you look at the likes of Shay Given who was playing well in the Premiership that year he was only five foot eleven maybe six foot pushing it but it's just really an excuse to get rid of you and an awful lot of the clubs would use height wise or not skilful enough as an excuse to get rid of you.

Interviewer – Did they support you through that? Obviously you were going home and it was a long period. Did they offer you any support during that time or even when you came back to get used to that process?

Interviewee – Not so much. When I first came back I didn't play for six weeks. They had another young guy playing so you were training Monday to Friday, sitting on the bench and you weren't playing. That was six weeks into it and I then went on the PFA kind of support programmes called (inaudible) which was held up in Birmingham so we went and played a football match, three days training up there

and the last day was a football match but it just turned into like a cattle mart because you had all these scouts and managers looking at you around the pitch but there wasn't an opportunity for you to express yourself because you only got 20 minutes, 40 minutes in total really but as I say it was just like a cattle market because you had all these coaches looking at you and it was very difficult to express yourself in 20 minute games or 40 minute games especially as a goalkeeper if you don't get to touch the ball as much. Out of that there I got a phone call to see if I would go and play for Crawley Town so I played the last 10 weeks at Crawley Town. Lucky enough we won the promotion and did the Vauxhall Conference that year with them but that there was about the height of the help that you would have got. The PFA was more helpful. The PFA is still more helpful till this day because when I was there I paid membership so any coaching qualifications, any school work that I do or extra studies that I do I can get money back from the PFA for all the work that I do.

Interviewer - So you are still getting a bit of support from the PFA?

Interviewee – Yeah once you become a member you're a member for life so in and around that time whenever I was playing Gary Neville writes about it in his book that they were going to go on strike because there wasn't enough money from the TV deals so there is some money that comes in from the Premier League back into the PFA and that there supports all the players right down to maybe Division Two, League Two or even the Vauxhall Conference so but once you are a member they support you for life so they do.

Interviewer – That's good at least you have some sort of support in the background.

Interviewee – Yeah, I have used them a couple of times doing my UEFA B and doing my National Diploma and also any other qualifications that I've done. I just fill out a little form and just send it off and they give you between 50 and 75% of the student fees.

Interviewer - That's brilliant.

Interviewee – Yeah it's good now. Probably the main two people that would have helped me over there would have been Mike Taylor who I still speak to on the odd occasion whenever he is over with the Northern Ireland National Team and Van der Sar he would have looked after you as well because I cleaned his football boots so he'd have given you maybe kind of some money towards cleaning boots. If you ever wanted equipment or football boots or gloves you just went to speak to him and he'd get you the gloves or boots whenever you needed them and then at Christmas time he'd also look after you in terms of giving your tracksuits, giving you football boots, trainers and obviously a little bit of money. It was good that way because you also got a chance to get to speak to him as well.

Interviewer - Yeah so you had somebody else you could sort of turn to as well?

Interviewee - Yeah you could always speak to him. He was always open to talk, both him and Mike were excellent in terms of that there. They would always chat to you.

Interviewer - Did you speak to either of them two at that stage of your release you know when you were going through that sort of process?

Interviewee - Yeah, they spoke to me about it and they tried to help me out as best as they possibly could but obviously whenever I just got released ITV Digital had just gone bankrupt so they were kind of supporting football league so there wasn't that much money around the football leagues and an awful lot of clubs then did go bankrupt but I think that was because of overspending and then some clubs aren't going to bring you in unless you are better than what they have.

Interviewer - Yeah and obviously taking you back you sort of said the club gave you the excuse that it was the height but you thought it was going well. Was there anything you sort of thought what was maybe hindering/maybe furthering your progression within that sort of structure moving forward you know first team and all that? Was there any sort of barriers or anything to moving?

Interviewee - I think when you are playing at academy you then played reserve team so it's not really competitive football as such. I know now the Under 21s are doing something similar with the reserve teams. Maybe if the Academies were to play against or move into say like lower leagues to kind of toughen you up a wee bit it might help you because when you are playing against people your own age it kind of becomes passive football its more or less attack v attack. Same with the reserves very rarely would you have got a couple of first teamers dropping down. I know now a days speaking to some of the ones that are over when I am on coaching courses with IFA they find that there as well that the Academies and the reserves are not testing each other. They are playing against people their own age and maybe ability whereas if they go and play in the likes of league one or league two it will toughen them up a wee bit.

Interviewer – Yeah that's good. Obviously then you had been released and you went to Crawley for the last 10 weeks. What sort of happened after that there for you?

Interviewee - Once there I thought I could have got a contract because you win the league and you'd like to think that they would keep the same team so when I called in to speak to the manager he said, "Yeah you can come over for pre-season. There's no contract here at the moment so you would have to earn a contract" and at that time I wasn't prepared to come over unless I had something set in stone because you would have had to pay for your rent and it could have lasted maybe from one week to maybe 2 or 3 weeks maybe even 2 months so I wanted to make sure I had something set in stone. So then whenever I came back Portadown were getting ready for Europe and I knew Ballymena were getting ready for Europe because Kenny Shields took the Northern Ireland Under 17 team so I kept in touch with Kenny quite a bit so whenever I came back I just went and trained with both clubs and both clubs offered me a contract but I preferred to sign with Kenny purely and simply because I liked working with Kenny at the underage Northern Ireland teams.

Interviewer - And obviously then you went to, that was with Kenny. Who was he with again, sorry?

Interviewee – He was at Ballymena.

Interviewer – Ballymena.

Interviewee – So they played in Europe that year. They played against a team from Denmark called Odense. So we drew nil - nil with them away in Odense and whenever we came back they beat us 7 - nil in the return leg. So as second choice at Ballymena I didn't expect to get into their first team but towards Christmas time I got into their first team right up to Christmas time and then Kenny brought in this more senior goalkeeper because results weren't going our way and I think we finished mid table that season so between playing 2-3 months from September to December and then after that there I got the tail end of the season with Ballymena.

Interviewer – And then what happened for you next there afterwards? Was it a one year contract with Ballymena.

Interviewee – I signed a one year contract with Ballymena and then the following season I signed another one year contract. Tommy Wright came in at Ballymena. Tommy Wright kind of moved the club forward as well. We kind of finished mid table. We got to a final that year against Linfield in the County Antrim Shield. Kenny had got us to a semi-final but Tommy then came in and brought us to a final, just one step further to where we had got to the previous season and then played all of that season and then I signed another one year contract with Ballymena so I was there for three years so I was.

Interviewer - So you were there a right while and then did you leave the club then after that?

Interviewee - I left the club in January of that year. So into my third season I signed for Glenavon at Christmas time because I wasn't playing any football and there wasn't much point staying at Ballymena just collecting money. I'd rather have gone and played so I signed for Colin Malone at Glenavon. There was Dungannon interested in signing me as well but Ballymena wouldn't sign to their nearest rivals which was Dungannon at that stage so I ended up signing for Glenavon for a year.

Interviewer - And obviously then you had obviously went back to Ballymena. How did you find that sort of process you know coming from England a Premier League club back to Irish Football?

Interviewee - Coming back I struggled quite a lot.

Interviewer - What way would you have struggled?

Interviewee - Struggled in terms that you have gone from people keeping an eye on you to trying to keep an eye on yourself. I'd struggle maybe mentally as well in terms of not coping well with training and the physical aspect because you had people looking after your training and making sure your diet was correct whereas I would have struggled that way. Put on a bit of weight but then lucky enough I had my mum and dad around me and then I also had Kenny at Ballymena and they would have brought me to the side and said here you need to start working harder, you need to start eating properly, you need to start concentrating on your studies whereas I thought it would just automatically happen for me.

Interviewer - And obviously your mum and dad were quite critical at that stage in terms of guidance and obviously Kenny would have been up there you know in terms of keeping you on the straight and narrow.

Interviewee - Awh yeah it's not that I was a wrecker or a mucker about like. I would have worked hard and trained hard but I just to get the mental side of it I couldn't cope really with the mental side of being released. Three years you have put all your effort in and you kind of more or less think that you're a failure and that you have failed and that you have let everybody around you down as such.

Interviewer - But that shouldn't be the way like. Obviously then you were supported a wee bit from Fulham. You had a couple of ones around you. Were the IFA at any stage aware of you coming home? Would they have supported you in any shape or form?

Interviewee - Not really the IFA were more interested in themselves. When I came back there was an opportunity for me to become a coach with the IFA but it didn't

materialise. I thought I would have had a good opportunity of becoming a coach. When I was at Fulham I worked with the Community Officers in the under deprived areas and thought there would have been an opportunity of going and getting a job with the IFA because there was Government jobs there for coaches going into the local schools and I thought I had an awful lot to offer people over here but when I came back the IFA didn't give me a job because I didn't have a level 3 qualification which I thought was a load of nonsense at the time and I thought that they should have been able to give you a job on your experiences working with kids from deprived areas and working with groups that had gang related issues as well but the IFA didn't see it that way. Not the whole of the IFA but the Coaching Department or the Education Department thought that you weren't good enough to become a coach. Especially whenever you played for the country you kind of feel let down but it wasn't to be and I am now working for Fermanagh District Council so in one way one door closes and another door opens. I am now back doing a bit of coaching with the IFA and working on their Coach Education as well.

Interviewer – Good stuff and even in terms you know you were struggling with the game sort of mentally with the whole sort of challenges of coming home and you sort of talked that you thought you were a failure to some people. Did they offer anybody to talk to about that sort of process of coming home to guide you through it because it seemed to be like a bit of a difficult time...

Interviewee – Yeah it was. There wasn't really anybody there to talk to. You obviously had your mum and da but they kind of didn't really understand the kind of physical demands of playing for a full-time club in Fulham, in England or anywhere so whenever I came back I just thought it would automatically fall into place but maybe looking back now maybe I could have worked harder. You become a wee bit wiser when you become older so looking back maybe I could have put a wee bit more effort in when I came home but I just thought that it would automatically fall into place for me which it didn't and these things happen but we're tried to test us.

Interviewer – If you would like to see something like even other support mechanisms for players like yourself going through that process what sort of things would you like to see in place?

Interviewee – Em well I think what could be done is when the coaching courses are on during the week there is no reason why the seventeens, eighteen year olds, nineteen year olds couldn't be invited up to the IFA and a coaching seminar put on because they are doing the UEFA B, the UEFA courses so there is no reason why those players couldn't go up, be kind of like guinea pigs for the players or for the coaches or also getting a bit of pre-season in as well and then if needs be you can speak to people because there is always professionals that come over and do the courses so there is no reason why because as soon as your season is over you're home for maybe 4-8 weeks anyway so you could go up to the IFA, up to the Queens University, take part in the coaching courses, get pre-season under your belt but you could also speak to any of the coaches there, any of the psychologists, any of the fitness, strength and nutrition guys that are there for the courses so there is no reason why a structure like that there could be put in place.

Interviewer – To try and help people as they are coming back out?

Interviewee – To try and help people out whether it be in terms of them being released or in terms of them first year back, second year back home, going in for their most important year which would be their third year contract. There is also people there that you could speak to but they could do better. There is a structure there.

Interviewer - So even like the whole way through as opposed to maybe at one sort of stage.

Interviewee - Yeah once you become sixteen there is no reason why those players couldn't go up to the IFA or to the coaching courses to train the weeks that they are on and then there is people there to help and guide them, to help them out in terms of their training, in terms of their contracts, things like that there.

Interviewer – You're sort of coming backwards and forwards anyway so it would be nice if you were sort of included in them timeframes.

Interviewee - You are home for 8 weeks anyway so the coaching courses run on to June time, end of June start of July cause they are all geared around the profession so those players could be here, used as guinea pigs, the coaches are coaching them as part of their course but the players are also getting the benefit of training there from 10 in the morning right through to maybe 4 or 5 O'clock that evening, getting the sessions done and also gaining a bit of match practice as well.

Interviewer - So it would be a good sort of support network there.

Interviewee - Yeah a good support mechanism.

Interviewer – How do you think you know, if you were looking at the whole process now, how do you think it has had an impact on you as an individual?

Interviewee - Well when I first went over at 16 I came from a rural area so you had to grow up quickly and become a man because you are moving from a small county like Fermanagh to moving to the biggest cities in the world in terms of London so you had to grow up pretty quickly and find your feet. I would be more street wise now and also looking back everything happens for a reason. So you got released, it's not nice to happen but there's other doors and pathways that have opened up to me as well

Interviewer - So you have been quite thankful that you went through the process at the same time.

Interviewee –Yeah, it also helps when you go for jobs. You stick it down that you were a professional footballer cause not only in interviews do people talk about experience but they might end up talking to you half the interview about your experiences with Fulham, what happened and what can you bring from that into your workplace.

Interviewer – Awesome. Thanks you very much I think that's pretty much everything you know in terms of the interview but if there's anything you know that I need to follow up on is it alright to give you another shout.

Interviewee - Yeah no problem.

- Interview 6 End -