Football Fever and the Power of Sport Inspiring Children to Get Active, According to Parents

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Youth Sport Trust survey reveals footballers including England captain Harry Kane dominate the sporting role models parents say inspire children to move more, as Summer of Sport and National School Sports Week show how sport can unite communities.

As England's Men's Football Team prepare for a World Cup quarter final against Norway with their run capturing the attention of all generations of the nation, new research commissioned by the Youth Sport Trust reveals the British athletes inspiring the nation's children to be active, according to their parents.

The survey, carried out ahead of this year's National School Sports Week, explored the importance of sporting role models in motivating young people to move more, build healthy habits for life and experience the life-changing benefits of sport, including confidence, resilience, connection, togetherness and teamwork. Amid growing concerns around children's physical health and activity levels, families, schools, organisations and Government all have a role in tackling these issues, but do we know who inspires our young people?

The findings show parents believe football remains the dominant sporting influence among young people, with current England stars among the players inspiring children during a summer in which the game has once again shown its power to unite communities, families and fans.

So, who do parents think is inspiring the nation's children?

Top five British inspiring male athletes:

1. David Beckham
2. Marcus Rashford
3. Mo Farah
4. Harry Kane
5. Anthony Joshua

Top five British inspiring female athletes:

1. Chloe Kelly
2. Leah Williamson
3. Jessica Ennis-Hill
4. Keely Hodgkinson
5. Lucy Bronze

Other England squad members named by parents included Bukayo Saka, Jude Bellingham and Declan Rice. From watch parties and playground conversations to children recreating goals in school fields, the performances of our national teams serve as the latest example of sport's unique ability to inspire the next generation and to bring people together.

That same sense of connection has been visible across the country this week through National School Sports Week, powered by Sports Direct and Everlast, with schools, families and organisations uniting to celebrate PE, play and sport. The campaign is encouraging children to take part in the action during a landmark summer of sport, with resources and activities linked to major events including the Football World Cup, the Wimbledon Championships, Women's T20 cricket and the Commonwealth Games.

Ali Oliver MBE, Youth Sport Trust CEO said, "Hot on the heels of the Women's Cricket Team making the finals of the T20 World Cup, the England's men's Football World Cup journey has shown once again how sport can capture hearts and bring people together. When children see players like Harry Kane and Jude Bellingham performing on the biggest stage, or hear parents and friends talking about the tournament, it can spark a powerful sense of possibility.

"But the power of sport is not only found in stadiums. We have seen it this week as part of National School Sports Week, touring the country and seeing children connect through play, develop skills, build confidence and experience the togetherness that comes from moving with others.

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“This summer of sport is a huge opportunity to help every child feel part of the action. Whether it is football, cricket, tennis, the Commonwealth Games or playground games with friends, play and sport can give young people joy, belonging, resilience and so many more skills they need to succeed.”

Sir Mo Farah, National School Sports Week champion, said, “It means a lot to be named by parents as someone who inspires children to be active. Sport has given me so much throughout my life, including the belief that you can achieve more than you think. I have always loved football too, and moments like England’s World Cup run show how powerful sport can be in bringing people together. That is what National School Sports Week is all about: helping every child feel connected, try something new, build skills and enjoy being active with others.”

Over 2,600 schools took part in this year’s National School Sports Week, supporting more young people to get active for the UK Chief Medical Officers’ recommendation of 60 minutes a day. A number of schools taking part across the country have also had visits from athletes and para-athletes to share their experiences and showcase the power of sport to change lives.

Company Contact:

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Youth Sport Trust

T. 07825 065195
E. press@youthsporttrust.org
W. https://www.youthsporttrust.org/

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