

New program launched to help top footballers & clubs with stress and poor mental health

Monday 14 May, 2018

The Sober Advantage, a wellness provider, is today launching a first for football, a coaching programme focused entirely on the player's mental health and wellbeing. This is to coincide with the start of this years' Mental Health Awareness Week.

The CEO, Dr Bunmi Aboaba, said "in my work as a wellness coach, I began to see professional footballers. I soon realised that they had unique problems – the constant risk of a career ending injury, suddenly being thrust into a new environment, and never ending press speculation. I knew we had to develop a programme specifically for footballers."

Called the 'Good Mental Health & Wellbeing Football Coaching Programme', it is packed full of powerful techniques to quickly ground individuals struggling to manage stressful situations, low mood or addiction cravings. Other segments of the programme include regular, confidential discussions with a specialist Wellbeing Recovery Coach, and club wide initiatives to make emotional wellbeing discussions part of the culture.

It is clear the most innovative part of this programme is what Managing Director David Steward coined, 'Initiative Destigmatisation'.

He said, "we have listened carefully to the players we have seen privately. We heard an overwhelming amount of fear of speaking out to management about their psychological problems. There is still a huge amount of stigma and concern over judgments, and not wanting to appear 'weak'. This culture is quite literally crippling players who are working through their own internal struggles. They are desperately trying to manage their feelings in secret and not let it impact their performance on the pitch".

We feel the way to make lasting changes is to have a footballer who has gone through and understands these issues talk in confidence with the Club. Over time, the issue of Mental Health and overall Wellbeing will start to become a regular part of training. The power will be taken out of the taboo. The team will allow themselves to be more vulnerable with each other. The football family will start to support each other in new ways.

The Sober Advantage have already secured both former and current footballers to deliver these talks as part of Initiative Destigmatisation. Former Aston Villa favourite, Lee Hendrie said, "I feel privileged to be able to speak out about my own personal struggles to raise much needed awareness of the impacts of bouts poor mental health. I have teamed up with The Sober Advantage to help deliver their destigmatisation initiative bringing mental wellbeing and addiction recovery support to football clubs up and down the country."

We are looking forward to talking with coaches and managers planning ahead for next season about their views on player mental health and wellbeing and to discuss their appetite to implement a programme that will be a hands on approach making a lasting change".

Talking with Dr. Bunmi Aboaba on last Monday's The Debate show on Sky Sports, Liam Rosenior of Brighton & Hove Albion FC said: "Having a Wellbeing / Recovery coach within a football club, I think that's key now, I think it's important to players performance on the pitch as well".

Retired Italian Midfielder Andrea Pirlo was spotted recently on social media saying "Football is played with the head. Your feet are just tools" and David's reaction to that was, "Precisely, yet we still aren't doing enough training, educating, strengthening, sharpening nor resting of our minds. It's not seen as a priority, often until it's too late".

Newly promoted Wycombe Wanderers' front man, Adebayo Akinfenwa, aka 'The Beast' said: "I know within the profession there is a lot of mental health, substance dependency, stress and depression and this is why I champion The Sober Advantage who are taking strides to support the wellbeing of athletes".

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