

Sport



Ex-Brighton captain sets up own academy

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Former Brighton captain Adam Virgo has set up his own football academy with the aim of creating a fun atmosphere for children in a no-pressure environment.

The 35-year-old played for Albion, Exeter, Celtic, Coventry, Colchester, Yeovil and Bristol Rovers in a 13-year professional career, and his academy is based at Steyning Town Football Club, East Brighton Rugby Club and Hassocks Sports Centre.

Virgo feels too much pressure is put on children from a young age and his aim is to develop players at his academy in a fun atmosphere and push them through to a professional club when and if they are ready.

Virgo still has football running through his veins after making 280 professional appearances and also now works as a pundit for BT Sport and talkSPORT. He hand-selected all the coaches for his academy and vows to be at as many coaching sessions as possible and welcomes dialogue with parents about how their children are progressing.

On setting up the academy, Virgo said: "When I first retired in 2013 it was on my thoughts to set up my own academy but my job in the media took off so quickly that I didn't really have time.

"It was always something I wanted to pursue, though, and I've taken my time to make sure everything was in place. I wanted to use the experience of my career and experience of working in other academies, the good and bad, to try to make a package for my academy.

"With my name on the badge, I want this to work. The most pleasing aspect is we have



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received a lot of support from local grassroots clubs in the community.

"I've only missed one session because of work and am there as much as possible, so parents can speak to me and they can have that personal dialogue with the academy."

Virgo has a Level B coaching licence and has coached at clubs in Sussex. He is keen to stress his academy is not to replace the coaching provided at local teams but to add something different.

He said: "A lot of clubs have parents who have a Level 1 or Level 2 coaching badge now and they do it for the love of the game. Clubs have the numbers coaching-wise but this is offering my own vision on how I believe a training session should run.

"I'm offering children the opportunity to come and have some good coaching, have fun and try to work their way into

the professional game.

"At ages five to 12, football is all about having fun and learning from good coaches.

"I believe that if I set up a session compared to a professional academy at Arsenal, Tottenham, Chelsea, Brighton, wherever, that my coaches are good enough to teach just as well as a professional academy. The difference is they won't have any pressure because it's under my badge and not a professional club badge.

"Parents seem to think that when their children are training at these clubs, they're going to make it a lot quicker but I can develop a player and then say 'you're ready to go into the professional game now'.

"Timing is crucial in football. If you go too early to a club and lose your confidence, you may lose someone within the system.

"This is my vision. I'm not saying it's perfect and the right way but I'm just going to be honest and try to get a way into the professional game for boys and girls."

Virgo plans to set up an agency in his academy to help children move into professional clubs. The academy will also run a BTEC course at Steyning in areas involving sport such as coaching and personal training for ages 16-plus, so players have something to fall back on if a professional career is

unsuccessful.

Virgo said: "In the early years, five to 16, it'll be purely about learning and enjoyment.

"But when we've got youngsters coming through the age groups and they've got a good chance of making it, we'll bring them in, look after them and make sure they're prepared for when they get there.

"At the same time, it's about being realistic. We'll push people as much as possible but, for most teenagers, there comes a time when someone has to say 'You're not going to make it'. One moment you're dreaming of a career as a footballer, the next you're back to square one.

"So, from the ages of 16 to 19, students at our academy can be educated for two years on a BTEC course, whether that's coaching, physiotherapy or some other aspect of sport.

"We'll put them through coaching badges. At the end of that, they can either go to university or train as a personal trainer, gym instructor or even get on a scholarship in America. Ultimately, it's about saying to the parents 'We'll do everything in our power to make your child a footballer. But if he doesn't make it, there's a safety net'.

"That way, when a kid comes through our doors, he won't feel pressure or worry about letting anybody down. He'll just enjoy playing like I did."

For more information on the academy, visit www.adamvirgoacademy.com, email info@adamvirgoacademy.com or follow @adamvirgoacademy on Facebook and Instagram and @AcademyVirgo on Twitter.

