

# FOOTBALL IN THE COMMUNITY

BY NIGEL DAVIES - PEN FOR HIRE

*In a few weeks time a team of youngsters representing Swansea City Football Club will be setting off to tackle their very own Italian Job - not a lot of people know that which is something that needs to be put right!*

Swansea City's Centre of Excellence Under 12s / Under 13s have once again been invited to rub shoulders with the likes of Juventus, Fiorentina, AC Milan and Sampdoria in the prestigious Margine Coperta Tournament.

April the 5th will see the Swans Minis get a bloomin' move on as they head out to the idyllic province of Pisa to tackle talented youngsters from some of the biggest clubs in the world.

The squad will spend a week in the scenic setting of Montecatini, soaking up sights such as the famous Leaning Tower and the Coverciano Museum - but make no mistake, this is no comedy caper... it is a crucial step in the development of potential Swansea City stars of tomorrow.

Centre of Excellence head coach Kevin Hodder explains: "The main benefits of the tour are to experience a different culture and to give the players a different education in football."

"Obviously there is a different style of football in Italy; it will give them the experience of playing in a different country against a different mentality of player, a different physique of player.

*"Basically it will help develop them as all-round footballers and give them as good an education as possible."*

The Margine Coperta Tournament has already played a key part in the development of one current Swansea City player; in 2003 the Swans became

the first ever non Italian team to take part in the competition and their 13 year old midfielder Joe Allen was voted Player of the Tournament as the side finished ninth out of 16 teams.

Now 17, Joe is a 1<sup>st</sup> year scholar with Dave Moss's youth development side and he has made it into the Swans' first team match day squad on a couple of occasions this season - including the memorable FA Cup tie against Premiership Sheffield United.

According to Moss the slightly built 5'5" central midfielder possesses fantastic technical ability and bravery in equal measure, often making a mockery of his diminutive stature through his fiercely competitive nature.

*Allen has also impressed Brian Flynn enough for the national youth supremo to make him captain of the Wales Under 17s side.*

Joe's progress shows just how valuable a tour like this can be - granted, the talent has to be there in the first place but the talent and the attitude have to be nurtured and given the best opportunity available to grow and flourish.

Of course, a trip like this isn't going to come cheap and the money has to be found by the Centre of Excellence and the families of the young players themselves - and short of robbing a kitbag full of gold bullion, that isn't going to be easy.

The cost of air fares,

accommodation, kit and accessories must all be met by the Centre of Excellence, amounting to thousands of pounds.

So in my capacity as fanzine editor I said "Hold on lads, I've got an idea!"... and came up with a way of raising extra funds on top of the £130 donated from last issue's proceeds.

*Kevin and his crew were given a batch of copies of issue 8 to sell like raffle tickets and they were allowed to keep the full cover price on every one that was sold, generating a further £100+ for the coffers.*

But more money has to be found over the next couple of weeks and all donations will be gratefully received - if there are any business people looking for a worthwhile sponsorship opportunity then look no further!

"A Touch Far Vetched!" would like to take this opportunity to wish the young Swans the very best of luck and although winning takes second place to learning and development, it would be a real bonus if the side can beat their best ever placement of sixth, achieved last year.

Oh, and when you're out there lads, remember just one thing....

*"You're only supposed to blow the bloody doors off!"*

*If you or your business wish to help the Centre of Excellence meet the costs of the tour, either through sponsorship or a straight donation, then please contact Kevin Hodder on 07966 076845 or email him on k.hodder@sky.com*

