



**WALKING FOOTBALL
NATIONAL GAME STRATEGY
5 YEAR PLAN
2019 – 2023**

WALKING BACK TO HAPPINESS



August 2018

www.thewfa.co.uk



The Walking Football Association Ltd
A not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. Company Registration no. 10479575
The National Governing Body for Walking Football in the UK

Background

Walking Football was created as a unique sport by John Croot (Director of the WFA) in Chesterfield in 2011. The Walking Football Association (WFA) was established in 2016 as the National Governing Body in the UK. Through its many successful initiatives, it has achieved a position of pre-eminence within the sport. The WFA is a not-for-profit Company, staffed by over 30 passionate and committed volunteers. The sport is aimed at adults aged over 50 of both genders, but younger age groups are involved. It has grown organically largely “through word of mouth” with little national marketing. The sport is now played in over 1200 clubs/locations, with an estimated 40,000 regular players.



Strategy

This strategy is a plan of action designed to deliver the following 10 key objectives over a 5 year period:

1. To double the number of walking football players in the UK
2. To widen the appeal of the sport; specifically targeting new markets such as the disabled, women, long-term illness, obesity, lower-socio economic groups and non-footballers
3. To establish a national network of walking football centres
4. To establish a national network of WFA Leagues
5. To promote a single set of rules to be used by all, with the ethos of the sport fully implemented by WFA qualified referees trained through the WFA Referees Academy
6. To raise awareness and significant funds for our official charity partner, Prostate Cancer UK
7. To establish walking football as a unique sport, leading to Olympic and Commonwealth Games recognition
8. To host the European Nations Cup in 2019
9. To host the World Cup in 2020
10. To raise the sport’s profile through increased PR and marketing



Participants



It is believed that the majority of current walking footballers used to play football at amateur or recreational levels. A small number were semi-pro or pro. The majority are male.

The sport is very different to Association Football (with 50 differences). Therefore, there is no reason why the focus need be solely on footballers.

Of course, this remains a key market for potential players, but other markets will be explored, specifically:

- Women
- Disabled
- Socially isolated
- BAME communities
- Armed Forces in transition
- Obese individuals
- Cancer recoverees
- Lower socio-economic groups
- Injury recovery

The WFA will be seeking referrals from GPs, NHS Centres and relevant charities.

The WFA will be using innovative marketing techniques to reach this new audience.



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WFA National Walking Football Centres

The WFA plan to open these new centres in 25 major cities and towns throughout England and Wales.

The WFA is in partnership with Goals, the largest provider of mini soccer facilities, and several other partners, in this venture.



Subject to funding, we intend to offer free walking football sessions for an initial period with local and digital marketing used for promotion to new targeted participants.

The WFA is fortunate in having access, through its affiliated clubs and volunteers, to a huge bank of walking football expertise which can be capitalised on in developing this project.

The WFA has also developed a Best Practice Toolbox to assist the setting up and running of a new club.



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WFA Referees Academy



This initiative is a crucial part of our strategy. Using a regional support team of qualified referees, the WFA will be expanding its rapidly growing network of walking football referees to a target of 500 within the next five years. Professional training, assessing and mentoring will ensure our high standards are maintained.

The WFA will also be using a two-referee system for all Tournament finals and internationals.

A disciplinary panel has now been established and the WFA will be enhancing its disciplinary procedures for WFA Cup and League matches as soon as resources permit.

The sport faces 2 big challenges- running and physicality. The WFA have already seen significant improvements in club and player attitudes since we started the WFA Referee Training scheme in 2017.



Non- contact... physicality is one of the sport's challenges, along with running.



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Laws of the Game



Uriah Rennie. WFA Referees Advisor



The International referees team

The WFA LOTG have been established for several years and are already used by most tournaments and leagues, having been deemed by most to be fit for purpose.

Each year the WFA LOTG are evolved through suggested amendments and votes by affiliated clubs. This process will continue.

Moreover, it is crucial that the rules also show a duty of care to the participants and fulfil the health and safety criteria that needs to be adopted where players of a senior age are concerned.

The FA's version issued in February 2017, was widely viewed as not age appropriate and therefore not widely adopted. After a lengthy hiatus, they are planning to issue a new version very soon. The WFA hopes that they will reflect the wishes of the sport this time, specifically the importance of the non-contact rule.

The harmonisation of these two versions of LOTG would be useful, if only to remove some of the confusion that does exist.

However there are some key areas that the WFA will not compromise on.



WFA National Premier Leagues



The first WFA National Premier League will be launched in the Midlands in September 2018.

Other leagues will follow to form a complete national league.

WFA rules and WFA referees will be used throughout.

A new WFA League website will be launched to showcase all the results and tables.

WFA Coaching



A new WFA coaching qualification will be offered in 2019.

This unique qualification will cover:

- how to set up and run walking football sessions in a safe and professional manner
- bespoke walking football training routines for the more competitive players

We recognise that for many WF sessions they are booked on a timed basis - ie a one hour session - however the WFA believe in developing the game and are looking to encourage coaching of the sport.

Unique Sports Status

Obtaining Sport England recognition as a unique sport will create further funding potential, and in the future a possible place as an Olympic and Commonwealth sport.

The WFA has started the application process with two very positive and constructive meetings with Sport England.



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National Teams



The England winning over 60s and over 50s teams at the Amex Stadium, May 2018



The world's first ever walking football match, between England and Italy, was played in May 2018, and was a huge success generating enormous worldwide publicity. Tom Charlton (above) is our WFA Ambassador.

The next international between Wales and England is planned for September 2018.

Planning is underway with both national teams for the Euros in 2019 and the World Cup in 2020.

The England set up is being enhanced with the addition of five regional squad managers. Our strategy is to keep looking at new players through the development of regional teams.

The WFA's focus so far has been on England and Wales, but the other Home Nations will be addressed in due course.



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National Cup Tournaments

The WFA run the oldest and largest walking football national cup tournaments for three age groups. A new over 70's will be added.

The enhanced format, leading to an enlarged grand final, has been a great success.



Birmingham 2017 winners (Over 50's)



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Funding



The WFA is actively seeking funding from a range of sources, including Sport England and the Big Lottery Fund, and is confident that significant funding will be obtained during this strategic period.

The WFA's strategy fits perfectly with the Government's "tackling inactivity" strategy.

Such funding will primarily be aimed at the grass roots level of the game, encouraging new clubs and new players and new types of participants.

Partnerships

In the short period of its existence, the WFA has already formed some excellent partnerships with some prestigious and relevant companies, who have been both extremely supportive and an integral part in the WFA's success.

The WFA is seeking sponsors for the National Teams and the National Cup and Leagues, as well as the Euros and World Cup. The JUST Pensions Group kindly sponsored the first International match at Brighton.

JUST.

RETHINK RETIREMENT

As the WFA grows, we expect further prestigious partners to be joining us on this exciting journey.



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Walking Back to Happiness

The title of our strategy is a permanent reminder of the huge physical, mental and social health benefits derived from this unique and fun sport. Lives are indubitably being saved and prolonged.

This message will be a key element in our “tackling inactivity” marketing.

Marketing

The WFA will be including the appointment of a marketing agency as part of the funding applications, as it is clear that there is considerable scope to significantly raise awareness of the sport.



Plans will also include further collaborations with our world class sports video partner SGTV.

Sky Sports have already showcased the sport in the Autumn of 2017 and we plan to work with them again.



Liverpool legend Alan Kennedy is a regular walking footballer



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Charity Partnership



The exciting initiative of a Walking Football Month in September will no doubt be a great success in raising both awareness and funds and we expect this will become an annual event.

The WFA's long-term partnership with PCUK is aimed at saving lives and raising funds for this fantastic charity.

The WFA are also planning to develop a relationship with a leading mental health charity and will work with charities like Age UK to identify potential participants.



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Club Affiliations



Within one year of launching the affiliation scheme, the WFA were delighted to see that most of the major clubs had affiliated, and our ambitious 1st year target was exceeded after only 8 months.

Further initiatives will be launched to attract more affiliations.

WFA Resources

The WFA have developed a team of over 30 high quality, committed and passionate volunteers.

Our growth and success would not have been possible without their magnificent help.

This strong team will be enhanced by the further recruitment of 10 WFA regional representatives and 5 regional squad managers. These appointments should all be completed by the end of 2018.

Once funding is secured it is expected that several permanent full-time staff can be recruited to strengthen the Head Office team.



WFA Research



As the NGB for walking football, the WFA are in a unique position to lead and assist in the various research projects that are now focussing on the benefits of walking football.

The WFA has a strong relationship with UCFB, the elite Sports university, who have been extremely supportive of the WFA since we launched, and we have recently been approached by several other Universities and PhD students asking for our help and advice.

International Development



The WFA will be a founding member of FIWFA (The Federation of Walking Football Associations) when it is launched later this year as the international governing body.

Growth of the sport on all continents has been amazing with over 35 countries now already involved.

The WFA has been helping in many countries, with coaching and referee training visits already made to Hong Kong, Italy and Guernsey.

There are current initiatives in Kenya and France.



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Branding

The WFA is reviewing whether a re-branding of the sport would be beneficial in terms of broadening its appeal and helping the unique sport status accreditation by distancing itself from Association Football.

Various alternatives have been explored and initial feedback has been positive.

Extensive consultation will take place in 2019.

The English FA



The WFA has a long-standing agreement to work with the Football Association for the benefit of the game, and we have assisted them on the development of their suggested LOTG.

The new FA strategy for walking football “Stepping Out” will be published soon and we have been invited, and agreed, to meet with the FA following that publication.

The WFA is hopeful that their objectives will be compatible with those outlined in this document, and that the game will progress from our joint work.

The WFA is also looking to form a working relationship with the English Football League (EFL) in the future.



Media frenzy at the Amex



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A UNIQUE SPORT

#INSPIRINGACTIVITY

FUN, FITNESS & FRIENDSHIP

"There are people on the pitch - they thought it was all over - not now - not for a good few years".



FINALIST
Best Sports Governing Body Initiative

For further information please contact paulcarr@thewfa.co.uk



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