

Sport



Adam McEvoy, coach of Sevenoaks Powerchair Football Club, with his players at training
ALEXANDRA JOHNSON

Coach turns from Powerchair novice into European leader

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SEVEN years ago Adam McEvoy walked into the PE department at Valence School for the first time.

Unbeknownst to him at the time, his new job in Westerham would be the first step on a career path that has taken him across the world, via Sevenoaks.

McEvoy had been brought into the school to help with one of the students' extra-curricular activities - powerchair football.

Having already worked in the West Midlands as disability officer, McEvoy already had some experience within the field, but he'd never encountered powerchair before.

Fast forward to the present day and McEvoy is now the go-to person for anything related to the sport in the UK and beyond.

He is now the National Development Officer for the Wheelchair FA in the UK, and the Director of Sport for the European Powerchair FA, putting him in charge of organising the equivalent of the Champions League and European Championships. He also runs the Sevenoaks Powerchair Football Club, which he has helped grow to become a National League side playing against the country's top teams.

"I never thought powerchair was something I'd be involved in fully," said McEvoy. "But I had such a good time as a disability officer and I thought if I enjoy getting up for work every day then I'm onto a winner.

"Then the opportunity came up at Valence and I thought why not? I'll give it a go."

McEvoy's time at the school quickly saw the team he inherited progress on and off the pitch and before long the Valence Vikings, as they were then known, needed to expand.

Through an affiliation with Sevenoaks Town FC the Vikings changed their name to Sevenoaks Powerchair FC, and the merger meant they could now draw in players from the surrounding areas as well as through Valence.

The club could also, vitally, benefit from extra funds to help cover the costs of running the club.

Each powerchair can cost between £6,000-£7,500, while hiring a venue for ten months provides a financial burden that the club could ill-afford without help.

Alongside getting support from Sevenoaks Town, McEvoy also



Adam McEvoy being given Premiership Coach of the Season

helped ensure future funding by registering the club as a small charity.

"It's not jumpers for goalposts but we're realistic that it costs a fair amount of money to run the club," added McEvoy.

"Sevenoaks Town helping us with funding is a massive weight off our shoulders, but we knew we couldn't always go to them for money which is why we registered ourselves as a charity. Bit by bit with the funding we've built ourselves up. Now we

have seven or eight chairs owned by the club plus a lot of the players own their own, but we still don't have the resources to grow right now.

"We've got families and players from other clubs asking to come and join us, but I'm having to put them on a waiting list.

"Unfortunately, there aren't clubs in every town and village like there are with running football, so parents have to travel. Most of our players are Kent-based but we

have some come down from London, some from Sussex and one player who comes through the Dartford Tunnel every week."

Players aren't solely coming to Sevenoaks because of its location. The club have been thriving under his coaching.

There was a run to the semi-finals in the WFA Cup in 2017, an invincible WFA Championship title in 2018 and, this year, the senior and development squads

faced each other in the South East Regional League. This season the senior squad were sat in second, their highest ever league position in the Premiership, after the first three matches too - grabbing a

1-1 draw with previous league winners Northern Thunder.

Individual success has also followed, with Kyle Alexander becoming the first Sevenoaks player, across any form of the game, to earn a call up for the England national team.

The then 16-year-old helped England finish third at the 2017 Powerchair World Cup in Florida.

McEvoy himself has also been recognised when, in June, he was awarded the Premiership Coach of the Season at the WFA's awards night.

For all their successes, McEvoy recognises the importance of the club as an avenue for people with disabilities to enjoy themselves.

"With the nature of the sport the players we get have incredibly severe disabilities," said McEvoy.

"A lot of them have conditions which mean they'll pass away before they're 30.

"We know that for our players, life has dealt them a bad hand, so anything we can try and do to give them more reasons to enjoy life we will do.

"Being in that environment, knowing they might be halfway through their life already, it just means we have to encourage them to live life to the fullest, and if football can play a part in that, then that's amazing."

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Adam with his Sevenoaks players