



# IT COULD BE YOU

With American football enjoying a renaissance on these shores, there are now examples of growth at a variety of levels

**There are now more than 73 teams** and more than 4,000 students participating in American football at university level and there is growing interest in the adult game, underscoring by Baltimore Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis coming to England this year to motivate the London Warriors for their derby fixture against London Blitz.

And this year, for the first time, the BritBowl weekend was live-streamed online by Gridiron TV. There are now international teams representing GB at the junior, student and adult levels.

So how does the British American Football Association (BAFA) plan to ensure

that this becomes a permanent boost as opposed to a temporary one?

**Get schools involved**

In years to come, when PE teachers go to their storage cupboards, instead of pulling out battered footballs or chipped cricket bats, there will be the opportunity for them to take out well-maintained shoulder pads, new high-tech helmets and fully pumped-up pigskins. When you walk past sports fields either during the day or after school, you'll see players learning to block, tackle and throw touchdown passes.

While this is all a dream for the future,

progress is being made. Earlier this year, BAFA sent out a consultation document to schools and colleges to gauge what sort of interest there would be for them to compete in either kitted or flag football. This could either be as part of the curriculum, or take the form of after-school clubs and other extra-curricular activities. The response to the survey was a very positive one.

When you think about it, American football can go hand in hand with both academic and sporting success. Learning a playbook is excellent practice for exam revision and algebra looks simple



compared to some of the terminology in offensive play-calls. There is also the teamwork aspect. With companies increasingly keen on individuals who are good communicators and who can work in a team, playing either flag or contact football gives participants credentials to impress future employers.

In some schools and colleges, American football is already well established. Woodham Academy, in Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, is one such programme. Established by their head coach, Jon Tait, in 2004, the Woodham Warriors are not only successful, they are inclusive, with sessions split over three nights to accommodate the 60-plus students who are keen to play.

Starting off playing flag football, they quickly went from the national to the international stage, representing Great Britain in both the NFL European Flag Championships and then the 2007 NFL World Flag Championships in New Orleans. They received over £5,000 from the County Durham Foundation to purchase padded kit and enable them to expand into contact football. They have also been on trips to the US to form partnerships with high schools and have a huge number of volunteers to help run the club.

**Student culture**

In spite of all the success, according to Coach Tait the most important aspect of the programme is to give some students the opportunity to better themselves. He said: "The general success of the introduction of the sport cannot be undervalued. Not only has it helped more young people into sport, it has also been paramount in creating a positively disciplined student culture. Students who play the game value the importance of teamwork, rules, and personal discipline, all of which are essential to the day-to-day well-being of young people and schools."

Woodham isn't the only success story. The Exmouth Community College Raptors in Devon also pride themselves on their inclusivity, with boys, girls and players with learning and physical disabilities

encouraged to play. The Raptors have over 50 students who play and are able to compete in both flag and kitted leagues thanks to a successful application for a £10,000 Sport England grant. The Raptors' head coach, Rob Rooksby, believes the programme's focus on simplicity and fun are the main driving forces behind the number of participants.

**Way forward**

"I felt I had to strip the game down to its simplest form and in doing so I saw many opportunities that would directly benefit a wide spectrum of student player," says Rooksby. "What we do at the college may not be the experience of most football coaches but it is, I believe, the way forward in developing a truly exciting and fun game that is safe and accessible. It helps to build a skill base that will be further developed as they progress through their career."

In response to the interest of American football in schools, BAFA are looking to put in place more resources for institutions that want to start their own team. They are also examining the possibility of setting up a schools competition.

For more information on American football and on schools programmes, visit [www.britishamericanfootball.org](http://www.britishamericanfootball.org)



## BAFA's 10-point vision for the future

- Improved governance structure**  
BAFA is committed to getting the right people in the right roles.
- A better football pathway**  
BAFA will introduce a better football pathway in order to introduce, retain and develop players.
- Workforce development**  
BAFA will create formal programmes to support staff at teams and in schools.
- Coaching infrastructure**  
BAFA believes that better coaching will make for a higher level of play on the field.
- Officiating infrastructure**  
BAFA will work to create more officials and to provide better training for new and existing officials.
- Improved ICT**  
Central to the success of BAFA will be the role of ICT and an enhanced website presence.
- Athlete development**  
BAFA will adopt many best-practice approaches towards developing players.
- Facilities**  
BAFA is committed to providing better facilities at their games and events.
- Commercial**  
BAFA identifies the need for strong commercial partnerships to help grow its brand.
- Competitions**  
As the sport evolves, BAFA recognises current competitions may be adapted or new ones introduced.