St. John's in the News

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EXCLUSIVE Revealed: Tottenham's aggressive youth recruitment campaign to snap up Britain's best teenage stars and blow rivals out of the water - with the help of expensive private schools and lucrative pro deals

By ISAAN KHAN, REPORTER
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Tottenham Hotspur have launched an aggressive campaign to recruit Britain's most talented young footballers from rivals, using expensive private education and lucrative professional contracts to lure them in.

Daily Mail Sport can reveal Spurs are targeting the country's most talented Under 15s through a bespoke package, headed by hefty wages when youngsters turn professional aged 17 and free education at one of the country's finest private schools.

And a glimpse of what the future might look like came against Crystal Palace on October 31.

With Tottenham 2-0 up, **Roberto De Zerbi** introduced 18-year-old academy graduate Luca Williams-Barnett in the 88th minute. The eye-catching cameo proved a memorable **Premier League** debut, and last week earned him the top flight's Creative Moment of the Month award for a mazy dribble through Palace's defence.

It's further evidence of the talent coming through at Spurs. Williams-Barnett is not a product of the new recruitment drive, but he offers an illustration of what the club hope to achieve by nurturing talented youngsters and giving them opportunities in the first team.

That has not always been Tottenham's strength, having endured a decade of failing to turn potential into established first-team players. Since **Harry Kane** and Andros Townsend made their league debuts in 2012, only three Spurs academy graduates – **Ryan Mason**, Harry Winks and Oliver Skipp – have made at least 30 Premier League appearances for the club.



A glimpse of what Tottenham's future might look like came against Crystal Palace on October 31 with Luca Williams-Barnett's thrilling cameo off the bench

In a Daily Mail Sport interview last month, ex-Spurs player and manager Tim Sherwood claimed Tottenham's inability to give youngsters a proper pathway to the first team has failed those in the set-up over the past decade, and that the academy may as well be 'closed up'.

It is a record the club are determined to change. Spurs' renewed strategy has been felt across the Premier League's academy circuit over the past year, with rivals anxious at what lies ahead.

The competition for young players is growing. As well as the traditional Big Six clubs, Newcastle, Aston Villa and Brighton have also become worthy competitors because of the first-team pathways they offer.

Tottenham pay £21,000-a-year fees to St John's Senior School in Enfield, which boasts top grades and facilities. Its most recent GCSE cohort achieved 65.3 per cent grades 9–7, formerly known as A* and A grades. The school's football pitch has 22 water cannons underneath (the same number as Arsenal's Emirates Stadium) and both primary and secondary drainage systems.

The programme presented to the parents of prospective stars is the key selling point. Spurs have been given permission by the league to provide a Full-Time Training Module (FTTM) programme which allows students more time away from school. They have their lessons at St John's but on three days a week after lunch, they go to the training ground and focus on football. It is the school's responsibility to organise catch-up lessons so education is not missed out on.

Arsenal, Manchester City, Brighton and Wolves were the first adopters of FTTM, and now Spurs have joined them. Where Tottenham have elevated their strategy is in the number of schoolboys whose fees they cover. Daily Mail Sport understands Spurs have awarded multiple FTTMs to pupils, covering fees in excess of £300,000 annually.

Through this, the club have been able to lure in some of the country's best talents. Isaac Allen, who has captained the England Under 15s, joined Spurs from West Ham in August despite Arsenal's attempts to sign him. The 15-year-old struck four goals in three matches at the Under-15 World Cup last month. Gabriel Rigg, 15, was also recruited from West Ham in September, while Spurs beat Arsenal, Chelsea and Newcastle to the signing of Jake Maloney, 14, from Charlton.

The most promising among the cohort is Ashiah Haughton-Sinclair, who in September trained with Spurs' first team. Last season the 15-year-old became the youngest player to feature for their Under 18s, and netted 70 goals and 20 assists.

Tottenham's ambitions didn't stop there, as they tried to recruit other players from rivals last summer. The club thought Kyran Thompson was joining from Arsenal, before Newcastle snapped up the talented forward at the last minute. Mishel Nduka, also previously at Arsenal, was approached by Tottenham before he chose a lucrative deal at Manchester City.

Daily Mail Sport understands Spurs pay higher salaries than most Premier League clubs – bar Man City and Chelsea – for academy stars signing professional terms aged 17, which is the earliest age allowed.

This is a significant bargaining chip, as many clubs are rigid in what they will offer players signing their first professional contract.

There is typically the belief that too much, too young can have a negative impact, but Spurs view it as a necessary ingredient in the modern competition for talent. Nurturing academy graduates into the first team negates the need to spend millions later down the line on established players.

The Tottenham aim is for their first team in the next five years to be reinforced by multiple leading academy graduates, after a decade of producing promising talent – such as Marcus Edwards and Troy Parrott, now at Burnley and Real Betis respectively – without giving them a viable pathway at the club.

And those surplus to requirements could be sold for substantial fees. Luka Vuskovic (£50million to Brighton), Will Lankshear (£20m to Middlesbrough), Ashley Phillips (£20m to Middlesbrough) and Alfie Devine (£6m to Preston North End) are recent examples.

Facilities play a part, too. Spurs' Hotspur Way base, opened in 2012, is renowned as one of the finest training complexes in European football.

The 77-acre state-of-the-art complex in Enfield, which cost £45m to build in 2012 and has since seen significant investment, is home to both the first team and academy, as well as being used regularly by England.

While four of the 15 grass pitches are reserved exclusively for first-team training, the youngsters benefit from being immersed in the same elite environment as the senior professionals they aspire to emulate. It's an arrangement designed to make the pathway from youth prospect to Premier League footballer feel that little bit closer.

With Williams-Barnett already offering a glimpse of what lies ahead, Spurs will hope he is the first of many academy graduates to make the leap, rather than another reminder of the potential they have previously allowed to slip through their fingers.

For a club that has spent the best part of a decade searching for its next homegrown star, the teenager could yet become the face of a long-overdue academy revival.