

Glasgow Deaf Athletic Football Club – the story!

[Low sad music play]

HARRY A 10 YEAR OLD DEAF BOY, SITS IN HIS ROOM LOOKING SAD. HIS MUM ENTERS.

MUM: You ok?

HARRY: I wish I could play with a deaf football team.

MUM: Do you want to go to the park and play football?

HARRY: Ok!

HARRY AND MUM ARE WALKING ALONG A PATH NEXT TO A GAME OF FOOTBALL. HARRY TURNS TO HIS MUM

MUM: What's up?

HARRY: Look a deaf football team.

MUM: Do you want to watch?

HARRY: Yes!

MUM: Let's go then.

[Gentle piano music plays]

THEY APPROACH THE PITCH AND HARRY STANDS NEXT TO A MAN (TOM, 70s). TOM TURNS TO HARRY.

TOM: Are you deaf?

HARRY: Yes.

TOM: Me too, I'm deaf. Glasgow Deaf Club are playing. They're up 2-1. I played football for the club for years, but I am retired now.

HARRY: Wow.

TOM: Maybe you'll play for them one day like I did.

HARRY: Yeah, maybe.

TOM: Hopefully in the future.

HARRY: Yeah!

[Music fades]

GEORGE (40S/50S) WEARING A TRAINING TOP STAND NEXT TO THE FOOTBALL FIELD. HE SIGNS DIRECTLY AT THE CAMERA.

My name is George McGowan, and I'm the Chair of Glasgow Deaf Football Club. The club was founded in 1871, and was the first deaf 11's football team in the world- making it older than both Rangers and Celtic!

It was founded, managed and kept going thanks to William Agnew and Alexander McGregor all those years ago.

Before I first got involved in the deaf football team, I had no idea that there even was a deaf football team. Back then there were 3 deaf teams and we competed in the deaf league for the Scottish Cup and British Cup.

Now there aren't any deaf vs deaf competitive matches in Scotland and we have to play in the hearing league. I wonder if there will still be a deaf football team when Harry turns 16?

I thought it would be interesting to look back at what it was like, and asked two ex-players about their experience.

[Energetic piano music plays]

[Soft background music plays]

MONTAGE OF OLD PHOTOS. GEORGE INTERVIEWS 2 OLD PLAYERS (Tom and Craig).

GEORGE: How did you get involved with a deaf football club?

TOM: I remember I was a wee 16 year old playing in a hearing league when I met a deaf man. When he found out I was deaf he told me about a Protestant deaf team and invited me for a visit. So I went along and met lots of deaf people. Communicating with them was easy.

CRAIG: When I was growing up I started going to Glasgow youth club with my sister (who's also deaf). They'd watched me play, saw I was good, and begged me to play for Glasgow. So that's how it started, through the youth club.

GEORGE: What was the structure of the football league like in the past?

CRAIG: It was different, there were lots of matches. There were 8 (deaf) football clubs from Aberdeen, to Edinburgh, to Ayrshire. We had regular matches every week, there was a buzz about playing: 5-a-side, 6-a-side, 11-a-side, all of it really!

They were good times in the past, more so than today.

TOM: I remember our football culture was really competitive. We played throughout Scotland, England and Great Britain.

We were also invited every year to competitions in Belgium and other places in Europe. It was fantastic.

CRAIG: Back then Sandy Brooks was the first club Secretary/President and he connected us with the Scottish FA and SAFA. This meant we played in a league and had weekly matches.

We had a deaf league that included the Scottish Cup and British Cup. Asking for time off was difficult, and some deaf clubs also had to compete in hearing leagues on Sundays. It meant it could be difficult but SAFA understood and accepted that.

They encouraged deaf clubs to play in deaf competitions throughout Britain and Europe. We had a really good structure, really smooth. Thanks to Sandy Brooks, it was really good.

GEROGE: What was football culture like in the past?

CRAIG: Football culture was really different than it is now. I played in the hearing league and that was really hard. We used to play on red clay which was really hard and you had to be tough. It was different when we played deaf teams, we used to play long balls and it was really open play.

GEORGE: Did you experience any barriers or difficulties when playing hearing teams?

TOM: When the hearing players were talking, I couldn't follow what was being said because I'm deaf. With other deaf teams this wasn't a problem. Sometimes hearing players would shout and mock me for being deaf.

I'd get angry about that and need to calm down. When 2 deaf teams played there was none of that, it was just a normal match.

CRAIG: Without a doubt our number one problem was a lack of deaf awareness from the referees. This meant when we played some hearing teams it could be good, but with others it was awful. Sometimes we'd really clash especially when hard tackles came in to deaf players. I could be in quite a bit of pain but wouldn't shout about it, so the referees would assume it was ok.

But hearing players would shout after each tackle, and the referee would call a foul. It was very frustrating week on week because there was no deaf awareness at that time, and how we were treated varied every week.

GEORGE: How do you feel about the historical divide between Catholics and Protestants?

Really, it never felt like we were against each other, we just played fierce fantastic matches on the pitch. We all loved it! They were good competitive matches, and when the match was over, we'd shake hands and that would be it.

But “sectarianism” dividing Catholics and Protestants could be felt at Rangers and Celtic matches. There were clashes, and you had to be careful to keep separate from both teams after our matches. But both teams loved the competition between St Vincent’s and Glasgow Deaf Football and really enjoyed the matches.

GEORGE: Do you think the clashes between Catholics and Protestants are still present today?

CRAIG: I think, at least from my perspective, they’ve stopped. The old times have passed.

It’s gone, now we’re the same - equal. We love to play football and want to pass that on to future generations. That’s better than having hate. That’s not good for your health.

GEORGE: Who were the toughest team to beat?

CRAIG: I think St Vincent’s were our toughest competition. Similar to Leeds (England) - they were a strong team!

In Scotland - St Vincent's and Lanarkshire. Both of them used every trick in the book. They’d always go in for tackles hard, so hard it’d make my body sore! They’d also call the referee over with accusations of handball. It was awful. They were tough.

TOM: In Britain the best team was Leeds, they regularly won the British Cup. We lost to them and got kicked out at semi-finals or quarter-finals a lot of times.

If it weren’t for Leeds we would have got through to the finals more because we were a strong team.

GEORGE: Why is deaf football important to you?

TOM: It’s part of my deaf identity. It’s where I can communicate with ease, teach and learn new things.

CRAIG: It’s where I feel happy, I feel good. It’s why I kept going all these years because it felt good. After the match we go to the pub or club and chat. Playing as a team every week we’ve become like brothers. You’re part of a team and you keep going. You get to know each other’s personalities.

Every week you get fit. It’s good. It’s a good football club to be involved in.

GEORGE: What is different for the young generation of footballers now compared to your time?

In my time we had 4 deaf schools in Glasgow, all with strong BSL, and we were all involved in the football teams which was great. Now all the deaf schools have closed, and the kids go to mainstream schools which means they are very oral, speak and only have a wee bit of sign language.

So when the younger generation arrive here and see everyone signing it's really different! It means it's time for change. For us and them to connect using their signs, using old signs less.

TOM: We have to realise it's different now than before when everyone used strong BSL. For young players now it's different. I remember in the past there were lots of competitions, big game after big game.

But now deaf youth don't have as many competitive opportunities. I hope in the future there will be more.

[Music fades out]

IN THE FIELD GEORGE SIGNS TO THE CAMERA

I've witnessed how deaf football has changed over the generations. For example, the shift from all players using BSL, to the introduction of SSE, and now how some players use a mix of oral (speech), BSL and SSE.

There have been different opinions and disagreements about hearing aids vs cochlear implants, BSL vs SSE, deaf vs mainstream schools, as well as signing with BSL vs using oral speech.

Now we face opinions about deaf vs mainstream football. Dividing players from deaf schools and youth clubs, from those players who've grown up isolated and alone in hearing schools.

We need to welcome everyone. We all face the same issues, the same barriers in our everyday lives. We need to welcome everyone to learn about our history. Now we'll chat with 2 young players about their experience.

WE INTERVIEW 2 YOUNGER CURRENT PLAYERS (JORDAN/KYLE)

JORDAN: I joined because, well - I grew up here at the club because my father was with the club. So growing up I would come and watch my father play for Glasgow, and it's something I've grown up with all my life. For me, it's the fact that it has a deaf team, where I can play with other deaf players in a hearing league.

Before we used to have deaf competitions, and I've always enjoyed representing Glasgow in different places. It's also a bonus getting to represent Glasgow Deaf in a hearing league. I like that.

What problems / barriers do we face as a deaf team? When competing with hearing teams we sometimes run into communication difficulties with the referee. If I'm playing a hearing team communication is a barrier because you need two way communication.

So, for example, they need to adapt their communication for me, and I need to adapt my communication for them. If we do this, we can have a conversation. If I arrive and you don't

know how to communicate with me, that's a barrier. But if they'll adapt: write notes, try in different ways to communicate, or if they can sign, it's fine. It's only if they do nothing that it becomes a barrier. With a deaf team there aren't any barriers and communication is easy. But when we're playing a hearing league team it can be a barrier when they don't understand what we're saying to them.

How I feel about the old times compared to my time and what the differences are? Well really, I've played for Glasgow for 22 almost 23 years. I've seen a big difference, for example, in the past players had much more commitment. People would come, we'd meet up, it was part of your social life really. But now it's a bit different, because, well there are generational differences. People have new hobbies, whereas in the past football was the hobby. Now with so many new hobbies it can be difficult to get people to make a commitment to football.

I know for myself, I love football! But there are people who like football but don't love it as passionately as me. They can be hit and miss with their attendance and what we need is commitment. So it's not the same as the old times when you could rely on people coming every week.

KYLE: What do I like about Glasgow Deaf (GDAFC)? It is all quite new to me. I have grown up in the hearing world, I did not know much about deaf culture. But I come and join this team. It gives me confidence in myself being more deaf and more opportunities to become friends, yeah more friends.

How do I feel about my deaf culture? Well.... I don't know. I mean the old culture, I don't have much experience about it. As I am growing up into the hearing world. There was not much deaf people around me. When I was younger I got bullied for being deaf. I think I was quite different from everyone else. I always wanted to be hearing. Being deaf was a big problem for me. But as I got older, it did not bother me much anymore.

How do I feel about the older players in the team, compared to our generations? The older generations have more experience than us in deaf culture. And playing for deaf teams, the older culture had a lot of deaf teams going out and about. But now we do not have much about here. But you always learn something quite new about the older culture and all the older players. They always make you right about what mistakes you have made in a game or at training and you learn from it.

JORDAN: To keep it successful for the future, we need to keep carrying on with what we're doing now. We need to keep playing in the hearing league, and also keep our own football team going so that it isn't shut down. To be honest if in the next 10 or 15 years we've managed to keep going, I'd count that as success.

KYLE: I would say probably bringing in more younger players. I mean we have got a lot of young players right now. But it would be good to get the young deaf culture into more experience and more opportunities for playing for a deaf team.

IN THE FIELD GEORGE SIGNS DIRECTLY TO THE CAMERA

The club has kept going because of the efforts of past and current players to preserve its important history. Thanks especially to the inspirational Sandy Brooks who served for 60 years, and Jack Hepner who served for 40 years, totalling 100 years of service between them.

Although deaf football culture has changed over the years, we still face the same issues and barriers everyday. It's important that we create a culture of inclusion and make sure there continue to be deaf spaces, especially in sports, to make sure that deaf people have a place we can come and relax.

If we want the club to still be here in 10 years so that Harry can achieve his dream, then it's up to us, it's our responsibility to carry on.

[Uplifting music plays]

WE RETURN TO THE SIDE OF THE PITCH. HARRY IS STANDING NEXT TO TOM WATCHING THE GAME. THE GAME FINISHES. TOM TURNS TO HARRY.

TOM: I have a surprise for you.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE TEAM GARETH APPEARS HOLDING A Glasgow Deaf Athletic football top. He hands it to Harry.

GARETH: I hope to see you when you are 16.

TOM, HARRY AND GARETH WALK AWAY TOGETHER

[Music fades]

CREDITS PLAY