I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your contribution to MK Dons Academy via the Academy Supporters Draw, particularly during such a difficult period in all of our lives.

Your donations have enabled us as an Academy to support both our players and staff during the National Lockdowns with a number of developmental programs.

Following a disrupted season, we are delighted to be fully operational once again, having welcomed the schoolboy age groups back into training. As per the EFL and Government guidelines, we will continue to maintain the highest of standards regarding our adherence to COVID policies and appreciate everyone’s co-operation in all matters relating to this.

Despite the stop, start nature of the season, as Academy Manager, I am enormously proud of the resilience and hard work of our staff who have strived to provide support to each age group in engaging and innovative ways. Thankfully, we can now refocus our efforts on delivering a high-quality player development program that will enable our Academy players to emerge stronger and ready to perform to the best of their abilities.

At the sharp end of the Academy, in challenging times, the U18s have had a mixed season. There have been some outstanding performances in the FA Youth Cup and Youth Alliance matches, but also occasions where we have not performed to the level we believe they are capable of. This is the beauty of player development whereby during learning players lose consistency and struggle to adapt to challenges they have been set. This requires patience on both sides along with dedication and commitment to the learning process.

The scholars have all enjoyed precious learning time with Russell Martin and the First Team staff. The opportunity to learn from an experienced player like Dean Lewington will prove invaluable to Jack Davies as he continues his journey into professional football. We were all delighted when First Year scholar, Lewis Johnson signed his first professional contract just after turning 17 years old. This once again confirms the club’s commitment to the pathway between the Academy into the First Team.

I hope you enjoy reading through the latest edition of our Academy Newsletter and I look forward to appraising you of further developments all designed to deliver an exciting future for your Academy.

Jon Goodman,
ACADEMY MANAGER
The easing of a National lockdown means that our schoolboy players have made their long-awaited return to Academy training. Jackie, Nathan and John put together a great lockdown learning scheme and this was supported brilliantly by our placement students Vaughn Watson and Jodie Southby. I am reliably informed that I was the only coach to join the virtual online HIIT sessions so feel well placed to say that the boys had to work really hard during these sessions.

Training is now back in full flow having paused an additional week whilst the players returned to schools. All age groups are now taking part in three training sessions per week, and our games programme returned during the Easter break – with games scheduled across the age groups versus a host of opposition from league representative and district sides, grassroots teams, Watford FC, Pro-Direct Academy, Chelsea FC, Walsall FC, Wolves FC and JP Pro development centre. We will then resume the EFL game programme through until the end of the season.

Recently we were eliminated from the FA Youth Cup by Leeds United. A disappointing result on the night. However, from my vantage point I was able to watch staff and players respond to high pressure, and was really pleased with what we learnt about our young players, and what I saw from Lee Collier in the heat of the moment and with a game plan thrown out after about 20 minutes! We will learn from the game and further enhance our coaching programme and develop our style to come back stronger.

Finally, we are proud to say goodbye and good luck to Kyln Brooks-Lynch who is departing the Academy to work at Brighton & Hove Albion. Kyln was in his third season with MK Dons and leaves with our best wishes and support for the next part of his coaching journey.

Stephen Payne.

HEAD OF ACADEMY COACHING
U18S UPDATE –
HEAD COACH LEE COLLIER.

As the season draws to a conclusion and the initial Youth Alliance fixtures have been completed, I have taken some time to reflect on the season and the overall feeling is very mixed. The season has produced some real positives with many of the players in the squad getting the opportunity to train or be included in the 1st team match day squad and on the back of this Lewis Johnson signing his first professional contract to join Jack Davies and John Freeman from the academy system.

With the ability in the group, I feel we have underachieved and should have got more points on the board. Some of the performances did not yield the points they deserved. The FA Youth Cup produced a decent run this year and in the first two rounds the boys performed well which set up a tie with Leeds united. It turned out to be a tough evening for the players; going down to ten men after 20 minutes made the task even harder, but I was proud of how they stuck at it and never stopped trying to play, the work rate and honesty from them was very pleasing.

Another real positive this season has been the gradual introduction of the U16s into the squad and getting to see what players we have moving up the pathway and coming into the programme next season. This contact time has been valuable as it allows us to get them up to speed quicker so the transition is smoother as they have a clear idea of what will be expected of them next season.

My thanks to all the coaching and support staff for their help this season and the hard work they have done over the season which sometimes can go unnoticed.

Hopefully, with the restrictions being gradually lifted over the next few weeks this will allow you all to attend games, so I look forward to seeing you then.
LOCKDOWN LEARNING FOR FOUNDATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PHASES.

The schoolboys were obviously disappointed when training was postponed due to the third National Lockdown, so in attempt to keep them engaged we designed a player care program that allowed us as staff to stay connected with the players.

A comprehensive weekly program was put in place. Each week it consisted of a player care session delivered by Lead Phases coaches and Head of Education, a physical session delivered by two of the Sports Science team and a player led element, where we encouraged the players to film part of their skill-based learning.

We covered key elements from the Academy Coaching syllabus so that these fundamental skills could be enhanced upon their return to practice.

Key elements included workshops on Resilience, Reflections, Goal Setting and Values.

As a team we had a clear focus to create a fun and engaging learning environment which gave the players opportunities to discuss issues that were relevant to them. It was a fantastic way to check in with them and their parents.

During February Half-Term we ran a quiz. We were fortunate to host some Special Guest sessions, which enabled the players to meet, Dean Bowditch – MK Dons, Gary Marheineke – GB Amputee GK and two of the current first year scholars Lewis Johnson and Ryan Holmes. All four guests gave a fantastic insight into their personal journeys, which coincidentally linked to our four main themes.

We ended Lockdown Learning with The Big Race – an attempt to virtually visit all the League 1 football grounds, via walking, running or cycling. Over thirty families and staff members contributed to the grand total of 1,310.304 miles which equates to running the distance of 17 away fixtures against League One opposition. A fantastic achievement in just under three weeks.

As a thank you to the players that had contributed the most, we presented them with a signed football from the first team.

As a consolidation task we asked the players to “tweet” their top three lockdown learning highlights, here are some of their responses.

Thankfully, its back to training for now, and we look forward to our return to play.

Jackie Bushell, John Bitting & Nathan Thomas.
During lockdown, Academy players did exceptionally well with both their home Strength and Conditioning programs and HIIT classes, hosted and brilliantly put together by this season’s Sports Science and Therapy students Jodie and Vaughn.

We feel that beginning these programmes at home has enabled a seamless transition into our in-person Strength and Conditioning sessions following our return to training.

The first block focused on balance, with progressive exercises for each age group. Balance is used in all tasks, from everyday activities such as walking, to making sure you can compete to be the first to the ball. Balance is also particularly important during periods of growth, as it is common for the body’s centre of gravity to change, making it an essential skill for our Academy players.

Each week, players have enthusiastically engaged with an in-person, technique-based session during training. Guides have also been provided for players to complete full sessions at home.

We hope that through this programme, we can help improve the confidence of our players, increasing performance and decreasing injury risk.

During the Easter Break a screening day was held for every age group. This included testing sprints, change of direction, jumps, musculoskeletal measurements and baseline concussion screenings. Through this information, we will be able to track player’s progress each season and when needed, establish targets for players to meet upon return from injury.

Lucy Juffkins, Caitlin O’Reilly, Vaughn Watson & Jodie Southby.

International recognition for Academy players.

Second-year MK Dons scholar Talibeh Jallow was one of three UK-based players to be called up to the Gambia squad. The Young Scorpions progressed through the group stages before beating the Central African Republic in the Quarter Finals.

A 1-0 defeat to Ghana saw Gambia miss out on a place in the Final but they bounced back to secure a bronze medal thanks to a success over Tunisia on penalties in the Third-Place Play-Off. Jallow scored from the spot in the shoot-out, after coming off the bench with 11 minutes left to play for his first appearance at the tournament.

Ryan Holmes was recently selected for the Wales U17s National Training Camp following a number of excellent performances for the U18s. Ryan spent 5 days on camp training at the same site as the Senior Men’s team as part of the U17s preparations for future International matches.

We are enormously proud of both players – well done!
MK DONS ACADEMY

Thank you.