

REACHING FOR THE SKY

Huddersfield New College

By David Brenchley

With a wealth of sporting talent on its doorstep, Huddersfield New College has the distinction of being one of the best sports academies in England.



With football stars Cameron Jerome and Fraizer Campbell, cricketer Ryan Sidebottom and many rugby league players making their mark with Huddersfield Giants all being Huddersfield-born, the college is situated in an ideal place. Jerome studied at the college, as well as badminton player Sarah Bok, rugby stars such as Michael Lawrence and Leroy Cudjoe and many 'soccer' players in the United States of America.

It's also the place where Outlane CC hold their winter nets.

New College's highly-qualified coaching team is headed by Manchester United Development coach Gabriel Mellor, who has seen many improvements in facilities since he joined in 2001: "When I started there was no academy, so I set up the football academy in my first year."

In addition to the football academy there is women's football, basketball, golf and cricket academies and, Mellor adds, "next year we are running a rugby league academy in conjunction with Huddersfield Giants so we are going to have six academies."

"We have a fitness suite, for which we have just spent £22k on new equipment, and we have also got a small sports therapy room for the use of our academy students who have got injuries to gain a bit of insight about how they can get back to full fitness."

This is reinforced by Giants youngster Michael Lawrence, who acquired his BTEC National Diploma in Sports and Exercise while studying there: "Now I know a lot about injuries, I know what I have hurt and how to get better. I know about the causes and recovery now, which helps."

Although the college prides itself on having ex-students step up to become professional athletes, it is not their initial aim: "That is not necessarily our aim, that is a fantastic by-product", Mellor said, adding: "What we are trying to do is

offer students the opportunity to gain an education and also carry on with their passion and their sport at a higher level, so to improve as players, gain coaching qualifications, refereeing qualifications which might lead them on to university or careers.”

Winger Lawrence said: “Ever since I was young I have always wanted to play rugby and it just fell into place that I was picked up by the Giants. If not, I was going to go for a career in sports anyway.”

Many former students have gone on to be picked up by American universities and have their profiles framed in the college and used for inspiration. The first of these was female footballer Zoe Barratt, who impressed Oklahoma University so much they came back the next year and picked Sarah Leonard as well. The first male footballer was Michael Robertson, who attended Bethel College, Tennessee.

Mellor is assisted by an impressive team of coaches, including former Manchester City defender Paul Futcher. Futcher “is a ‘coach educator’ which means he actually coaches the coaches, which is what he has been doing with the girls. He runs the ‘Level 1’ and ‘Level 2’ courses to assess new coaches or people who are wanting to become coaches.”

Cricket-wise the college brings in coaches from Yorkshire Academy like Tony Pickersgill combined with teachers like Dave Weston who also has a cricketing background.

The facilities are used by a number of cricket teams, as well as Manchester United and Blackburn Rovers football clubs. Outlane’s net sessions take place in Huddersfield New College’s sports hall on Sunday at one o’clock.