

Written evidence submitted by Richard Ward

My name is Richard Ward, I'm 29 and I play for Profutsal futsal club, and England (until the recent unexpected disbanding of national teams).

I am addressing the governance crisis being faced by futsal in England. Since futsal is not effectively represented in England, I am also giving evidence that futsal is a widely played international sport in its own right. It is not a training tool for football, although playing futsal is certainly likely to benefit football players. Through my testimony I want to highlight futsal's established and growing community that I feel lucky to be part of and how well placed it is for helping to **reverse declining levels of sport participation**. Futsal's governing body is The FA along with football. Being totally subservient to The FA's primary football interests effectively hides the true scale of futsal interest and provides **woefully lacking futsal-specific governance**. To convey some of what futsal can offer, I will share what I have personally gained from playing, explain why futsal is a sport, and **share concerns as well as opportunities for the future** of this brilliant sport.

For the past 11 years futsal has been my life. I have missed birthday celebrations, weddings, and anniversaries, putting futsal ahead of work and often straining important relationships in my life. The England Program encouraged me to go to the gym before 6am or after 11pm to make sure I got in my training around work. I committed everything to try and push myself to help my country. This culminated in 2016 when I left a steady job to play professionally in Italy, only to be sacked 3 months in and return with my tail between my legs. But I wouldn't change a thing, as futsal is my identity and I have seen it as the way to push and challenge myself to be the best version of myself I could possibly be.

What is it about futsal that creates this passion? Futsal is like a cross between speed chess and basketball. It is as much a mental game as a physical one. It relies on dedicated teamwork, ball mastery and tireless hard work. My first experience of futsal was when I was 15, I was playing 7-a-side at my local community centre and my friends and I were asked, and we were approached about joining a tournament. We played the tournament (which was more like a 5-a-side game) and won, but then I forgot all about the sport until 3 years later when I went to university and saw it on one of the stalls. I went to the trial and fell in love with the game from there.

Fortunately, I played in the University of Sheffield team, winning the BUCS tournament, and played with Sheffield FC where we travelled across the country to play in the league. Futsal already is well represented in Universities across England and this may present an answer to this question:

“What key measures could the Government introduce to increase the resilience of sports clubs and venues?”

By encouraging and supporting universities to offer community Futsal Hubs, you would be linking facilities , sport expertise, existing quality players and established educational environments.

To break into the England team I played with Sheffield for 2 years, I studied in Barcelona for a year on Erasmus where I trained with a team, and then lived, trained, travelled between Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield for 4 years before getting a chance with the National team. Regularly my dedication to training would take at least an hour each way. Along the way I have made so many friends in all these cities as well as the wider futsal community. The support network has been incredible and **I regularly get contacted by these people who ask for support as they are running academies or implementing futsal into a football club** to teach children the improved technique, but also **to give kids an alternate pathway to elite success** with a ball at their feet.

I was fortunate enough that I got selected to train with the development team in 2012. For the next 2 years I attended multiple training camps, and this led to my selection for an away game in Montenegro in 2014. This turned out to be the first of over 60 games I played in, each started by proudly singing the National Anthem with the rest of the team. **Every player felt the pride of family, friends and our community as we walked onto courts in so many host countries¹** to play the best from such a variety of nations. Closer to home, playing in front of a big crowd in the Copperbox and **3 times winning the Home Nations Tournament²** are also cherished memories.

These things don't just happen. It takes the long-term vision and guidance of a fully committed governing body matched by the commitment of teams, coaches and administrators. **The value represented by national teams is an accumulation of investment in all areas of the community** and in the case of futsal, much of the investment is from volunteers. Most important is the platform being prepared for the next generation to build on. My intense appreciation for what The FA had made possible for me was destroyed when just a month ago **The FA dismantled all our national teams, shattering aspirations of young players, wasting years of**

¹ [England vs Germany 2016 Highlights](#)

² [England - Wales 2019 Highlights](#)

investment including Sports England funding and breaking commitments to The Women's game. How can a governing body do this to its own sport? How can individuals invest so much without any recognition of that investment's value for the next generation?

Everything I imagined in playing for my country has been surpassed, and I am both devastated and confused by The FA's actions knowing first-hand just how much futsal delivers and for such a small proportion of their overall budget. Blaming Covid doesn't make sense when you consider the insignificance of the futsal budget compared with what it achieves and The FA's broader finances.

Futsal has taken me to many countries and shown me how their love of **futsal has been nurtured and grown nationally with thousands attending games**³, high levels of participation and loyal television and internet audiences. You would think that the biggest Football Association in The World would not be happy being **outperformed by so many countries with much smaller budgets**⁴. These are all countries that The FA could learn from: Montenegro, Andorra, Malta, Estonia, Israel, Hungary, Germany (one of the most recent nations to found a team, already has more impetus than the UK), Bulgaria, China, Georgia, Thailand (2012 World Cup hosts), Latvia, Italy and Moldova. Spain, Brazil, Portugal and Argentina.

The national futsal teams represented the biggest incentive for excellence in the English game. Removing them is not only the removal of a key part of development for future star footballers, but also a vital part of the picture to attract future generations of youngsters who prefer the fast-paced action, high technical content and intense enjoyment of futsal.

While there is some very strong support for futsal in the FA, the size and complexity of The FA has clearly resulted in **significant shortcomings in futsal's governance**. The sport is neither understood nor represented. The value of previous Sports England funding is not being recognised. I believe The FA needs to be held to its obligations as a custodian of Futsal in recognition of the investments made by so many. **How the value of public funds used by The FA to develop futsal is being protected for the future needs to be clearly visible**. The FA's own commitment in its 2018 Strategy Document to form a Women's National Team must be honoured.

Futsal is an ideal platform to deliver on so many government sports targets but without the advocacy of a functional governance function its potential can't be realised. Working with Universities and other Educational institutions are ideal ways to extend sports into local communities and with active representation and strong, open leadership, futsal would deliver on all levels.

Richard Ward.
08/12/2020

³ [FIFA Futsal World Cup Final 2016](#)

⁴ [Israel 1-4 Moldova // Preliminariile CE-2022](#)