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MATT PHILLIPS



JORDAN IBE



KADEEM HARRIS

# Diamonds aren't forever but their sparkle lingers

WANDERERS don't have much to shout about at the moment, but a flourishing youth policy is at least one thing they are getting spectacularly right.

Jordan Ibe, Kadeem Harris and Matty Phillips are testament to the work being done below the first team and before supporters point to the fact that they've all been sold, it's worth pointing out one truth of life in the lower leagues – that's often the point.

Head of youth and assistant manager at Wanderers Richard Dobson is the man most responsible for bringing those talents through.

He said: "We're aware that we've got to make money for the club. The club does make a loss, so when you consider how much we made from those three it helps the club to survive. Wanderers need it [that

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income], and I think most clubs at this level do."

Apart from the three that have moved on, Wanderers can also point to a handful of other young pros that have come through the academy and are now on the fringes of the first team.

Dobson says Josh Scowan, Matt McClure, Charles Dunne, Anthony Stewart and Jesse Kewley-Graham can be Blues players for years, and the contrast between promoting a player from within and signing one from another club is stark.

Dobson said: "Every time a young player comes through the youth system, you're not paying another club for him.

"You're looking at £700 or £800 a week just to pull a player out of non-league football. It becomes expensive, but if they come from the youth system, you're paying a fraction of the wages [apprentice wages are £78 per week], there is no fee involved and they are already embedded in the culture of the club.

"Also, you're not taking a gamble because you know the character of the player. With new players, there is a chance that they come to the club and then you realise you don't like their attitude."

For the cream of the crop though, Liverpool and the Premiership can be the reward.

Dobson said: "We could have lost Jordan Ibe two years ago.

"He could have taken a window of opportunity. These come up at

various stages within a contract where the player is allowed to look at other clubs and Jordan took his up and went to Liverpool, Manchester City, Spurs.

"They were all keen to sign him but myself, Gary Waddock and Steve Hayes visited him at his house and he decided to stay because of the way he was looked after here.

"He had a mentor, a psychologist...a lot of work goes on behind the scenes and the amount of work that's gone into Jordan Ibe has been massive.

"We picked him up at 12 and four years on just about every Premier League club wanted him.

"There is a fair bit of interest in our young players now. We're starting to turn heads with the numbers coming through the system."

## A brighter future?

WYCOMBE Wanderers' boys at least offer hope for the future with unparalleled success for the club in age group football.

The Blues rule supreme from U12s down with the combined return last year from their U9s, U10s and U11s being 85 games played and just three defeats.

Their U11s also went to The Netherlands and inflicted a first defeat on Dutch giants PSV Eindhoven in two seasons, 2-0 Wanderers won.

Head of youth Richard Dobson said: "We want to play a passing style of football, but the players have to be technically adept.

"In the first few years the focus is on the individual player and we hammer home movement and technique.

"Then it's more structured and we start working on team shape and the principles of attack and defence. We want to drip feed them rather than overload them with tactics."

## Talent spotting

RICHARD Dobson says it wasn't difficult to spot the talent of Matt Phillips, Kadeem Harris and Jordan Ibe when they first came to the club.

He said: "They're the best three in my time. They all caught my eye the first few times I saw them.

"Matt and Kadeem were out and out wingers but needed to do a bit of work defensively and I remember Matt did a lot of one to one work with Peter Taylor.

"With Jordan, he's an off-the-cuff player and you don't want to coach that out of him. You have to be clever by getting the message across without over-coaching him and stifling his talent. I'm a better coach after working with Jordan."