

Bayo helps launch Heads Up weekend with HRH Duke of Cambridge

Chairboys star plays table football alongside the Duke of Cambridge.



Wanderers star Adebayo Akinfenwa lined up alongside FA President HRH The Duke of Cambridge, plus players, managers, representatives and fans from the men's and women's game on Wednesday to take part in a table football tournament and a mental health conversation.

The event at Heist Bank in London helped to officially kick off this month's Heads Up Weekends, and mark Time To Talk Day on Thursday 6 February.

With the likes of Premier League stars such as Troy Deeney, Andros Townsend, Scott McTominay and John McGinn and FA WSL legends Fran Kirby and Fara Williams in attendance, they were also joined by former players such as Tony Adams, Ledley King and Kelly Smith at the event.

Football will come together again this month, with the ambition to kick off the biggest ever conversation around mental health through the Heads Up campaign.

For two weekends in February, starting this week, every team from across the Premier League, EFL, National League, Barclays FA Women's Super League, FA Women's Championship and FA Women's National League will dedicate their matches to Heads Up, a partnership between us and Heads Together.

New research shows just one in three football fans regularly talk about mental health with their friends and, spearheaded by HRH The Duke of Cambridge, the season-long campaign aims to harness the influence and popularity of football to normalise the conversation around mental health.

The 'Heads Up Weekends' will highlight the power of talking as a way to support one another and dispel stigma, with activity planned at fixtures across the men's and women's football calendar.

Over 8-9 and 14-17 February, clubs of all levels will feature Heads Up branding across stadiums, programmes and player kit, in a major unifying moment that aims to get the nation talking about mental health.

Clubs will also be releasing their own short films featuring players talking about mental

health and showcasing the work they do to improve mental health in their communities.

“Imagine if we talked about mental health as much as we talk about football...many of us won't go a day without talking about it,” wrote The Duke.

“And whatever team we support, every single fan, player and manager has one thing in common – we all have mental health, in the same way that we all have physical health.

“And we will all face ups and downs in life which will affect it. It's time we start taking our mental fitness as seriously as we do our physical fitness, and that starts with talking.”

It comes as a new Heads Up survey of 2014 football fans, carried out by Censuswide, showed:-

- Football is the number one topic of conversation (75%) between fans and their friends
- However, only 1 in 3 (34%) football fans regularly talk about mental health with their friends – with male fans much less likely to do so (27% of male respondents, compared to 47% of women). Overall, male football fans were over three times more likely to talk about football than mental health with their friends (83%, compared with 27%).
- Meanwhile, 40% of football fans find it easiest to talk about their mental health while busy with other activities – such as while walking or running, driving, going to the pub, or watching sports with a friend. Meanwhile 32% would find it easiest to have a face to face conversation at home with no distractions.

Men's and women's football is now coming together to call on everyone to talk more about mental health in order to normalise the subject and help remove the stigma that prevents many – particularly men - from speaking out.

Fans are encouraged to join the conversation using #KickOffAConversation and #HeadsUp.

Find out more and get tips from Heads Up's charity partners (Mind, CALM, Sporting Chance and Heads Together)

Those wanting immediate support can also text 'HeadsUp' to **85258** to connect with a trained crisis volunteer – a service run by 'Shout' and powered by Crisis Text Line, which is available 24/7 and free to text from most mobile networks.