

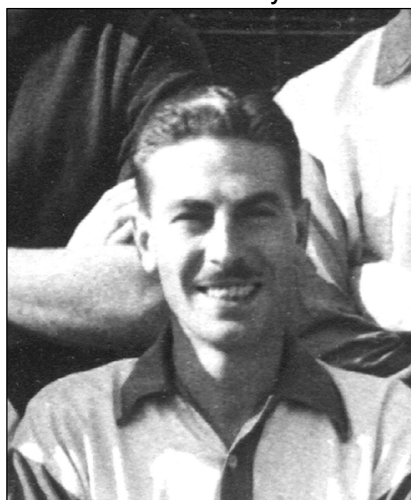
Little League Football – A History

The thing about Little League is that once hooked, you're involved for life ... if not longer. So this brief (?) history of Little League Football is not just to explain to new managers how it all came about, it's also an unashamed wallow in nostalgia for the old-timers. Reminiscences (and corrections!) will be most welcome.



The bright idea

"If it works so well in America, why can't it be adapted to suit the kids in England?" mused Frank Adey, one day in 1967. Frank is one of life's enthusiasts and blessed with considerable energy, charm and most importantly, foresight: qualities that were to be used in full over the years to come. In his day, Frank played football at a high standard, as centre half for Epsom Town. Whilst spending some time in the States, Frank had become very impressed with the concept of Little League Baseball. A keen baseball player himself, Frank was an all-round sportsman and a regular in his works football team back in England.



Little League Baseball had started in Pennsylvania in 1939 but because of the war, it took until 1946 for the 12th League to be set up. Then following Newsreel exposure came hundreds of enquiries and an explosion of interest. Within 10 years, Little League Baseball was in every US State. By the time Frank went to America, almost every sport-minded boy belonged to his local Little League.

Frank was well aware of the shortcomings of youth football in the 1960's. For a start, there wasn't much of it, apart from school football. So if a boy wasn't in the school team, he might get to play occasionally for the Cubs or Scouts, but only if he was pretty good would he get into a Sunday team. Otherwise, he could have a kick-around with his friends in the street or park.

At that time, Frank ran the print shop at Watliff & Co, an engineering company on the trading estate at Merton, Surrey. Having been impressed with Little League Baseball, Frank often thought about the need for organised football for the youngsters who couldn't get into a team, and he had some ideas on how it might work. But it was just a dream, until the day when one of his workmates burst into the print room. George Burdett had just been sacked from managing Merstham F.C. and had decided that he would start a boys' team. Off went George, hotly pursued by Frank saying "George, don't do anything until you hear from me!" The seed had been sown.

So Frank got thinking hard about what was wrong with youth soccer and how could his ideas, together with some of the ways of Little League Baseball be adapted to suit England's national game. And after mulling it over, he came up with his concept of how youth football ought to be arranged.

“Football for children,” Frank declared, “should be child-centred.” At the time, that was quite a revolutionary proposal. “No longer would kids have to fit the adult way of playing the game,” he decided, “the game would be changed to fit the children.”

Some ideas were pretty obvious, like cutting down the size of pitches to suit the size of the players. No longer should small boys struggle on adult pitches, or goalies be beaten by lobbing the ball over their heads.



Frank Adey and Tom Arnold

Some ideas were very new, like limiting the numbers in a squad and making substitutions compulsory. Or telling children that once they were in a team, they wouldn't be dropped if a better player came along.

Frank also wanted every kid to have the chance of playing. So there wouldn't be fees and subs each week that could exclude boys from poorer families from playing.

And playing all games at home meant that every Little League became a community organisation, with huge social advantages automatically built into every League.

Having thought it through, Frank then started discussions with others in his company football team, notably George Burdett, F. Judd and Ron Sexton.

His concept of Little League Football created much enthusiasm and Frank signed up several of his colleagues to be the first team managers. Amongst those keen to be press-ganged was a youngster by name of Ronald Hobbs, who was to prove a valuable addition to the cause. And while he was at it, Frank recruited Watliff's Managing Director, William E Arnold, C.Eng., F.C.G.I., F.I.E.E., F.I.Prod.E., F.B.I.M., known as Tom to his friends. Tom was happy to allow Frank to use the company premises and facilities and as Frank's day job was in charge of he printing works, posters and leaflets were no problem and nor were goals and team benches.

Gradually the first Little League Football rulebook took shape and Frank was ready to take up the challenge of setting up the first League. He already had his first six team managers and persuading the local authority to provide a pitch of the right dimensions and a changing room was soon achieved.

Finances would be required, of course. The new rule book suggested each team should have a sponsor so Frank gave a talk at the Morden Rotary Club luncheon in November, 1967. Both the lunch and the talk went down well, and by the time coffee was served, Frank had sponsors for all six teams. In addition, Ron and Joyce Hales, the owners of a sports shop in South Wimbledon agreed to give hefty discounts on the kit, plus a lengthy period of free credit.

Tom Arnold became the first President of Little League Football, a position he was to hold until his death, some 24 years later. A distinguished engineer, Tom was a world expert on long case clocks and had a considerable collection built up over the years, all in working order and busy chiming away the hours – but not necessarily all in sync. It seems that Tom and his wife Betty had great difficulty in ever persuading a piano tuner to come more than once.

Tom Arnold had already agreed to sponsor a team. The other five original sponsors, all members of the Morden Rotary Club, were R. Len Smart, the Rotary President, who ran a photography business called Remco, Arthur Footman, an aptly named supplier of chiropody equipment, Leo Mays, of L.V. Mays Transport, Ernest C. Micklewright of Elm Auto Sales and H John Locke of Switchgear Engineering

All this had taken place by the time of the inaugural meeting of Little League Football on 21st February, 1968 in the Watliff canteen.




Left to Right: Ron Hobbs, Ron Sexton, D Duffell, Charlie Briggs, George Stevens, Len Saunderson, Frank Adey, George Burdett, Robert Green, W Tackaberry, at rear Frank Judd, L "Robbo" Roberts



So all that was required were the boys and Frank now went on a recruiting drive. A thousand leaflets were distributed to advertise the trials and in addition, Frank started chatting up every likely lad in the area – until the local constabulary suggested that this might not be seen as such a good idea. 240 applications were received and Frank visited each one personally to outline his plans before the first trial on Saturday 24th August. That's an awful lot of tea and biscuits!

The Grand Opening Day of Morden Little League Football took place on Saturday 5th October 1968 at King George's Field, Tudor Drive, Morden, Surrey. Such was the enthusiasm of boys and adults, that one lad, Richard Hornsby, got out of his sick bed to attend, although he was not allowed to play. But Match Official Brian Hall went to hospital to have a pain-killing injection for a back injury before coming to the ground to officiate.


 NEW YORK, N.Y. 10018
 APR 11 1938
 Mr. A. A. A. A.
 The Duke of Edinburgh has asked
 me to thank you very much for your letter
 of 7th April and for the kind invitation
 which it contained.
 I regret however that His Royal
 Highness has already made his arrangements
 for 4th October and must regretfully
 decline your request.
 Yours sincerely
 James Orr
 Frank P. Avey, Esq.,
 Little League Football.

10.30	Watliff Dynamos	8	Elm Beetles	4
11.30	Footman Flyers	1	Remco Royals	2
12.30	Switchgear Flashes	2	Mays Lions	1

Right from the start, Frank had envisaged a central committee with central fundraising – quite a departure from the usual football model of clubs running teams and teams joining Leagues.

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Received by P. Adley
Hales

One notable change in culture over the years since Little League Football was founded was the readiness of parents in those days to get involved. In the 21st century, the likely question from the parent of a new player is “How much?” rather than “How can I help?”

But right from the start, the first Little League committee got stuck in. Not surprisingly, there were a few teething problems, but these were quickly sorted out and at the end of the first season, the venture was judged a huge success.

The Golden Years

As Ron Hobbs said:

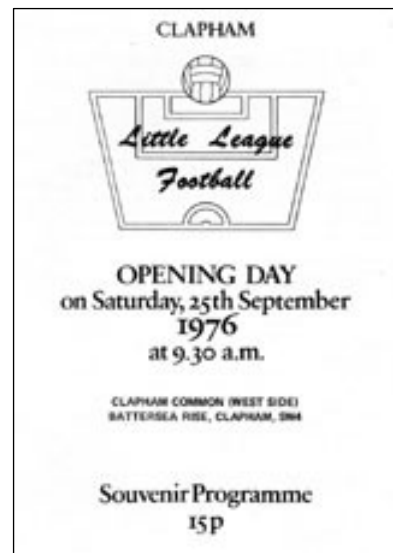
“We just couldn’t let the enthusiasm rest there; this little gem had to be offered to other areas, locally at first before spreading our wings further afield. Public meetings in 1969 saw the formation of Raynes Park Little League followed by Wimbledon (1972) and Mitcham (1973).

“In every case, in every area, there was no shortage of parent volunteers, sponsorship and generous support by local authorities. We were on a roll; we had a tiger by the tail. Our Executive Committee, consisting of representatives from all Leagues, was a fantastic team who, like Frank Adey, recognised the value and potential of Little League Football.”

Back in those days, new Leagues were relatively easy to set up. There was a huge demand for boys’ football and parents in those days were more prepared to volunteer. We already had all that was needed to start a new League – a terrific formula and some dedicated and enthusiastic Little Leaguers.

First, an approach was made to the local authority to obtain a suitable ground and then the area was flooded with posters and handbills to advertise a public meeting. At the meeting, enthusiastic Little Leaguers – the likes of Ron Hobbs in those days, and later Sue Haylock – would explain to the assembled throng how the best concept in junior football was coming to a park near them.

Taking a cue from Billy Graham, a popular evangelist in those days, people willing to help run the new League would be asked to come forward and parents were encouraged to fill in forms with their son’s details. (Girls’ football was almost unheard of back in the seventies.)



A couple of meetings of the new committee, always with an experienced Little Leaguer in attendance and the new League was ready to run four weeks of trials. Again, the trials would be heavily advertised to enable any shortfall in the number of adults and boys to be rectified.

To start with, the method worked a treat. Such was the enthusiasm at the time that not one, but three Leagues were started in 1974. These three – Sutton, West Sutton and Carshalton – were quickly established with Frank Adey, Ron Hobbs and Gordon Martin steering a League each. And a year later, Carshalton split in two to form a fourth League, Wallington.

We were on a roll, and as the seventies progressed, another eight new Leagues were quickly established, all in the South London area. Realising the value of Little League Football to the social welfare of a district, there was a wish to start new Leagues in deprived areas. Unfortunately, it tended to be more difficult to recruit volunteers here than in the middle class areas of Merton, Sutton, Kingston, etc., as was demonstrated more clearly in the eighties.

Dinners and Dances

Following the resignation of Frank Adey from L.L.F. in 1976 it was agreed to honour him for introducing an entirely new concept of youth football, with a dinner dance at The Cambridge Rooms, New Malden, Surrey, the following February.

All existing Leagues of the day were invited and the restaurant was awash with those wishing to extend their appreciation. The Guest of Honour was John Pilger, the well known journalist, who was pleased to pen a full page article in the Daily Mirror regarding the National Tournament Final and whose son played for Clapham L.L.F. Also in attendance was Terry Bullivant, an ex Morden League player, who had progressed to play for Fulham F.C.

An excellent three course dinner was enjoyed followed by an address by John Pilger and a reply by Frank, followed by lengthy applause before the presentation of a Dynatron stereo system and engraved plaque to Frank and a bouquet of flowers for his wife, Renee.

The tables were then moved to create space for dancing and the evening continued with an MC / Comedian and music by the resident band of The Cambridge Rooms.

A great time was enjoyed by all but poor Renee faced a terrible fate when she inadvertently came too close to a table candle. Fortunately the quick action of a number of those close by ensured her hair remained in place.

Carriages at midnight saw the end of an evening to remember and one which deservedly honoured one man's dream of providing free football for so many children and who launched an avalanche of enthusiasm and contributions by a multitude of adults.

Dinners and dinner/dances were a regular feature of Little League Football in the early days. The very first was held in 1969 at the Crown in Morden when a three course meal plus coffee and a live band were included for two quid a ticket. By 1972, when the price had escalated to £2.80, it was considered to be too expensive! However, Morden Little League organised a dinner in honour of their League President, Len Smart. The guest speaker was Tommy Docherty whose after-dinner speech went down a storm with a fund of interesting and funny recollections of his life as Manchester Utd Manager and his dealings with players.

The National Tournament

It didn't take long for Little League Football to want to run a National Tournament. Just as long as it took to set up the first eight leagues – the 1976/77 season, in fact, when Morden beat Raynes Park 2 – 1 at Sutton United. Tom Arnold, the President, donated the magnificent FA Cup replica which has been fought for ever since, at several league venues and in 2001 at Leyton Orient where Steve Davis presented the trophies.



In 2005, the first Girls' National Tournament was played and in 2007, the new NEC Sec Dennis Jones introduced a small sided tournament for younger boys.

The Little League Heydays

The Green Hornets

Put a group of Little Leaguers together who go back thirty years and talk will turn to the fabulous Green Hornets trip. It all started with a search for frying pans. Dave Harper ran a chain of pancake houses in the States and came to London to buy industrial quality frying pans. He was also involved with the Green Hornets Athletic Association in Severna Park in Maryland.



Knowing the manager at the Cambridge Rooms, it was easy for Dave to make contact with Little League Football and arranged for two boys' soccer teams to visit us in the summer of 1979. The boys and accompanying adults stayed with English families and were taken on various pleasure trips, the highlight being a conducted tour of Wembley Football Stadium. In addition, they played matches most evenings against several Little Leagues.

The visit was a huge success, many lasting friendships were made and an invitation was extended for two Little League teams to make a return visit.

This caused quite a lot of head-scratching. Which two teams? What about the Little League rule that football is free? So it was decided that each of the then 16 local Leagues should nominate two boys, and the NEC would start a huge fundraising effort

to pay for them. How do you raise the £7,500 cost (over £20,000 in today's money) to fly 32 kids to the USA for a couple of weeks?

The six stalwarts in the photo arranged it all. Ron Hobbs went on a 600 mile sponsored bike ride to Lands End and back. Not surprisingly, the other five declined Ron's invitation to join him, waved him good-bye at Wimbledon Town Hall and got on with the work of the four other major fundraising efforts: -

- A benefit match was arranged between Wimbledon and Fulham Football Clubs.
- Local pop group 'The Merton Parkas' gave a concert at Wimbledon Theatre. (If you're nostalgic for that never-to-be-forgotten gig, you can still get their CDs on Amazon.)
- A Grand Fete was organised at Sutton Public Hall.
- 1,000 begging letters were sent to the heads of the country's biggest companies.



Eddie Dribble, Ron Hobbs, John Smoker
Peter Harward, Michael Macey, Malcolm Ash



The ever-hospitable Yanks were kind (daft?) enough to say that the boys' brothers, sisters, Mums and Dads could come, too. So the 32 immediately expanded to 110.

But we could spot the players in the crowd because they all had tracksuits emblazoned with "London Lions" – all except one poor lad whose tracksuit read "London Loins". Dave Neal, our St John Ambulance man acquired a lion's head which he proudly wore at all events.

In the meantime, the teams were being coached by Little League regulars Don Hurrell, Tony Norbury, Peter Harvey and Peter Sweeney.



The 1967 Team

Managers: Don Hurrell & Tony Norbury

Back row: Mark Andrews, Daniel Morrissey, Gavin Jeal, Geoffrey Bangay, Robert Jeal, Andrew Dickson, John Burrige, Tony Hill, Nick Lloyd.

Front row: Mark Sparrow, Glyn Pearse, Derek Phillips, Aaron Linger, Peter Grant, Kevin Kerner, Paul Sainsbury.



The 1968-9 Team Managers: Peter Harvey & Peter Sweeney
 Back row: Mark Twine, Mick Smith, Clifford Kirby, Darren Mann, Glen Fallon, Steven Fowler, Eddie Keating, Mark Hanson, Paul Smith.
 Front row: Dean Long, Martin Reid, Tony Keeble, Kevin Ayling, Graham Harward, Martin Cassie, Ricky McCleary.

And so the 32 boys, together with 32 frying pans plus the 78 hangers-on departed on one of Freddie Laker's Skytrain planes on Friday 23rd May, 1980. Everyone stayed with American families, friendships were renewed and new friendships made.

Each day a succession of American soccer teams of varying sizes pitted their skills against the Brits. In between games, the boys were worn out with a string of sightseeing trips, like the Smithsonian Space Museum, the Capitol building, the Naval Academy at Annapolis or barbequing soft-shell crabs at Sandy Point and naturally everyone was spoilt rotten by their American hosts, returning totally worn out on Sunday 1st June.

The Dutch Link

1980 also saw the start of the exchange visits with Dutch football clubs. In those days, 'twin towns' were all the rage and the London Borough of Sutton linked up with Apeldoorn, a most attractive Dutch town. The biggest football club there is Robur et Velocitas ('Strength and Speed').

John Sweet organised the very first coach load of kids from West Sutton Little League (and put them on the wrong ferry at Dover, but that's another story...) This has now become a regular trip in even years, with Robur et Velocitas boys coming to West Sutton in odd numbered years to take part in their Anglo-Dutch Tournament.

Soon after, Morden League linked with Groen Wit (Green & White) and Wimbledon with Victoria. Both clubs are in Apeldoorn and not Merton's twin town, but what the heck! The link ups are very successful and still going strong 30 years later.

The Rise and Fall of the West Midlands

Readers may remember the Handsworth Riots, which made the news in 1981 and again in 1985. Handsworth is one of the areas in Birmingham where poor social conditions, racial discrimination, poverty, unemployment and dilapidated housing created many social problems. Since then, I'm glad to say, much has been done to improve the local amenities and housing conditions.

Following the riots, meetings were held between the Social Services, the Police and other bodies to see what could be done to improve social conditions. Amongst the attendees was Kevin McCarthy, who worked for the Social Services but before moving to the West Midlands, Kevin had been a St John Ambulance volunteer, regularly attending to the Morden players' injuries. He had seen Little League in action and knew what a force it was for social cohesion. So one of the ideas taken up by the authorities was to set up a Little League in each of the thirty two districts of Birmingham.

The man charged with making this happen was Phil Summerill and he set to with a great deal of energy and, helpfully, a great deal of cash. Leagues were quickly established, starting with Ladywood in 1986 and the initial success kept up the momentum with a new League being started every few months.

This speed created a few problems of its own. Although Ron Hobbs, Len Naish and Sue Haylock, the NEC Officers at that time, wore deep grooves along the motorway, there were no experienced Little Leaguers on the spot to attend meetings and to be there on Saturday mornings to help and guide. This was also in the days before mobile phones. As a result, control over the direction each League was taking became one big problem. In an attempt to help consolidate the two separate areas, NEC meetings were frequently held in the West Midlands, or even half way up the M40. AGMs were held in Birmingham in alternate years.

Many new Leagues had a paid local authority worker drafted in as the League Secretary, and plenty of funds were also provided. But some cracks soon developed. Chief among these was the fact that in deprived areas, it can be more difficult to recruit adult volunteers. In those cases where the League Sec. was a paid official, the League ran into trouble when funds were cut during the next recession and the local authorities took their workers back. In some cases, no-one volunteered for the Sec's job and the League folded immediately. Other Leagues lasted rather longer, but the difficulty in finding volunteers, especially in deprived areas, has always been the one major weakness dogging Little League Football.

Of the four West Midlands Leagues that survive, and no less than 24 were set up in Birmingham and Wolverhampton, three are dependent on the sterling work and long-term commitment of individual volunteers and their families.

The National Football Show

Little League Football was represented at the Tennants FA National Football Show at Earls Court in 1992 and were allocated a free stall because of our charitable status. This was decked out with hundreds of balls and the LLF motto "Free Football for Boys". Don't ask me why the organisers were then surprised when assorted youngsters came up to demand their free football. Apart from being able to explain the LLF concept to interested people from all over the country, it gave Sir Stanley Matthews, our first Patron the chance to have his photo taken with Ron Hobbs.

The Coca Cola Show

1996 saw the 'Alternative Wembley Stadium' being built on Clapham Common. To celebrate Euro 96, Coca Cola decided to get in on the act and build a replica of the stadium.



Little League Football provided 65 senior and 16 junior boys' teams plus another 10 girls' teams. Over all, some 600+ Little League players took part over the two day festival. Highlights included a display by the Red Devils parachute team, trophies being presented by the legendary England goalie Gordon Banks, and John Haylock pleading with the kids to "Keep off the boings".

Problems of Governance

How to organise the NEC (the National Executive Committee). This has been a major concern over the years and a question where the answer changes depending on the number of leagues and where they are situated.

Naturally it's important for there to be plenty of contact and consultation between the governing body and the local leagues – we're all supposed to be singing from the same rulebook. Several formats for the NEC have been tried over the years (you may have noticed that the rulebook still mentions 'Divisions'). Since 2009 every league is invited to

be represented on the NEC in order to keep lines of communication open between the governing body and the local leagues.

As the governing body, the NEC works on behalf of the local leagues on a large number of projects.

- Charity Registration took several years and a complete new rulebook to achieve, but the NEC plus five local leagues – Morden, West Sutton, New Addington, Chelmsley Wood and Wallington – now take advantage of the benefits.
- On several occasions, the Football Association have required Little League Football to amend its rulebook and negotiations with the F.A. on behalf of the local leagues have been a regular feature of the work of the NEC
- And, of course, there are the fun jobs, like the National Tournaments, the European Championships on Clapham Common, the visit from the Green Hornets and our return trip to the USA.
- And the not quite so exciting jobs like CRB checks and the Officers Manual

Problems from the Football Association

The F.A. has become steadily more 'controlling' over the last 40 years. From paying little attention to junior football in 1968, the FA has gradually introduced more and more rules and restrictions. It doesn't help that Little League Football doesn't fit the standard F.A. model, and naturally the F.A. can't admit that the Little League Football concept is superior.



Difficulties arose with schools right from 1968 when many boys wanted to play for the then brand new Morden Little League rather than their school team. Then in 1981, our plans to expand into Oxfordshire went awry when the local F.A. insisted on a minimum age of 9th birthday and a maximum two substitutes.

1991/2 saw major discussions between the FA and the NEC – with Ron Hobbs and Sue Haylock meeting the F.A. at Lancaster Gate, the HQ at the time. The topic was the development of junior football, and the options being considered were two quite different approaches. On one side was the possibility that the FA could promote the LLF Concept countrywide. Against that was the new junior format of Mini-Soccer – small sided football with simplified rules. The eventual winner, as you know, was Mini-Soccer. And why did LLF miss out? One reason was the FA's insistence that there should be a registration fee paid by every child, which was vetoed by LLF as it is alien to our Concept. Neither did we like the idea of a maximum two substitutions, bearing in mind our principle of every player getting at least half a game.

Later, in 2001/2, the F.A. wanted us to have a maximum two year age spread in each team. This was particularly difficult for the smaller leagues that didn't have enough kids close enough in age to be able to comply. At least the F.A. could see that if they insisted, then several Little Leagues would have to fold. So common sense prevailed and time was granted for leagues to slowly come into line. However, the change was one factor in the demise of some leagues, for example Selly Oak and Weoley Castle.

Bulk Purchases

A regular feature of Little League Football in the early days was the range of items bought centrally for resale. These included several hundred LLF holdalls and sweatshirts, ties, ballpoint pens, 2000 footballs, badges...

Newsletters

In 1983, in the days before computers and websites, Geoff Watson, Peter Harvey, Jim Murphy, Malcolm Ash and Janet Smithson started producing "footbaLLFocus" - regular A4 newsletters produced three times a year and sent to our 1,000 adult volunteers. Later, Derek Coleman modernised the magazines before Dennis Jones, with the advent of computers, saved a fortune in printing and postage by switching them to our website.

Little League Netball

There was no football for girls in the early days. In fact the F.A. had banned women's football in 1921 and didn't lift the restriction until 1971. It took a while before girls' football became popular and in the meantime there was a demand for something like Little League Football to be arranged for girls.

The first initiative came in Ladywood in 1988 where Susan Bell set up the first Little League Netball section. Sadly, Ladywood League is no more, but netball thrives at Selsdon where Lorna Jones and her band have been running Little League Netball since 1991.

Girls' Football

As far as we can tell, the first girl recorded in Little League Football was in 1980 at Carshalton, playing in a mixed team. The first four all-girls' teams were set up at Chelmsley Wood Little League in 1994 and ran for five years. In 2001 an all-girls' league started in Elmbridge which ran for four years. All-girl's teams have also been established at Kingston, Morden, Sutton, West Sutton and Wimbledon

The Under14 / Under 15 Sunday LL Goals League

Little League Football goes up to Under 13's for most leagues and Under14's at a few others. Then we wave goodbye to the players. In 2009, responding to pressure to provide football for those boys who were leaving, a separate organisation was formed on the all-weather pitches at Goals in North Cheam. The small-sided teams are chosen from ex-LLF players and games organised from September to June each season.

Numbers

By 1994 Little League Football had grown to 5,400 children playing in 40 local leagues. By 2010 although the number of leagues had shrunk to just 20, many of the remaining leagues had expanded, setting up additional sections for different age groups. Some leagues currently have in excess of 500 children playing each week. As a result, the number of boys and girls playing Little League Football each week is still over 5,000.

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Reminiscences

Tales from the 'Good Old Days' will be most welcome ... if printable

One abiding memory of those early days was the occasion I received an ankle injury that required treatment from my club physio, who ran his practice from the bedroom of an old end-of-terrace house. I duly arrived and was let in and directed to the stairs, via the lounge, by his wife. The physio did the business in a brisk and professional manner and after thanking him I prepared to leave.

"Do me a favour, son," he said. "Rather than disturb the wife, will you leave by the back door through the scullery?"

"Of course," I replied, and descended the stairs, opened the scullery door to be met by the sight of his 19 year old daughter standing up in the bath, stark naked, and reaching for a towel.

I did what any gentleman would do and spent the next five minutes apologising before handing her the towel and leaving as instructed. It took my mind off a very painful ankle, I can tell you.

Ron Hobbs

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Many years ago at Raynes Park LLF, a group of kids from a local Norwegian school joined the league. However, the kids were only starting to learn English, and none of the managers spoke Norwegian, so the managers had to mime their instructions from the touchlines.

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The weather in 1976 was superb, sunny and hot for weeks on end. In fact there had been a drought so severe that the pitch was burnt to a crisp. Which is how Clapham is the only League ever to have the pitch permit for their grand opening day cancelled.

Did they panic? Of course they did! But a nearby all-weather ash pitch was quickly re-lined, goal-netted and corner-flagged.

And on the appointed day, John Pilger, the journalist, Prunella Scales (Sybil in Fawlty Towers) and her husband Timothy West the actor, declared the league open.

And when the rains finally came, the ash became sodden and playing football became like cycling without mudguards. Boys and officials were soon covered from head to toe with wet, sticky ash.

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On one exchange visit, the Morden bus got all the way to Dover before Len Smart discovered he had left his passport at home. It was arranged for him to return home, collect his passport and travel overnight to Apeldoorn where he was hailed as Len not so Smart.

Len never used to worry too much about Health and Safety. He was quite happy to perch precariously on an old oil drum to get a better group photo of Dutch and English lads. The resulting photograph was brightened up by the cheerful grins of the lads, who watched with glee as the oil drum slowly collapsed under him.

Another year, another Health and Safety episode as Len stood on a metal water tank to repair the electric light fitting in his loft. He really should have turned off the power

before starting work and was very lucky to survive. Soon afterwards, Len joined Friends of the Earth.

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After setting up a new league, Ron Hobbs would enjoy reffing some of the games each week to help the new league get off the ground. At Kingston, the grateful league responded by plying him with cups of tea, which meant that quite often, Ron would need to 'disappear' at half time. One week, when he rushed back for the second half of a game, he was mortified to find twenty two kids killing themselves with laughter and a potty sitting on the centre spot.

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When a piano tuner visited a Little League old-timer a few years back, he happened to notice a photo of Tom Arnold. "I remember that man!" he said. "That's the fellow with all the grandfather clocks. He asked me to do his piano once. Never again!!

"I got there a bit before eleven one morning, sat down and started work, and then there was the devil of a racket when all these blasted clocks went off, one after another! Then after they went quiet for five minutes, blow me, they all started chiming the quarter hour! It was long after lunch before I'd finished!"

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MORDEN LITTLE LEAGUE FOOTBALL

DINNER/DANCE AT THE CROWN PUBLIC HOUSE, MORDEN

MAY 1969

At the conclusion of the first season of Morden Little League in May 1969 it was time to celebrate the outstanding success of Frank Adey's brainchild. Watliff Dynamos won the first half of the season who then defeated Footman Flyers, winners of the second half of a season that passed all expectations and led to the launch of further Leagues in South London and the West Midlands

Such was the enthusiasm of dedicated League officials and parental support throughout the season it was decided to celebrate with a dinner/dance at the Crown Public House, Morden in May 1969.

This turned out to be a very enjoyable evening with the majority of those attending meeting up with the new found friendships developed round the touchlines weekly throughout the first season of Little League Football.

The one unforgettable incident of the evening was a number of team managers accepting a challenge to see who could lay the longest line of their clothing on the floor. The wine consumed earlier encouraged unseemly bravado and the photograph above demonstrated the preliminaries to this exercise, and all for a first prize of a Mars bar.

It is now a distant memory and as forty two years have now passed it is difficult to put names to faces, perhaps it's just as well as I am not one to boast.

A great evening for the princely sum of £2.00 which included a live band and a three course meal plus coffee.

Those were the days!

R.H.

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During the Little League Football trip to the States, we spent a day at the Naval Academy at Annapolis. Amongst all the interesting things to look at, one of the boys spotted a large, bright red button. "I wonder what that does?" he thought to himself, as he extended a tentative finger and gave it a prod.

His question was answered immediately. All hell broke out. A cacophony of bells was drowned out by the deafening sirens on the largest fire engine he'd ever seen – so large it had another driver at the far end to steer the rear wheels – as it came hurtling along and screeched to a halt allowing swarms of firemen to jump off and surround him.

I have to hand it to young Philip Martin. He didn't run for it. Was he a lad of great courage? Or was he perhaps rooted to the spot?

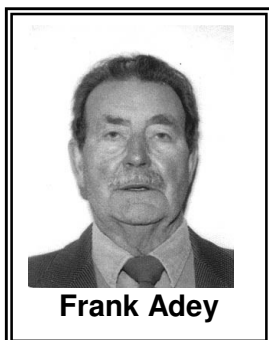
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Your scurrilous memories go here...

Appendices

League	Location	Year founded	Year ceased	Reason ceased
Addiscombe	Surrey	1983	-	
Billesley & Yardley Wood	West Midlands	1992	1997	
Bilston	Wolverhampton	1992	1998	
Carshalton	Surrey	1974	-	
Chelmsley Wood	West Midlands	1990	-	
Chessington	Surrey	1978	1999	
Clapham	Surrey	1976	-	
Colliers Wood	Surrey	2003	2011	Lack of adults and boys
Druids Heath	West Midlands	1994	1996	Changed name to Solihull Lodge
Dudley	West Midlands	1996	2009?	Lack of children
Eastfield	Wolverhampton	1995	1998	
Elmbridge Girls	Surrey	2001	2005	
Fieldway	Surrey	1980	2004	Lack of adults
Greenvale	Surrey	1992	-	
Handsworth	West Midlands	1988	2005	Parents got out of hand
Hawkesley & Primrose	West Midlands	1989	1998	Changed name to Kings Norton 1998
Highgate and Digbeth	West Midlands	2007	2010	Lack of adults
Hodge Hill	West Midlands	1990	2002	Lack of kids and adults
Kennington	London	1979	1988	Park closed after 1987 storm damage to trees
Kings Heath	West Midlands	1999	2001	Previously called Solihull Lodge. Lack of adults
Kings Norton	West Midlands	1998	2002	Previously called Hawkesley & Primrose. Lack of children
Kingstanding	West Midlands	1990	1995	Lack of adults
Kingston	Surrey	1977	-	
Ladywood	West Midlands	1986	2008	Lack of adults & kids
Lambeth South	Surrey	1975	1977	Moved ground and renamed Norwood LLF
Lewisham South	London	1986	2010	Merged with a non-LLF club
Mitcham	Surrey	1973	-	
Morden	Surrey	1968	-	
New Addington	Surrey	1977	-	
New Malden	Surrey	1978	-	
Northfield	West Midlands	1989	-	
Norwood	Surrey	1977	2002	
Pollards Hill	Surrey	2004	2010	Lack of adults
Quinton	West Midlands	1988	1997	Lack of adults
Raynes Park	Surrey	1969	-	
Selly Oak	West Midlands	1992	2009	Lack of adults
Selsdon	Surrey	1991	-	
Sheldon	West Midlands	1991	-	
Sheppey	Kent	2002	2003	Lack of adults

Shirley	West Midlands	1991	-	
Smallheath (a.k.a. Ackers)	West Midlands	1989	Before 1994	
Smethwick	West Midlands	1995	2005	Loss of kids & adults during pitch renovation
Solihull Lodge	West Midlands	1996	1999	Previously called Druids Heath. Changed name to Kings Heath 1999
Sutton	Surrey	1974	-	
Tolworth	Surrey	1979	2010	Lack of adults
Tyseley	West Midlands	1993	1999	Did not get off the ground
Wallington	Surrey	1975	-	
Washwood Heath	West Midlands	1992?	1996	Did not get off the ground
Weoley Castle	West Midlands	1990	2002	Offshoot from Northfield.
West Sutton	Surrey	1974	-	
Wimbledon	Surrey	1972	-	
Windsor	Wolverhampton	2000	2006	Left LLF stable
Yardley	West Midlands	1992	1997	



Notable LLF Volunteers

In the best traditions of pantomime, the cast list is shown in (approximate) order of appearance ...

Frank Adey – The chap that started it all. Little League Football and this history are a lasting testament to the vision of the man. What more can one say? Except “You did a brilliant job, Frank!”

Ron Hobbs – A one-time work and football team colleague of Frank Adey. A huge Little League enthusiast ever since that fateful evening when Frank Adey came round for tea and biscuits. One of the original Morden team managers (and later a Wimbledon team manager) and Morden Sec from 1969 to 1972. National Sec from 1972 to 1997, involved in setting up most Leagues in the south and supervising the formation of new leagues in the West Midlands. Fingers in many activities including National Tournament, Charitable Status, Green Hornets, Clapham Common. Now a white haired chap with more spare parts than the million dollar man, but don't let that air of respectability fool you.

Bill (Tom) Arnold – A major supporter of LLF and First President until his death in 1992. As Managing Director of Watliff Co. he was Frank and Ron's boss. An engineer with a long string of letters after his name, Tom was a world expert on long case clocks and a member of the Magic Circle.

Len Smart – involved right from the start in 1968. Len was a professional photographer and mass producer of team photos. He was very active until his death in 1996, when he solved the problem of how to finance the NEC by leaving a large sum of money to Little League Football. In his day, Len was always regarded as the most senior of the Vice Presidents, and deservedly so.

Ron and Joyce Hales – ran sports shop in South Wimbledon. Gave extended credit and discounts to leagues.

Brian Thornton – (Morden) started 1969 and reffed two or three games every week for over 30 years. Several times Chairman at Morden. One of life's gentlemen.

Gordon Martin – (Raynes Park) Early NEC member. Set up Carshalton League.

Harry Lewis – Heavily involved at Wimbledon LLF and NEC Chairman from 1976 to 1978. Introduced Divisional Structure in 1980

Eddie Dribble – (Raynes Park) NEC Chairman from 1978 to 1982 Driving force on Green Hornets trip.

Malcolm Ash – (West Sutton) National Treasurer 1976 to 1980. National Administrator 1999 to 2006. Involved in much background work, including charity registration, revamping the rulebook, FootbaLLFocus, CRB checks. Helped set up several new leagues.

Peter Harvey – Sutton activist and printer involved in National Tournament, FootbaLLFocus and London Lions team manager.

Michael Macey Invited to tea at the Palace (Buckingham, not Crystal) in recognition of his efforts as Kingston, National Tournament and Green Hornets Press Sec.

John Smoker – Sutton LLF stalwart, Green Hornet committee and NEC Treasurer from 1980 to 1984. Helped set up several new leagues

Len Naish – Norwood enthusiast and NEC Chairman from 1982 to 1998. Heavily involved in the West Mids expansion.

Peter Harward – first Kingston Sec, Green Hornet committee member and also helped set up several leagues.

Geoff Watson – Oversaw massive expansion as Morden Sec 1979 to 2002. Acting NEC Sec 1983 in Ron Hobbs' absence. National Treasurer 1984 to 1987 National Sec 1999 to 2000. President 2003 – 2009 Involved in much background work, including charity registration, revamping the rulebook, FootbaLLFocus, etc

Howard Gurr – (Addiscombe) Long serving National Tournament co-organiser

Sue Haylock (West Sutton) National Treasurer 1987 to 2002 and Development Officer 2002 to 2007. Started several Leagues and heavily involved with the West Midlands expansion.

John Haylock (West Sutton) – Arranged trademark registration for the name Little League Football in 2000. Helped Sue with setting up new leagues.

Kevin McCarthy – regular Morden LLF St John volunteer, moved to Birmingham Social Services and responsible for the introduction of Little League Football to the West Midlands. First Secretary of Ladywood LLF.

Billy Sutton – (Ladywood) larger than life character involved in promoting LLF in the West Midlands. First Chairman of Birmingham Division 1986 to 1997.

Phil Summerill – Worked for Birmingham and paid to set up and supervise the running of Little Leagues in all parts of the area.

Ron Clarke (Chelmsley Wood) Tireless worker and Chairman Birmingham Division from 1986 until his death in 2000. Helped set up several leagues.

Tony O'Loughlin – Helped set up several new leagues – including Ladywood, the first in the West Midlands. Handsworth Sec and co-ordinator of West Midlands leagues for many years.

Brian Pattison – (West Sutton) Insurance expert who arranged tailor made policies for LLF. Claims Officer on Managers' Accident Fund.

Marlene O'Brien – with husband Frank runs Northfield and has been involved with West Midlands Division and NEC since 1989.

Derek Coleman – First Smethwick League Sec, Chairman West Midlands Division and National Sec from 2003 to 2007

Mary Bennett – mainstay at Lewisham South for many years. Awarded Barclaycard Community Champion Award at age of 80

Bob Goodall – New Malden Sec for many years and current NEC Chairman (since 1999)

Ted Schuck – (Ladywood) helped set up several leagues in the West Midlands.

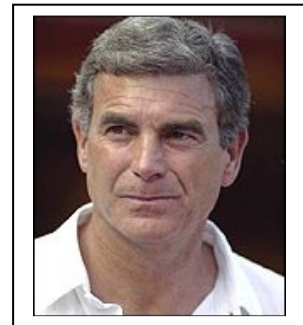
Martin Pettingell – Sutton Secretary and NEC President from 1994 to his death in 2002, father of Margaret who set up Lewisham South LLF in 1985.

Roy Gordon – NEC Treasurer 2002 to 2006

Frances Cooper – (Sutton) Current National Treasurer (since 2006)

Dennis Jones – Morden Secretary and current NEC Sec (since 2007)

Patrons



Sir Stanley Matthews – first Patron of Little League Football. Recruited 1989. Died 2000

Glenn Hoddle – Patron of Little League Football recruited when Chelsea Manager in 1993. Glenn became England Manager in 1996.

Sir Trevor Brooking – former West Ham and England player and previously Chairman of Sport England. Recruited in 2002 as the third Patron of Little League Football.

Famous Old Boys and Girls

Terry Bullivant (Morden LLF) Fulham and Aston Villa)

Jason Cundy (Wimbledon LLF) Chelsea, Spurs and England U21

Joleon Lescott (?? LLF) Wolves, Everton, Manchester City and England International

Lee Hendrie (Hodge Hill LLF) Aston Villa and Sheffield United, 12 appearances for England U21s and came on as sub in England v Czech Republic 1998).

Neil Sullivan (Morden LLF) Wimbledon, Spurs, Leeds and Scotland goalie.

Steven Reid (Kingston LLF) Millwall, Blackburn and West Brom, played for England U16 and was a full International for Ireland. Little League's first World Cup player in 2002 against Germany and Cameroon.

Casey Stoney (Morden LLF) Arsenal, Charlton and Lincoln Ladies and capped over 90 times for the England Womens National Team.

Paul Merton (of 'Have I Got News For You' fame) was originally Paul Martin, the Footman Flyers goalie at Morden LLF.

And umpteen thousand team managers, referees, committee members and tireless helpers. We can't mention you all individually, but over the years several thousand volunteers have helped make Little League Football what it is. On behalf of the tens of thousands of players, past and present, may we thank each and every one of you for a job well done.

And tens of thousands of players – without you, the adults wouldn't have formed so many friendships and had so much fun.

The last word

"If I am permitted to send one message to everyone in Little League Football, it is that the original concept of Little League is never lost sight of, and the fun and enjoyment of children playing football continues to be the primary objective. That is becoming more and more difficult to sustain against the present-day background of commercial professionalism in sport, but Little League is all about recreational football and that must be preserved at all costs."

Martin Pettingell
President 1994 – 2002