



# NEWCASTLE UNITED

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## DISABILITY NEWS

NEWSLETTER FOR NEWCASTLE UNITED'S  
DISABLED SUPPORTERS AROUND THE WORLD

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DAVE BALMER

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Hello, and here we are as the season fast approaches after a very enjoyable 17/18 season. The team did what was required on the pitch and we work tirelessly off the pitch to enhance the match-day experience for all our fans.

Since the last newsletter we can list the following achievements;-

- We have trained stewards to become 'Dementia friends'
- We have set up an independent advisory group with a representative from the superb Percy Hedley foundation on it
- NUFC staff have been trained in mental health first aid
- I attended a disability access conference in London
- NUFC hosted a hate crime conference
- We have completed our sensory room which will be in place for the beginning of the season
- Wheelchair spaces have been increased, so that at the start of next season we will have 234 slots available
- We have had the premiere of 'More than a manager' / Magic weekend and Ed Sheeran, with lots of our disabled fans attending those events as well

Below we have an article from Gareth Beard, which takes a look at how things have moved on. Gareth is a lifelong Newcastle fan and is chair of the Newcastle United Disabled Supporters Association. He also sits on the fans forum. Additionally we have an article from the foundation about the power chair football, and highlights some of the excellent work the Foundation does.



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## 2. HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED

Sitting before the Southampton match, I watch the stadium rapidly fill up; black and white everywhere with a splash of red and white from the away fans up in level seven. The tension is increasing. Soon the flags will be waving.

I start to think how much the stadium has changed for myself and other disabled supporters. Back in the day, "when I was a lad," there were no facilities. I used to stand in what is now known as North West Corner. In the late sixties, early seventies, it was just a small concourse where St Johns' Ambulance were located, squashed between the Leazes End and the paddock of the Main Stand. Then, as a handful of disabled supporters began to attend matches, a minor miracle occurred and the club created a small area for us in the lower corner of the Leazes End; a flat concrete hard stand which was walled off at the rear. It was small with room only for thirty, but it was a start.

Word was getting around and it wasn't before long the area quickly filled up on match days. This was great, but the downside was that if you were thirty-one in the queue you didn't get in. With no official season tickets for disabled supporters or advance tickets for the area, it meant getting to the ground for about twelve thirty for a three o' clock kick off! Fortunately the club had allocated us a steward and he soon got to know the regulars, and if you got there early he would dish out tickets. Nevertheless, it wasn't very comfortable sitting in an unheated invalid carriage for about two and a half hours before any action was due to start. If memory serves me well, it was sometime around the mid to late seventies the club created a small area behind the Leazes End where we could park, although this was limited to the aforementioned vehicles and a handful with blue badges (although they were orange in those days) and we even got a disabled toilet! At some stage over the years, the club decided to put the away fans directly behind us. Oh joy! With home fans just across the corner flag I think we all learnt some new words very quickly.

For some, no doubt, the abuse hurled across the corner added to the occasion. But the coins falling short of their target became a problem, even though some went home with more cash than they'd brought with them.

Following several complaints to the club, very quickly a metal corrugated roof was attached. We now actually had a little protection from the elements. Things were looking up!

My final memory of that "shed" was the season we got promoted to the Premier League. Leicester home, last match of the season, and it was party time. Advised to get there early, I was at the ground for eleven with a packed lunch entered the "shed" only to find the seats they always left out for those not in a wheelchair removed. When asked, a steward said the club had deemed there'd be no free standing seats in case they were thrown on the pitch! Protests from several of us fell on deaf ears. I wasn't sure I could stand all that time. In those days the police were inside the ground and regular copper who was stationed near us asked me where my seat was? When I told him he turned to the steward and in colourful language I won't repeat, told the steward to tell the club to grow up and ordered the seats to be brought out. Let the party begin: we won 7 : 1, Lindisfarne played on a platform behind us and we were in the Premier League.



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## 2. HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED CONTINUED.

The start of the new season saw major development at St James' Park; the Sir John Hall Stand replaced the terraces of the Leazes End, the "shed" was gone and we were allocated wheelchair spaces and seating in the stand and the Gallowgate end opposite. More importantly; season tickets. It meant more disabled could attend and although those from the "shed" were split up, new friendships were created and we were in with the crowd.

In September 1998 NUDSA was formed and relations through dialogue, consultation and advice began like never before. NUDSA and the club, off the field, have gone from strength to strength. Now, through working together and the current Accessible Stadia Project, we have two Changing Places, a sensory room, raised platforms so that wheelchair users can see over the heads of standing spectators when there is goalmouth action, an increase to come of wheelchair accessible places, plenty of disabled toilets and lowered counters at some, but not all refreshments stalls. There is always work to be done, but how things have changed.

*Gareth Beard*



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## 3. FOUNDATION NEWS

### The Power of Power Chair Football – Oliver’s Story



Like many other eight year olds, Oliver Crawshaw loves sport. After coming along to our Power Chair Football session at Percy Hedley eight months ago, he’s gone from strength to strength, recently making the step up into the first team.

Since day one, thanks to natural talent and the knowledge and support provided by Newcastle United Foundation coaches, Oliver has become a popular and important part of the Power Chair Football squad.

Oliver’s dad, Rob Crawshaw, said: “Oliver absolutely loves the training sessions and since gaining the opportunity to play in the Northern League he has become even more determined to succeed.

“He recently scored his first league goal for the team and has even been given the famous number 9 shirt!”

Not that football is Oliver’s only sporting passion. He also plays another disability sport, Boccia, which you will not be surprised to hear, he is excelling at.



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## 3. FOUNDATION NEWS CONTINUED.

Despite only playing for two years he has made three national finals and is now playing for Vipers Academy – a recognised gateway to the England squad!

To cap off his incredible progress, Oliver’s sporting ability at such a young age was recently recognised at the North East Children of Courage Awards, where he took home the gold in the Sporting Achievement category.

Reggie Dornan, Senior Disability Football Development Officer at Newcastle United Foundation said: “Oli has made incredible progress since we started the Junior Power Chair club only last September.

“It’s a testament to our fantastic session coaches Sam Little, Codie Nichols and Michael Woods who work incredibly hard with the players.

“Oliver is definitely a great talent and one to watch out for in the future.”

## 4. BOX OFFICE NEWS

The club has increased the number of wheelchair spots for the start of the new season to 234. Both the Gallowgate and Leazes have raised platforms now (picture of work getting done below), giving wheelchair fans a better view of the match, and by moving the spaces forward we have prevented anyone blocking the view.

The box office is here to assist with Jan Brien the Box office liaison officer for disabled fans, having worked for the club now for 24 years, she continues to work hard to make sure that supporters experience the best service possible.

Jan can be contacted on [disabilitysupport@nufc.co.uk](mailto:disabilitysupport@nufc.co.uk)

The website offers further information on what information is required to qualify for a disability concession, and a link to when tickets become available is below.

[www.nufc.co.uk/tickets/on-sale-dates](http://www.nufc.co.uk/tickets/on-sale-dates)





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## 5. SENSORY ROOM UPDATE

We are delighted to announce that the new sensory room will be up and running for the start of the new season. The sensory room is a gateway to the general seating areas of the stadium for fans who have themselves autism or similar hidden disabilities, or parents / carers who have children with such requirements.

To enable the sensory room to be used by the maximum number of people requiring it, there is a limit of 3 times (on how many times it can be used in a season), and a set of conditions of use.

Please contact [dave.balmer@nufc.co.uk](mailto:dave.balmer@nufc.co.uk) if you require further information.



Enjoy the new season and let's hope we can push on from last season!

————— **THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!** —————