

Family spirit at Central Ajax FC

Dutch football has inadvertently inspired generations of young soccer players in Warwick. Central Ajax was founded in 1978 as Ajax FC, named after the much-admired European champions of the time. Traditionally, the Amsterdam club is famous for developing young talent and, albeit on a lesser level, that is an ethos certainly applicable to the Hampton Road club today.

The similarities do not end there: the Warwick club has also adopted the famous red and white strip, once worn by the likes of Johann Cruyff and Marco Van Basten, as their easily-identifiable kit of choice. While the pronunciation of the Dutch-sounding 'eye-yax' might have been replaced by the more phonetic 'A-Jax' since the club was founded, the same family spirit at the club has remained.



Youngsters in training

It is one of only a few in Warwick district to own its pitches and now turns out 14 teams every weekend to compete in the Mid-Warwickshire boys and juniors' leagues.

Chairman Terry Dirienzo, who has been at the club for 13 years, said: "Junior football has changed tremendously since I have been involved with it. There were so few good facilities around ten or 15 years and now there also is a lot more funding available to help get more kids involved.

"The coaching is also much better than before. When I started here parents used to be down here teaching the children what they knew - but now they are encouraged to go and get the appropriate FA badges and qualifications.

"As a result the standard of the football has greatly improved and the children get to practise their skills in an enjoyable environment.

"That's the main thing - they still enjoy it."

One of the foremost names to have come through the ranks at Central Ajax is that of England and Manchester United goalkeeper Ben Foster who spent nearly ten years playing for the Hampton Road club.

He then moved to Racing Club Warwick for just six months before being sold to Stoke City, a move which netted Racing about £10,000.

Central Ajax did not receive a penny of the fee, which would have covered their ground maintenance costs for a year.

Mr Dirienzo, who used to drive Foster home after matches, said: "He was a cracking goalkeeper and a great lad who was with us from the age of six.

"And that is the sort of age we want people to get involved.

"We can cater for a lot more teams at our 20-acre site and, as a town, Warwick is growing so quickly that we want to offer boys and girls here the best possible chance to play football.

"Above all else we are a family club. If people come down and want to play then we will fit them into a team - we don't just take the best players.

"We want to improve everybody who plays here. It doesn't matter how good they are.

"If everyone improves a little we are achieving something."

Although primarily a junior football club - Warwick Town is its senior team - it does not mean there is a shortage of ambition at Central Ajax. Mr Dirienzo added: "We are one of the biggest and oldest junior clubs in the area and having our own ground helps a lot in giving us an identity.

"But everyone who works down here to keep the club going is a volunteer and we are lucky to have such supportive parents. In future we want to keep doing what we are doing. Funding an all-weather pitch might be something we would look at, but mainly it is about getting kids here at an early age and getting them off the streets and keeping them fit, healthy and playing football."

For more information on Central Ajax training call Mr Dirienzo on 883188 or visit: www.centralajax.co.uk