

NEWS

'Dad left a great legacy with young people and sport ... that motivated me to do more and get involved in community'

His dad was one of the finest rugby league players of his era. **Will Ramsey** talks to Simon Foster about how sport and family have influenced a new Hull project



OPEN TO EVERYONE: Hull City of Sanctuary Sports training with Simon Foster, centre, at the community pitch in Thoresby Street, west Hull. Inset, Simon's dad, the late Bradford Northern legend Trevor Foster. Pictures: Jack Harland



HE WAS an "Indomitable" and one of the finest rugby league players of the post-war era.

But for Simon Foster – the son of the late Bradford Northern legend Trevor Foster – his dad's influence was felt just as keenly off the pitch.

The 65-year-old, who lives in Beverley, is following his lead by encouraging young people to take up sport.

Every Tuesday, at Thoresby Primary School in west Hull, you will find Simon in charge of a multinational group of aspiring footballers, cricketers and tennis players.

"As his only son, I couldn't quite follow in his footsteps, as he was a great player," said Simon, who runs the Sport For All project. "But it is to him I owe a lot. I am trying to inspire young people now – he left a great legacy in Bradford with young people and sport."

"He was a gentleman and a proud Welshman who became a proud Bradfordian."

"It was his enthusiasm for life that gained a lot of supporters for whatever project he was doing."

His father, who was part of the Great Britain "Indomitable" tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1946, was made a Member of the British Empire, and the Pope's Medal for his work with young people in Bradford.

It was his legacy of volunteering and sport that inspired Simon to start this project. Set up through Hull City of Sanctuary, which helps refugees and asylum seekers to the city, Sport For All began in April.

Simon, a retired further education lecturer, referees at the weekly meetings.

He decided to start the project after becoming involved in Red Cross in Hull, where he helped in the international family tracing service, and as a volunteer at Open Doors in Princes Avenue, west Hull.

The latter, held at the Methodist Church, provides support for refugees and asylum seekers in the city.

"It's an amazing place. It became a key part of my life after my dad died," said Simon.

"I realised fairly early on was that one of the needs was sport – meaningful activity,

particularly for young people of refugee families that wouldn't have the money to buy a club membership at the gym."

The football games he initially began at Pearson Park have now turned into a regular meet-up at Thoresby Primary School.

"It is open to everyone, and when I turned up on the first here quite a few people already there from the local community," Simon said.

"I was really pleased a dozen of these youngsters, some of whom were from Poland and Latvia, wanted to play football with us."

"One of the aims is to try to get some community cohesion. Everyone – we also had people from countries including Iraq, Somalia and Sudan – has mixed really well."

"There was about 40 people there and they were bouncing – that first night I refereed and they loved it. They wanted to play football at a good level, it was competitive."

"I picked out some youngsters with a real ability. It will be interesting to see if we can pick out a pathway for them to get into local teams."

The event, which has also seen parents becoming involved, has been shaped by Simon's own experiences of youth sport.

"When I was a youngster, my dad took me to Bradford City Police Boys' Club, where he had worked as a volunteer," he said.

"Dad encouraged young people to raise their aspirations, to increase participation in sport."

"It was there that we learned discipline and

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INFLUENCE: Simon Foster.

teamwork, and to understand how to take responsibility for ourselves.

"That put a very strong spin on my life and that's what I'd like to instil in youngsters today. I'd like to make them proud citizens of Hull."

He hopes the meetings will help raise the confidence of those attending, alongside improving their English language skills and general fitness.

"One guy, who must have been in his early twenties, came up to me the other night," Simon said.

"He told me, 'I'm so unfit that only after an hour I am gasping for breath – hopefully, if I come every week, things will improve'."

"It's open to everyone – we've got parents helping out with the refereeing."

Alongside grants from organisations including Bud-Hull, a churches charity, there has also been support from the community for the project.

One woman donated a set of football kits,

footballs and basketballs, with Simon hoping that young adults – possibly aspiring coaches – might like to become involved as volunteers.

As the project continues to develop, he cannot help but think back to his dad.

"He didn't have to ask me, I followed him naturally into volunteering," Simon said.

"I was very lucky that we got to all the big rugby league matches with him in his retirement. He was a rugby football league vice-president so he would get into all the games."

"I was his taxi driver, particularly later in life, so we always had a good chat. He was my best friend and that motivated me to do more and get involved in the community."

"He's probably looking down and saying, 'Well done lad, but keep working at it – I notice there's not a lot of rugby yet'."

"Perhaps a rugby team is something that will come one day."

■ Visit www.cityofsanctuary.org for more information.

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MEANINGFUL ACTIVITY: Oream Tony, nine, playing cricket.

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