



ANNUAL REPORT 2024 – 2025 Season



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The league has been operating for 50 years this season, and I'm very proud to record my 21st year in the League Council and 14th year as its chair. I continue to represent the league on the IFA Council, IFA Football Committee and Co Antrim Junior Shield Committee. We have two Down Area League Council members on the board of the Irish FA, and four on the Co Antrim FA. This demonstrates our strong commitment to junior football and ensures we are well represented at the highest levels of football in Northern Ireland



Archie Walls, as Vice Chair has aided me when I haven't been available to Chair a meeting, or a conflict of interest arose. Archie's vast footballing knowledge, his attention to detail and ability to provide a balanced rationale to issues when difficult decisions are required have been vital this season.

Alan Robinson, as Secretary hit the ground running as our new secretary and has delivered this vital role with professionalism and dedication, unequalled within the League Council. Alan regularly liaised with our clubs and Referee convenor to provide a weekly

update ensuring as many games as possible can take place. Alan continues to spend many hours promoting our member clubs, whether the results are good or bad on social media and the local press. Alan's detailed reports are eagerly awaited on a weekly basis, and they give an outstanding overview of what's happening within or league and cup competitions. Alan assisted me with presentations, attended the semi-finals and finals, represents the league on the Co Antrim, is an IFA Council member, and has recently just assisted with new club recruitment, all well above and beyond his secretarial role.

Bill Smyth, as our new Treasurer has carried out an excellent job and your league accounts remain in a healthy position due to his hard work as he ensures bills are paid and monies are collected. My ongoing thanks to Simon McCoy for ensuring the transition went so smoothly.

Simon McCoy, as our new Fixtures Secretary volunteered to take on the fixture scheduling this season and delivered an excellent job. Simon's attention to detail, his ability to schedule 10 competitions at one time as well as considering what was going on in competitions and teams outside our league, referees, club referees and the winter weather, is credit to his dedication to football. My sincere thanks for all the hours Simon puts in behind the scenes to ensure we don't have many issues at fixture meetings.



Michael Wilson is a very hard-working committee member, the current County Antrim Treasurer and an IFA Board member. Michael assisted Bill with the account audit and



assists at semi-finals and finals. Michael has been instrumental in arranging trophies and medals this season.

Ricky Warnock came onboard as a new member of the League Council this season and got the sleeves rolled up and stuck in right away. Ricky is always engaging and happy to provide his opinion on the many football related matters we had to manage this season.

Dessie Adams, as always, a dedicated League Council member assisting with his vast experience in footballing spheres and is always around to help in any way he can.

DAWFL Chaplain - Stephen Thompson continues to provide support to all clubs and members within the league, which includes essential signposting to services when required.

Referee Convenor- Jimmy Fegan and his team of officials have been outstanding yet again this season. Despite the continuing difficulties of encouraging new officials into the game, Jimmy always makes sure most games are covered.

I would like to thank **Comber Rec FC, Holywood FC** and **Ards Rangers FC** for the use of their grounds and facilities for finals and **Sam Sittlington** for his ongoing generous sponsorship. My thanks to **Ards and North Down Borough Council** and **Lisburn & Castlereagh Council** for their support with facilities for our cup competitions.

My thanks to Dennis Nash and his dedicated team of volunteers who continued to promote the league in both social media and the local papers. The chosen charity this season was the Trailblazers power wheelchair football club with our clubs raising £600 to help with their running costs.



The league continued their sponsorship partnership with Andy Neill and his team at 442 Teamwear. Andy has provided many of our member Clubs with discounts and offers as well as supporting our competitions.

It's in all member clubs' interest to ensure they look within their own clubs to see if they have anyone with the necessary knowledge, skills and experience to be nominated for roles within the League Council at our AGM. We need others to step up and assist with the running of the league and come onto the League Council to assist in any way they can, which helps introduce new talent and skillset as well as freshen things up and lighten the load for others. We want our League Council to be vibrant and truly

representational of all our teams throughout the various divisions.

Many congratulations to all the winners and the runners up of all the competitions and my sincere thanks to all for their contribution and continued assistance as we all look forward to another great season in local football.

IAN FRAZER
Chairman



SECRETARY'S REPORT

It gives me great pleasure to deliver the Secretary's Report for the Down Area Winter Football League for the 2024/25 season, my first year in post, and what a learning curve it has been as we celebrated our 50th anniversary.

The following report highlights the main aspects of the League's business.

Registrations



Unfortunately, before the new season commenced the DAWFL lost three teams, with long standing founding member **Bangor Swifts III** severing its connections with the DAWFL, **Portavogie II** joined their 1st team in the NAFL and **Cooke Athletic II** departed to pastures new in the BDFL. It's always disappointing to lose clubs, especially when they've been as long standing as Bangor Swifts III, but we hope in time that there will be an opportunity for them to take up their ties again with

the DAWFL. As for Portavogie II and Cooke Athletic II, they both left with the best wishes of the DAWFL and on good terms, testament to the respect shown throughout the DAWFL by the League Council and our member clubs, so maybe in time we will see them too renewing their connections with the DAWFL.

Whilst we did lose three teams, we did welcome a triplet of new teams to our ranks for the 2024/25 season, with **Ravenhil YM II** rejoining the DAWFL after a few years absence to join Division 2, and **Comber Rec IV** and **Blackstaff II** joining the league, strengthening our reserve divisions.

It has always been the desire in previous seasons to maintain 36 Clubs, allowing us to form 3 'senior' divisions of 12 teams each. With the loss of the clubs aforementioned above and subsequently the new addition for this season, the total number in the 'senior' teams at the end of the season numbered 32. Despite a slight drop from the previous season, the League Council were able to carry out a realignment of our divisions, bringing our Premier Division back up to full complement of 12 teams, with Division 1 & Division 2 being rebalanced to 10 teams within each division. With the addition of a couple of new reserve teams, we had 22 teams competed in the Reserve divisions, bringing us to a total of 54 teams competing in this season's competitions.

Jimmy Fegan I think it's fair to say this has proved to be a difficult year for our referee convenor, never once having his full complement of official referees available to take charge of games, so it's testament to his hard work and dedication that we managed to get our competitions completed. As a League, we once again acknowledge this is not ideal for our members, and we will continue to work behind the scenes with the Irish FA and NEURA, the referee body, to try and address the shortfall, but as has been mentioned regularly at our League Meetings, clubs can also do their bit by making our match days a more friendly and respectable environment to attract new official referees to come on board, which would go a long way to alleviating the frustrations from time to time that we



know all our clubs encounter. Behaviour both on and off the field of play has been flagged up as a barrier for match officials to come into the league, so if clubs want the level of official referees to improve, we all need to be working together to improve the environment into which they would be coming. The IFA have floated the idea of Match Official Liaison Officers (MOLO's), a hospitality role to meet and greet referees, show them to changing room and ensure they get paid, a token role to start building better relationships with our match officials, so perhaps all clubs could consider this as part of the preparations for the new season.

Representatives to the County Antrim FA/ IFA

The DAWFL continued to be represented this season on the County Antrim FA Council and County Antrim Junior Shield Challenge Shield Committee by **Ian Frazer, Simon McCoy and myself**. Michael continues to do a sterling job as Treasurer of the Association and is very well respected for the efficiency he displays in undertaking that role.

Ian and I both also sit on the Irish FA Council, whilst Simon and Michael are both on the Board of the Irish FA, highlighting that this league is well represented at all levels of the football family. I'm also a member of the Irish FA Mental Health Champions network, supporting the roll out of the Irish FA's bespoke Ahead of the Game Mental Health Programme, and if your club hasn't already gone through that programme, I would strongly recommend it as a tangible way of improving the level of support within your club.

Sponsorship



This season we continued our teamwear sponsorship with **442 Teamwear**. 442 Teamwear provide our member Clubs with discounts and personal offers with dedicated 1-2-1 support, and we would encourage all our member clubs to make contact with them to take up that personalised service by contacting info@442teamwear.com as well as supporting our competitions by providing match balls and new bespoke DAWFL referee tops for our Cup Finals. We are, as always, grateful to **Sam Sittlington** for his continued sponsorship of the Sittlington Cup.

Any further contacts that can be provided for potential sponsorship initiatives, which ultimately help keep League fees down, should be forwarded to the Secretary for follow-up.

League Chaplaincy

It's 8 years since the DAWFL appointed their first Sports Chaplain, **Stephen Thompson**, who continues to fulfil the role and providing a very important point of contact for any player or coaching staff who has a personal crisis, needs prayer or other pastoral support. Other clubs have since appointed their own Sports Chaplain, highlighting the growing need of support within our clubs as well as enhancing those clubs with such a service.



I am sure everyone will agree that this is a vital service for our members, and I ask that our Clubs continue to engage with Stephen and their chaplains and assist them as much as possible.

Competitions



The traditional Dennis S. Nash Charity Shield season opener took place at the beginning of the 2024/25 season, and saw 2023/24 Premier Division champions **Newtownards RBL**, playing against Sittlington Cup winners **Castle Juniors**, with an entertaining game seeing Castle Juniors claiming a 3-1 win to claim it for the first time.

Whilst the fixture programme proved hectic and difficult at times, bearing in mind adjustments for Junior Shield/Cup matches, free weeks, pitch sharing, postponed fixtures etc, once again a full league campaign has been completed, and all cup competitions were played and concluded.



Congratulations to all those who lifted silverware, especially **Castle Juniors**, who won both the Premier Division and Reserve Division 1 titles for the first time in their history, **Victoria Athletic** winning Division 1 to claim their first league title since joining the DAWFL and **43rd Dundonald**, who won the Division 2 league title, as they, like the DAWFL, celebrated their 50th anniversary. In the Reserve competitions,

Comber Rec IV marked their return to the DAWFL by claiming a league and cup double, narrowly missing out on the treble, with **Victoria Athletic II** winning their first DAWFL trophy by claiming the Tommy Murphy Memorial Shield to complete a club double, so a few new names going on the majority of our trophies this season.

Acknowledgements

It would be remiss of me not to echo our Chairman's comments once again and thank the League Council for all their continued hard work and support throughout the season. While they do not seek out praise, it should be remembered that their efforts to provide our 1300+ members with a weekly sporting effort are completely voluntarily and can often impact on their family and work life, with many hours spent conducting work in the best interests of member clubs.





I would like to pass on my thanks to our **Chairman Ian Frazer**, whose Leadership skills are second to none, as he deals with matters in a calm and dignified manner, while ensuring all our Clubs are treated in a fair and just manner. I know from working with him at both the Co Antrim and Irish FA Council's, he's a highly valued and respected member, always representing the DAWFL in the best possible light.

Discipline has been discussed regularly throughout the season, forming a part of every league meeting throughout the season, but despite constant talk, it is a worry that fines incurred by member clubs has reached a peak this season, highlighting that a lot of education still needs to be done around this aspect of football, and this despite an excellent presentation prepared by our chairman and circulated to clubs. I would strongly recommend that clubs now start taking this seriously to save themselves a lot of money that would be better spent on the club, which can all be avoided with better awareness and understanding of the rules and laws of the game. This is something that needs to be addressed internally by Clubs, as I am sure all will agree the money could be better spent else were, opposed to haemorrhaging it away needlessly. Most people will now be aware of the recent IFA Appeals ruling that determined that some of our rules could not be enforced, hence the substantial proposed rule changes being put forward at the AGM, but it must be pointed out that all our rules belong to all member clubs, so whilst the League Council members maybe were in the focus during those proceedings, it's our member clubs that have a duty and responsibility to ensure **our** rules are fit for purpose, and our Annual General meetings are our opportunity to play our part in making sure **our** rules are fit for purpose.

Ensuring that all money received and paid out by the League is accounted for is **Bill Smyth**, who took over from **Simon McCoy** at the start of the season, and he's just completed the first of what we hope will be a long tenure in the role. He's made an excellent start, keeping a tight grip on our finances, so we are in really good hands. Thanks, should also be passed to **Michael Wilson** who uses his specialised skillset to ensure that the accounts are audited to a high standard. Michael also a highly valued treasurer of the Co Antrim FA. **Ricky Warnock** was new to the League Council this season, and he's brought a lot of football knowledge to our meetings with some fresh thinking, which has been great and refreshing for us all and good to see a younger man coming on board.



As well as the League Council itself there are a number of other individuals we continue to be indebted to for the supporting role they play in helping the league operate. These include the ever present **Jimmy Fegan**, in his role as the Referee's Convenor, and his team of referees. In addition to the official referee team, I must also acknowledge the dedication and willingness of the numerous Club Referee's, who stepped up for their clubs and gave their time to referee fixtures without an official referee. We all know the difficulties official

referees can face, but to do this on a voluntary basis for your club is commendable. I



sincerely thank all club referees for their contribution this season, without them there is no doubt our competitions would not have run as smoothly as they did.

On the media front, we get a large amount of exposure, not only via the **Dennis S Nash Sporting Snippets** page where an average of 2000 people read the weekly Sunday reports, but from the **Newtownards Chronicle**, with a two-page spread regularly produced and published each week, which puts the league and our member clubs at the forefront of people's minds, week in, week out, unmatched by any other competitive league. The DAWFL are still very fortunate to gain use of **Dennis S. Nash's** expertise, with his coverage and attendance at local games when time permits in his full and busy schedule.

We are indebted to the skills of a number of photographers, whose skills supplement the written reports published each week, with the excellent photographic skills of **Bob Torrens, Nigel Williamson** and **Jonathan Coates** helping to bring the games to life, and then there's the likes of Tommy Phillips, Stuart Clarke, who gave our cup finals wide coverage with their video expertise.

I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank every member of the League Council for their help and support this season, as they have been a great source of advice and support as I settled into the secretary's role. I would also like to note a special thanks to the Clubs, as by working with you all, in what hopefully was a supportive and respectable way, you've made my first year as League Secretary very enjoyable. As a club secretary myself, I acknowledge and understand the vast amount of effort it takes to run a football club. The thankless hours of volunteering, giving up your time to make football the wonderful game it is.

With the 2024/25 season now concluded, I reflect on the ups and downs throughout the season across all competitions and the excitement it has produced. Preparations for the 2025/26 are well underway, an indication that life behind the scenes in football never stops.

ALAN ROBINSON
DAWFL Secretary



Accounts

Jan 2024 – Dec 2024

| Income | | Expenses | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| League Fees (inc medals) | £5,860.00 | Admin | £2786.27 |
| Fines | £2,684.50 | Pitches | £862.00 |
| Guarantee Fees | £200.00 | Trophies | £2,444.64 |
| Co Antrim FA | £3,230.00 | Corporate | £513.80 |
| Probation/GBBonds | £150.00 | Refs | £1,190.00 |
| Sponsorship | £300.00 | Website | £840.00 |
| Gate receipts | £2,246.00 | Phones | £254.37 |
| Appeals | £400.00 | Charity | £550.00 |
| Charity | £527.00 | Misc | £325.60 |
| Ref over charging | £7.00 | Probation/GBBond | £600.00 |
| | | Appeal Refunds | £250.00 |
| | | Bank charges | £84.14 |
| Total | £15,604.50 | Total | £10,700.82 |

Balance Sheet

| | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Bank statement @ 01.01.2024 | £24,259.31 | Bank statement @ 31.12.2024 | £29,059.99 |
| Cash in hand @ 01.01.2024 | £61.68 | Cash in hand @ 31.12.2024 | £164.68 |
| Opening Balance | £24,320.99 | Closing Balance | £29,224.67 |
| | | | |
| Income 2024 | £15,604.50 | Closing Balance | £29,224.67 |
| Expenses 2024 | £10,700.82 | Opening Balance | £24,320.99 |
| | | | |
| Balance | £4,903.68 | Balance | £4,903.68 |



Audit Report

The DAWFL accounts are audited by Michael Wilson

I can confirm that I have audited the books of the DAWFL for the year to 31 December 2024 and have found everything to be in order.

The accounts show a surplus of circa £4.9k, which is very pleasing. There are however a couple of items to bear in mind –

1. For whatever reason, the insurance premium for 2024 wasn't paid until January 2025. It is also likely that the premium for 2025 will come out this year i.e. nothing in 2024 and circa 4k in 2025.
2. There are invoices for Tri Sport of £8.5k to be paid in relation to medals stock (2 years), medal engraving and a trophy. This has the potential to impact on any surplus return in 2025, albeit £3k of it should reflect as an asset (1 year's medal stock).
3. The League is strongly reliant on fines income (DAWFL and CAFA) and gate receipts from finals to fund its costs. Any downturn in one of these would have a negative impact on the League reserves.

Ultimately, the League has decent reserves to cover any short-term loss. An increase in League fees would be the solution if necessary, and clubs should be made aware of this.

In relation to the management of the League funds, Bill took over from Simon during 2024 as Treasurer. The transfer of control has been seamless, and the funds of the League will continue to be in good hands.

Thanks go to Simon for his stewardship of League Finances for a number of years. He hands over the books in good order.

Thanks go to Bill for taking on the role. Having known him for many years, I know League funds will be well managed.

Signed: Michael Wilson

