



ANNUAL REPORT

2025 – 2026 Season





CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



The league has now been operating for 51 years this season, and I am very proud to record my 22nd year on the League Council and 15th year as its Chair. I continue to represent the League on the IFA Council, IFA Football Committee, Co Antrim FA Council and the Co Antrim Junior Challenge Shield Committee. We have a Down Area League Council member on the Board of the IFA and three members on the Co Antrim FA Council. This demonstrates our strong commitment to junior football and ensures we are well represented at the highest levels of football in Northern Ireland.

Alan Robinson has continued to excel in his role as Secretary and has delivered this vital position with professionalism and dedication unmatched within the Committee. Alan regularly liaises with our Clubs and Referee Convenor to provide weekly updates, ensuring as many games as possible take place. He continues to spend many hours promoting our member Clubs—whether results are good or bad—across social media and the local press. Alan's detailed reports are eagerly awaited each week and provide an excellent overview of what is happening within our League and Cup competitions. He has assisted me with presentations, attended semi-finals and finals, represents the League on the Co. Antrim FA, serves as an IFA Council member and has also assisted with new club recruitment—well above and beyond his secretarial role.

Simon McCoy has played a key role in the effective management of our competitions throughout the season, overseeing fixture scheduling and ensuring timely and accurate updates are communicated to all Clubs. His organisation and attention to detail have been vital in ensuring that the League programme runs as smoothly as possible, particularly during periods of disruption where flexibility and quick decision-making were required. Simon has also been instrumental in arranging trophies and medals this season.

Our Treasurer, **Bill Smyth**, continues to carry out an excellent job, and the League's accounts remain in a healthy position due to his hard work in ensuring bills are paid and monies are collected.

Iain Hannah and **James Wilson**, in their first season on the Committee, have quickly established themselves as committed and enthusiastic members. From the outset, Iain and James have been fully engaged in all aspects of Committee business and have shown a clear willingness to contribute their views on the many football-related matters we have managed throughout the season.

Stephen Thompson, DAWFL Chaplain, continues to provide support to all Clubs and members within the League, including essential signposting to services when required. Jimmy Fegan, Referee Convenor, along with his team of officials, has been outstanding once again this season. Despite the ongoing difficulties in encouraging new officials into the game, Jimmy always ensures that the majority of fixtures are covered.

I would like to thank **Comber Rec FC**, **Ards Rangers FC** and **Newtownards RBL** for the use of their grounds and facilities for finals, and **Sam Sittlington** for his continued generous sponsorship. My thanks also go to **Ards and North Down Borough Council**



and **Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council** for their support in providing facilities for our Cup competitions.

My thanks to **Dennis Nash** and his dedicated team of volunteers, who continue to promote the League across social media and in the local press. The chosen charity this season was Northern Ireland Air Ambulance, with our Clubs raising £500.



The League has continued its sponsorship partnership with **Andy Neill** and his team at **442 Teamwear**. Andy continues to support our competitions as well as providing many of our member Clubs with valuable discounts and offers.

With ongoing changes within the League structure, it remains in all member Clubs' interests to look within their own organisations for individuals who may be nominated for roles within the Committee at our AGM. We need others to step forward and assist with the running of the League in any way they can.

The sudden and sad passing of Vice Chair **Michael Wilson** has sent shockwaves throughout the DAWFL and the wider footballing community. Michael was a hugely respected and valued individual whose dedication and commitment to football in Northern Ireland was second to none. His involvement at so many levels of the game, both within our League and beyond, demonstrated not only his passion for football but also his selfless desire to give back and support its continued development. Michael was a central figure within the Committee, always willing to offer his time, knowledge and support whenever it was needed. His contribution extended far beyond his official roles, as he worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure the smooth running of competitions, finances and matchday events. His professionalism, reliability and attention to detail set a standard that will be difficult to replace. On a personal level, Michael was a true gentleman—approachable, thoughtful and always willing to help others. He earned the respect and friendship of everyone he worked with, and his presence will be deeply missed at all levels of the game.

At the time of writing this, the news came that former Down Area Chair **Mervyn Bassett** had passed away. Mervyn performed a variety of roles during his time on the DAWFL Committee, including Match Secretary, Registrations Secretary and ultimately Chair. His decades of service to the DAWFL left a lasting imprint on the League. Such was the esteem in which he was held, one of the Leagues Cup trophies was renamed "The Mervyn Bassett Cup", a fitting and permanent acknowledgement of a man who gave so much without seeking recognition. To his wife Sandra and his children Andrew, Heather and Colin, and the wider family circle, you can be assured you are in our thoughts and prayers at this time.

Finally, many congratulations to all winners and runners-up across our competitions, and my sincere thanks to everyone for their contribution and continued support as we look forward to another successful season in local football.



SECRETARY'S REPORT

It gives me great pleasure to deliver the Secretary's Report for the Down Area Winter Football League for the 2025/26 season, my second year in post. However, it wouldn't be right not to start this report without acknowledging the huge loss of League Council member and Vice Chair **Michael Wilson**, who provided not only sterling and unwavering service to the league since joining the League Council in the 2014/15 season, but to the wider footballing family in his roles as Treasurer to the Co Antrim FA, Treasurer of the Co Down Supercup NI, IFA Board, IFA Council, Co Antrim FA Council, Co Antrim Junior Shield Committee. He will be sadly missed by all, and our thoughts and prayers remain with his wife Moninna, his children Cathy, Jayne, David and Claire, and to the wider family circle.

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

Registrations



The DAWFL league season started with 56 teams, with a very warm welcome to **Cloughey** and **East Belfast III** to our ranks. However, before the season started, we had been advised of the demise of **Agape**, and during the season we lost two further teams with **Clarawood** having their membership withdrawn due to persistent failure to fulfil fixtures, and **Blackstaff II** folding for a similar reason, highlighting the difficulties clubs face getting teams out on a weekly basis, so well done to the remaining clubs who saw the season through to a conclusion.

It is the desire of the League Council to maintain 36 Clubs, allowing us to form 3 'senior' divisions of 12 teams each. The losses of the three teams mentioned did have an adverse impact on the smooth running of the fixtures programme, the greater impact coming in Division 2, but to ensure each team had adequate fixtures until the seasons end, the first ever Divisional Cup was run for the Division 2 sides, which proved to be a great success. The total number in the 'senior' teams at the end of the season numbered 32, which was on a par with the previous season, but the loss of the teams meant that our main divisions ended up uneven, with our Premier Division sitting at full complement of 12 teams, Division 1 eleven teams & Division 2 sitting at 9 teams. Despite the loss of Blackstaff II during the season, we did finish the season with 22 Reserve Teams with **Cloughey II** joining Reserve Division 2, bringing us to a total of 54 teams competing in this season's competitions.

Referee Convenor I think it's fair to say this has proved to be a difficult year for our referee convenor **Jimmy Fegan**, as he battled to get games covered, the worst period being the first couple of months when around 50% of our games were covered by an official referee. The season ended in a much better position with nearly all games covered by an official referee, 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 continue to work behind the scenes with the Irish FA and NEURA, the referee body as has been mentioned regularly at our League Meetings. The



new season under proposed rule changes will bring greater flexibility for clubs to discuss and agree movement of fixtures, which in itself will hopefully aid the spread of official referees to cover matches and less reliance on club referees, but it will only work if clubs are open minded to that and work together. Discipline on and off the field of play has been mentioned as reasons why it's so difficult to get referee recruitment to the levels we all require, so 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. Just remember, whether a referee makes either a right or wrong decision, the referee isn't going to change the decision they've made, plus they see things at a different angle to us on the sidelines whilst possibly being closer to the play, so why get in bother by the ranting and raving that sometimes puts our games in a poor light! Some clubs implemented the IFA's idea of having 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, and the feedback on that has been the role was well received, but the vast majority of our clubs still have to embrace this initiative, so something to consider in 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 Wilson**, until his untimely passing, continued to do a sterling job as Treasurer of the Association and was hugely respected for the efficiency he displayed in undertaking that role.

Ian and I both also sit on the Irish FA Council, whilst Simon and Michael both serve on the Board of the Irish FA, Michael ending his tenure on the board in December 2025,

highlighting that this league is well represented at all levels of the football family. Ian is also a member of the Football Committee, whilst this season saw me taking up a role within the IFA Junior and Youth Cup Committee. 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 that you get in touch to start the conversation around Mental Health, as I know from my discussions throughout the season there's hardly a club that hasn't been touched by this illness, and there is so much we can do together to normalise things within our communities.

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. 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 9 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 2025/26 season, and saw 2024/25 Premier Division champions **Castle Juniors**, playing against Sittlington Cup winners **Newtownards RBL**, with an entertaining game seeing Newtownards RBL claiming a 4-1 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 fixture has been completed, and all cup competitions were played and concluded.





Congratulations to all those who lifted silverware, especially **Ballynaveigh Breda Star**, who won the Premier Division title for the first time in their history and in doing so created history by becoming the first team to win all three of our main league competitions. **Willowfield Parish 10th OB**, so close in the past number of seasons, won the Division 1 title to claim their first league title and **3rd Bangor** bounced back from relegation in the previous season to claim the Division 2 league title. In the Reserve competitions, **Comber Rec IV** added the Reserve Division 1 title to the Reserve Division 2 title they won the previous season to continue a remarkable return to DAWFL football. **Castle**

Juniors were in the hunt for a treble this season but had to settle for the Billy Allen Memorial Shield and the Sittlington Cup, whilst Comber Rec IV, in the final game of the season, claimed their second league and cup double to claim the Tommy Murphy Memorial Shield. **Newtown Forest** were another team creating history as they claimed their first DAWFL trophy in the Frank Moore Cup. This season also saw another piece of history with the first ever Divisional Cup being claimed, as Cloughey capped an excellent inaugural season in the DAWFL by claiming the cup to add to their Division 2 promotion success and it was also a first for DAWFL club Newtownards RBL, who hosted a DAWFL final for the first time. So further new names going onto our trophies this season with historic moments throughout.

Acknowledgements

It would be remiss of me not to thank my fellow colleagues in 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, this year proving to be one of the busiest yet as we dealt with various issues throughout the season and making some tough decisions along the way.



I would like to pass on my thanks to our **Chair 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. We are blessed to have him as our Chair.

This season our fixtures suffered a big hit due to the very mixed weather, so it would be remiss not to acknowledge the significant work done by **Simon McCoy** as he juggled fixtures to ensure our various competitions drew to a conclusion on time. Not an easy task



bearing in mind pitch availability, ground shares etc, but somehow he managed to get us all through the fixture congestion that had built up, so an excellent job all round.

Discipline has been discussed regularly throughout the season, forming a part of every league meeting throughout the season, but it is a worry that despite the constant talking about fines and getting the message out to those on and around the field of play our clubs are still giving rise to needless fines that can be easily avoided. 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 elsewhere, opposed to haemorrhaging it away needlessly. The League Council do have plans to discuss the matter further with all our clubs as part of the preparations for the new season, so please watch out for that and make the time to attend.

Ensuring that all money received and paid out by the League is accounted for is **Bill Smyth**, and he's just completed the second year 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. **Iain Hannah** and **James Wilson** both came onto the League Council at the start of the season, and have been excellent members bringing fresh points of views to the many issues and debates had throughout the season. **Thomas Matthews** was also a new League Council member, but due to other pressures had to end his time on the League Council early. **Ricky Warnock** was new to the League Council last season, but his move to another team outside the DAWFL saw him vacating his post within the League Council. **Dessie Adams** also decided to step away from his League Council role but continues to ensure the facilities at Ards Rangers are available for our face-to-face meetings. On behalf of the League Council I'd like to place on record our thanks to all for their work whilst members.

As well as the League Council itself there are a number of other individuals we continue to be indebted to. These include the ever-present **Jimmy Fegan** in his role as the Referee's Convenor, and his team of referees. Without them, then our competitions would prove difficult to complete. In addition to the official referee team, I must also place my sincere thanks to the dedication and willingness of the Club Referee's, who stepped up for their clubs and gave their time to referee fixtures without an official referee. 106 games were managed by club referees this season, all unpaid and requiring them to give up of their time for the benefit of others. We all know the difficulties official referees can face, but to do this on a voluntary basis for your club is commendable, so know that your efforts are truly appreciated, and we look forward to a time when there'll be less reliance on club referees so that you can all get back to watching the game for the enjoyment..

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 one or 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, who's skills supplement the written reports published each week, with the excellent photographic skills of **Nigel Williamson, Neal Dorman, Jimmy Graham** 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.



As I get to the end of this report, the news came through that former DAWFL Chair **Mervyn Bassett** had passed away. Mervyn spent many years on the DAWFL Committee, serving in a number of roles, lastly that of Chair. He's widely known for his many years of dedication to former DAWFL outfit Comber Star, and there's a long-lasting legacy to his years of service with one of the DAWFL Cups named after him. Mervyn will be sadly missed throughout the footballing family, and to his wife Sandra, children Andrew, Heather and Colin, you can be assured of our thoughts at this sad time.

I would also like to note a special word of thanks to the Clubs and especially their secretaries, as by working with you all, in what hopefully was a supportive and respectable way, you've made my time 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 2025/26 season now concluded, I reflect on the ups and downs throughout the season across all competitions and the excitement it has produced and the new history created this season. Preparations for the 2026/27 are well underway, an indication that life behind the scenes in football never stops, and before we know it, we will be back at it again when hopefully another exciting season will unfold.

ALAN ROBINSON
DAWFL Secretary



Accounts

Jan 2025 – Dec 2025

Income		Expenses	
League Fees (inc medals)	£5,785.00	Admin	£2020.00
Fines	£2,262.00	Pitches	£1166.00
Guarantee Fees	£200.00	Trophies	£8473.62
Co Antrim FA	£3,700.00	Cup Officials	£1300.00
Probation/GBBonds	£300.00	Other League Exps	£6687.92
Sponsorship	£350.00	Other Cup Expenses	£441.50
Gate receipts	£1996.00	Broadband Charges	£408.00
Appeals	£200.00	Charity	£1200.00
Charity	£332.75	Misc	£237.00
Misc Payments	£262.00	Probation/GBBond	£150.00
Cup Final Video Payments	250.00	Appeal Refunds	£250.00
		Bank charges	£68.90
Total	£15,637.75	Total	£22402.94

Balance Sheet

Bank statement @ 01.01.2025	£29059.99	Bank statement @ 31.12.2025	£22304.80
Cash in hand @ 01.01.2025	£164.68	Cash in hand @ 31.12.2025	£154.68
Opening Balance	£29224.67	Closing Balance	£22459.48
Income 2025	£15,637.75	Closing Balance	£22459.48
Expenses 2025	£22402.94	Opening Balance	£29224.67
Balance	£6765.19	Balance	£6765.19

NOTE; accrued assets for 2026 (medals) to value of approx. £2800.00	£2800.00		£2800.00
Revised Balance	£3965.19	Revised Balance	£3965.19

Treasurer	B Smyth	Date	17/03/2026
Auditor	S McCoy	Date	19/06/2026

