

Jacob Willis

Brief football background

I joined my first football team, Lower Earley Predators, a local hearing club, at around the age of 7, later moving to Woodley Wanderers at the age of 12. For them, I played most weeks either in midfield or on the left wing. In 2003, when I was 11, I also joined Fulham Deaf youth for training sessions and the occasional football tournament. With Fulham I changed position, playing as a striker. I continued playing for Woodley Wanderers as well as playing for Fulham Deaf Youth team. At 15 I also played for the Fulham Deaf Reserves team when Woodley Wanderers did not have a match. Then when I was 16 I was deemed good enough to move up to the Men first team, so I left Woodley Wanderers and started with the Fulham Deaf Men's first team. I've been there ever since.

My main football education was gained playing with my mainstream teams and I would encourage any deaf youngsters to start out in a mainstream team if they can, mainly for the education you get there.

Barriers faced

Being Deaf in a hearing football team meant I faced a lot of barriers; I couldn't always follow the team talks, or take part in banter. I felt quite lonely most weeks; I only went to play football as this was my big passion. For me there was no social side. This all changed when I joined Fulham Deaf, I was then able to take a full part in the social side of football. Although I now play for a Deaf team, I still face barriers, such as trying to communicate with referees who are not always Deaf aware.

What it means to be selected for GB

It means the world to be selected for GB, to be able to represent my country; you can't get much better than that!

What it has done to my confidence

Being selected has helped my confidence but at the same time I am keeping my feet on the ground as I have plenty of work to do and I will keep on trying to improve. Getting to the top is only the start and means more hard work to stay there and win medals.

Funding issues

I am currently trying get funding for myself and the GB squad to be able to go to Italy for the World Championships this coming June. We don't receive any support from the FA or any of our national governing bodies, so we have to dig deep in our pockets and work hard to find funding to be able to play for our country. This is something we have to do on top of our jobs as well as football matches and training.

Ambitions

I played at the European Deaf Championship last year at Hannover, where we grabbed the Bronze. The feeling was great, although we were disappointed to only just miss out on playing in the Final. This World Cup we are aiming higher, to reach the Final and grab that Gold!