*Good Practice Example – Buckinghamshire Schools’ FA Finals Festival*

**Summary**:

We, as Buckinghamshire Schools’ FA, ran a three-day Finals Festival to stage our secondary-aged School County Cup Finals. This included three fixtures per day at Arbour Park, home of Slough Town FC, which possesses a high quality, FA-registered 3G surface.

**Main Outcome**:

Between Wednesday 14th – Friday 16th March, the Buckinghamshire Schools’ FA Finals Festival took place at Arbour Park in Slough. One of the main aims was to provide a prestigious feel to the event at a high-quality Stadium venue. Arbour Park was an excellent venue for this purpose & was backed up by a fantastic 3G surface which meant the nine back-to-back Finals could go ahead regardless of the weather on an excellent surface for Football.

We took a gate for spectators coming to watch, which included a programme for the whole festival (attached). Slough Town FC kindly put on refreshments for spectators to purchase, which was appreciated, & we also had access to the PA system in order to assist with announcements, presentations & pre/post-match music.

We had to consider carefully the scheduling of fixtures due to our booking hours. We hosted the two 9v9 Finals back-to-back to assist with goal hire (from Mark Harrods) & pitch markings. Buckinghamshire Schools’ FA rules also assist with the time constraints, with any Final ending in a draw going straight to penalties rather than extra-time.

We were fortunate to have a number of 6th formers who are qualified officials willing to give up a day to officiate the fixtures, as well as calling on a couple of keen officials from the Berks & Bucks FA pool.

The Finals saw a high-quality of Football played & the feedback we received from players, teachers & spectators alike was very positive. We were also pleased to have guest presenters during the festival, with representatives of the ESFA & Berks & Bucks FA being willing to give up their time. On reflection, we feel that the setup enabled us to provide a professional & memorable experience for the students involved.

**Challenges**:

One of the main challenges was the logistics of back-to-back fixtures, with crossover of changing & warming-up etc. Due to only having the one pitch & two changing rooms (unlike the National Finals at the Madejski), thought had to go into getting around these challenges to ensure smooth progress throughout the days. A timetable was shared with the Schools (attached) as to when the changing rooms would be available & it was emphasised not to leave things in there. Where there was a quick turnover, we also had teams warming up on the pitch while the preceding presentation was in progress.

Another challenge was the location, with Slough not being a central venue for Buckinghamshire Schools. Despite the distance, Schools who had to travel the furthest (from Milton Keynes for instance) seemed to enjoy their Finals experience & the quality of the venue outweighed the location. Nevertheless, it was noticeable that Schools who travelled the furthest attracted less supporters.

**Future Actions**:

We will be looking to gain more detailed feedback from the Schools on their Finals experience at the upcoming AGM, which is usually well attended due to entry to County Cups having to be made in person at the AGM. We will be keen to replicate the Finals Festival again next season, most likely at the same venue, but will be considering ways in which to improve the festival further. As such, we have recently attended some of the ESFA Finals at the Madejski Stadium to see if there is anything else we can adapt to the Buckinghamshire Finals.

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