

PUBS AND SPORT

The Perfect Match



Written by Will Hawkes

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PUBS AND SPORT: THE PERFECT MATCH

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INTRODUCTION

Pubs have played a central role in the story of British sport. The Bat and Ball in Hambledon, Hampshire, was where cricket's evolution from rural pursuit to national summer game began in the 18th century; football's laws were drawn up by the nascent FA in the Freemason's Tavern in Covent Garden, London, in 1863; and The Sandon in Anfield, Liverpool, is the birthplace of both Everton and Liverpool football clubs. These instances are not unusual: many of our country's most cherished sporting institutions have similar stories to tell.

This relationship continues today at grassroots level. Pubs still provide a crucial source of support, financial and otherwise, for Britain's local sport and games teams. Until now, a fuller picture of this diverse and socially significant relationship has been unavailable: with this report, *Pubs and Sport: The Perfect Match*, we aim to provide that picture. How many pubs support local teams? How do they support them? Why do they support them? How valuable is this support? This report shines new light on a crucial part of Britain's social fabric.

The results are fascinating. Our research shows that pubs raise about £40 million for grass roots sport every year across the UK. This money goes towards everything from the most popular sports like football and cricket down to squash, volleyball, indoor skittles and any number of other pursuits. Pubs offer not just direct financial support, but support in-kind: sponsored kit, meals, space for meetings, free drinks, accommodation and more.

It's clear that, through direct financial support and support in-kind, pubs are helping to keep hundreds of sports teams and individuals competing across Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In an era when social cohesion can seem dangerously elusive, this relationship is vital.



METHODOLOGY

As befitting the first serious investigation of this complex subject, we have spread our net as widely as possible. We went directly to the people running Britain's pubs to ask them about their relationship with local sports teams. We did this in two ways:

INITIAL SURVEY

In June 2018, we began the process of contacting pubs around the country to find out if they were involved in supporting local sport. We sent out a short questionnaire by email to 28,000 pubs (a majority of Britain's pubs: the Office for National Statistics estimates there are 39,000 in total) which asked seven questions:

1. Over the past 12 months, has your pub or bar given 'in-kind' or financial support to a local or community sporting team?
2. What type of support does your pub or bar gives to local community sport?
3. What sports does the pub or bar give financial or 'in-kind' support to?
4. How much financial support (not 'in-kind') has your pub or bar given over the past 12 months?
5. What type of 'in-kind' support has the pub or bar given to your local community sporting team(s) over the past 12 months?
6. What £ value for 'in-kind' support has the pub or bar given over the past 12 months?
7. Over the next 12 months, is the pub or bar planning to continue it's financial and/or 'in-kind' support for community sporting team(s)?

We received responses from 1400 publicans; the key information gathered is contained within the report.

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY

To ensure that we had got a representative response, we then sent out a follow-up question to those that had not responded. We wanted to ensure we weren't just surveying the most committed publicans. The question was simple: have you supported a sports team or individual over the past 12 months? We received 612 responses: 62 per cent said yes, 38 per cent said no.

FROM FOOTBALL TO KICKBOXING:

the sports that get support

Britain's favourite team sport is unsurprisingly the most well-supported, and by some distance. 611 pubs - 40 per cent of those that responded to our initial survey - said they provide support to a football team of some kind. This support happens in a variety of ways, but sponsored kit and post-match refreshment - as at The Drill in Romford, which supports three football teams, pays for the kit and provides a buffet after each match - is common.

The Drill also support four darts teams, with practice and tournament play taking place three nights a week. Darts, along with pool and snooker, is a traditional pub game, which is the second most well-supported 'sport' category: 426 respondents (just over 30 per cent) support pub games in some way. Cricket is also popular (229, or 16 per cent, said they supported a cricket team), with rugby union (148, or 10 per cent) and rugby league (57, or 4 per cent) also having a strong core of supporters.

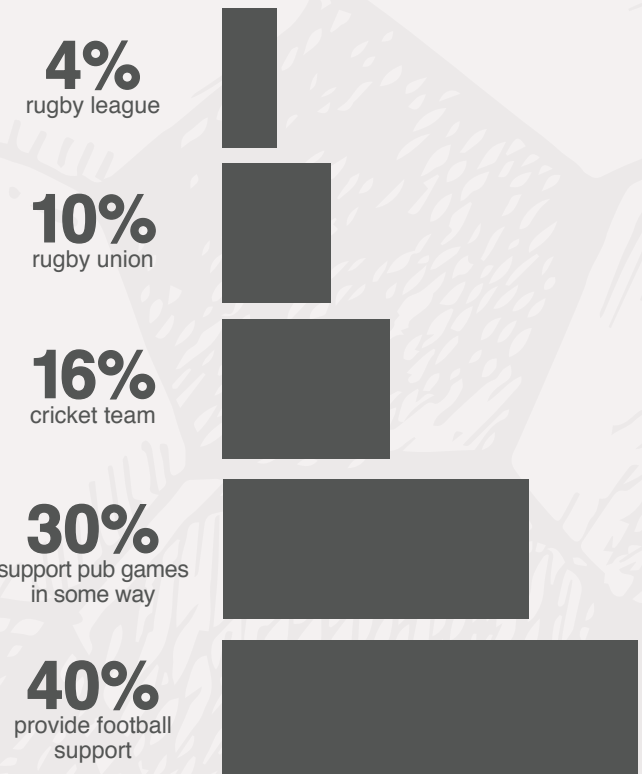
The Bear & Rugged Staff in Southmead, Bristol is a good example of how this works. Licensee Alan Sharp, a former Scotland rugby international who runs the pub with his daughters Zoe and Katie, has recently raised more than £300 for Southmead RFC minis and juniors with events including a race night. "I know most of their parents from running the pub," says Sharp. "We just thought it was time to say, 'Hang on, we take enough out of the community, why don't we put a little bit back in?'"

There are strong regional variations. The Borgue Hotel in Kircudbright, Dumfries and Galloway, bought new shirts for the local curling team while The Pilot Inn in Melksham, Wiltshire, supports a skittles team.

Some support individuals. As well as the local rugby side, The Bear & Rugged Staff has put £1000 towards Grace Chandler, who represents Great Britain at kickboxing. "I know Grace's father," says Sharp. "I remember that when I was young, my dad took me everywhere [to play rugby]: the way I look at it with Grace and her father, he's doing the same. Why shouldn't I try and help?"

A number of pubs support older age-group sport. The Foundry in Aberdeen, which also raises money to support the Aberdeen Football Club Community Trust (AFCCT) and Rattrays, Aberdeen's oldest amateur football team, hosts an over-65s walking group at the pub twice a month. "We offer free teas, coffees, biscuits and cakes," says General Manager Mark Joseph. "It's become very popular: it is a great way for local pensioners to keep fit and catch up with friends."

THE MOST POPULAR SPORTS FOR PUBS TO SUPPORT





THE BUTLER'S ARMS, PLEASINGTON

IT started with a tweet. Michael Hales, owner of the Butler's Arms in Pleasington, Lancashire, was looking at Twitter early one morning in October 2017 when he saw a picture of a happy group enjoying a meal at his pub. The tweeter, Wayne Beck, and his friends were involved in Blokes United, a social-inclusion support scheme based around weekly football sessions in Hull.

"I decided I had to contact them," he says. "I said to them: 'I'm interested in getting involved in a community project - have you got any plans to do something down here?'" They did, and the Butler's Arms has supported Blokes United ever since. Hales has contributed almost £5000 since February 2018, which has paid for pitch hire, kit, and food and hot drinks every Thursday after the sessions at nearby Witton Park.

His support has been crucial, according to Beck, who has bipolar disorder. He established Blokes United in Blackburn alongside his friend Paul Davies, who has also struggled with mental health problems. "We need more people like Mike," he says. "To have a pub doing what he's doing is not just helping people, it's life-saving."

Blokes United also now runs in nearby Darwen, with aspirations to take it further afield. "There were seven people there the first night we ran it, and we engage with between 70 and 80 people on a weekly basis now. The momentum keeps building," says Beck.

They have a team playing in the Blackburn-based Social Inclusion Football League, which means they need a minibus for away matches. Hales is looking to help raise £6000 for that purpose. "It's important to do small things that make a difference in somebody's life," he says. "As a pub in the heart of the community, it's about giving something back. It's not about PR, it's them lads that matter."

He clearly understands the value of pubs supporting the community. He owns three pubs, and his newest - the Railway in Bolton, his home town - supports the local cricket team, recently spending £1200 on kit. "I'm always up for helping local sport," he says. "It makes a difference."

CASH, KITS AND ACCOMMODATION FOR AUSSIES:

what this support looks like

It's not simply a matter of pubs handing money out. Most of the publicans that responded to our question about how they supported local sport said they offered both direct financial and 'in-kind' support (691 from 1021, or 68 per cent). 18 per cent said they only offered in-kind support, and 13 per cent only offered money. (A further one per cent were 'not sure').

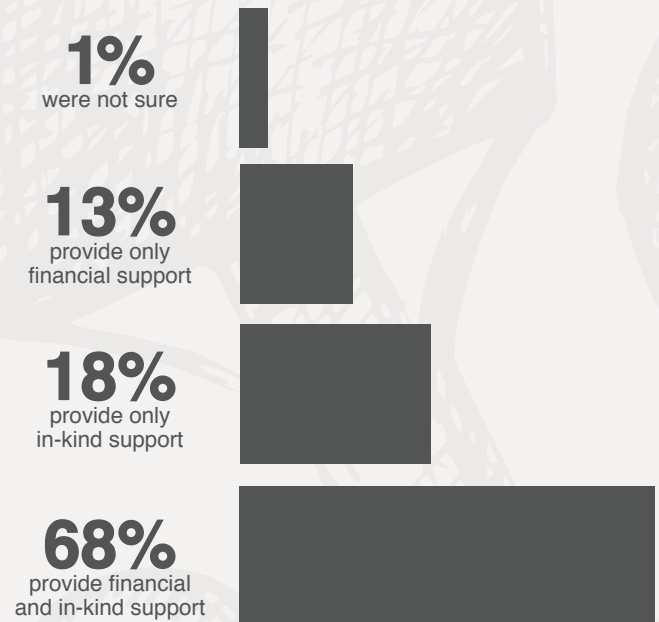
In terms of financial support, almost half give between £1 and £500 per year, while close to a quarter offer between £501 and £1000. Nearly eight per cent of respondents give more than £2000 a year to local sports teams.

Pubs often support teams in a variety of ways, with raffle prizes and free food (both 691 positive responses, or 79 per cent of those who say they offer support in-kind) most popular. At the Royal Oak in Bersted, Bognor Regis, two teams from Bognor rugby club - the first XV and the under-12s - have been supported for the past four years. "My husband John and I support everything they do from going to luncheons, providing raffle prizes, sponsoring shirts to having our logo on the board of the grounds," says licensee Janet Cattermol. "We're also non-playing vice presidents."

It's common for pubs to lay on post-match meals: at The Blackweir Tavern in Cardiff, for example, the local football team, Cathays Cons, gets a plate of sausage & chips after each Saturday game. Free room hire (605, or 69 per cent) is also typical, while free beer or cider is less usual (156, or 18 per cent).

Some pubs offer accommodation for visiting sportsmen or women. The Bull in West Tanfield, Yorkshire, has offered work and board to a visiting cricket exchange student from Australia, who plays for the local village team, every summer for the past five years.

HOW PUBS HELP SPORTS





THE GOLDEN LION, BROAD OAK

STEVE Burden, captain of the Kestrels Bat and Trap team, is weighing up tonight's opponents. "They haven't won this season, but they've been playing on not very good pitches," he says of The Huntsman & Horn. He points at the 22 yards of well-kempt grass in the garden of the Golden Lion, a country pub a few miles outside Canterbury, where the game is about to begin: "This is smooth, though."

It's gradually getting smoother, too, thanks to a light June rain. Unlike in cricket, Bat and Trap's cousin, drizzle won't stop play: the fielders have a shed to shelter in, and a few enterprising Kestrels players have put up a gazebo to ensure batsmen stay dry, too.

The rules of this Kentish game can be boiled down to one simple imperative: as in cricket, you must score more runs than your opponents. In the Canterbury & District League, where the Kestrels play in Division Two, each team has eight players and a match takes place over three legs. All of the pitches are in pub gardens, and a large majority of the teams, like The Huntsman & Horn, are also named after pubs.

The rules are secondary to the main point, which is communal enjoyment. Most of the players here know each other (there are two games going on, with Golden Lion B taking on The Red Lion, Dunkirk, on the adjacent pitch). "We see the other teams year-in, year-out," says Burden, who set up Kestrels in 1975, "and we always have a laugh." There's an annual Kent-wide Charity Cup, he adds, which this year takes place on August 18, at Lordswood Cricket Ground, with money going to Abigail's Footsteps, which helps those suffering in the aftermath of stillbirth.

The Canterbury League, which was founded in 1922, used to have 80 teams in the 1980s, but there are just 32 now. Its strength at the Golden Lion, a founder member of the league, owes much to landlord Colin Robson. He has five sides playing in various leagues, and is away this evening playing for Golden Lion A.

He's spent "probably thousands of pounds" on the game, he says, taking in registration fees, floodlights and the upkeep of the pitches. He is currently putting in a third pitch. "When the sun's shining, it's a lovely social occasion: you have a few beers, a laugh and a chat," he says.

And sometimes, like the Kestrels tonight, you win, too, with Burden scoring a crucial 16 runs in the decisive third leg.

COMMUNITY, CONTINUITY AND CUSTOMERS:

what does the future look like?

The relationship between pubs and local sport seems secure. A vast majority of those who currently sponsor sports teams say they plan to continue to do so in the next 12 months (93 per cent), while less than two per cent are going to stop.

The reasons for this, according to those who responded to our report, are simple: it's beneficial for both the pub and the community. "It's about community spirit," said one respondent, while another offered that, "Ours is a community-driven venue, and we want to give something back. It's part and parcel of being a traditional local pub." A third offered the reason that, "It's a two-way street. They supply much needed customer traffic on quiet nights, especially through the winter months."

Pubs who want to join this band should look locally, according to Aaron Fennell, landlord of The Marne Inn, Bishop's Stortford, and The Crown Inn, Elsenham. He recently took on the latter, and immediately sought out sports teams to offer his support: he has already confirmed partnerships with a local under-eights football team and the town's tennis club.

"Local sport is vital for a whole range of reasons, but teams struggle with funding," he says. "We're happy to help out. It's a partnership and a great way of thanking the community and the residents we serve for their support."

"We're happy to help out. It's a partnership and a great way of thanking the community and the residents we serve for their support."

Aaron Fennell, landlord of The Marne Inn, Bishop's Stortford, and The Crown Inn, Elsenham





THE LION, TREORCHY

THE Lion Hotel is at the heart of Treorchy, in the Rhondda Valley, but when Adrian Emmett took it on in 2011 it appeared to have served its last pint. It was boarded up, but he knew he could rescue it, and he knew where to start: by sponsoring the local rugby team. Or teams, as it turns out: Treorchy and Treherbert.

“That’s the first thing I did,” says Emmett, who grew up in Treherbert and played for the club before working in and managing nightclubs around Britain. “Traditionally there’s a lot of rivalry between them - it can be very tribal around here! - but they get along great, there’s no trouble. The Lion is now an extension of their clubhouses.”

He didn’t stop there. The Lion supports 15 different teams in the town, taking in football, cricket, pool and tennis alongside the rugby clubs, for what Emmett estimates to be an annual cost of £13,000. The 39-year-old says this is money well-invested, not just in terms of customer loyalty, but its value to the local community. “That’s the overriding aspect,” he says. “That runs through everything we do. We want to put the pub back at the centre of the community.”

It’s easy to see that The Lion is a great place for sport, from the Gareth Bale jersey on the wall to the 12 TV screens that regularly draw hundreds for Wales rugby games or big Premier League football matches. But it’s not just a sports bar: on a recent Wednesday lunchtime, the pub had perhaps 50 customers, from local workers on their break to young mothers with babies in cots. It clearly appeals to everyone.

Emmett is imaginative in his support for local sports teams, giving them the chance to raise their own funds using the pub. “I’ll give a team 20 tickets for the comedy club upstairs, which are worth £10 each,” he says. “It’s up to them if they sell them on, or keep them.”

“Or we’ll do a BBQ in the garden at the back - I’ll buy the food, give them raffle prizes, they have an event and whatever they make from the food is theirs. What I give gets covered in the bar income that night: it’s a no-brainer.” Sage advice - and for other publicans running a pub in a small town, following it should be a no-brainer, too.

TIPS FOR PUBLICANS WANTING TO SUPPORT LOCAL SPORT

Identify which local sports you would like to support – what sports are popular in your local community? What sports do regulars in your pub follow?

Research the local sports teams in your area and create a list of those you would like to offer support to - Think about the support you would like to offer before you approach a team – will it be direct financial support or support in-kind?

When you are ready to approach a sports team about offering support, make sure you approach someone who is in a position to make decisions for the club, such as a chair or treasurer

Be clear to the sports club on what you expect from them in return for your support – is it that they drink in your pub? Is it that you get sponsorship rights? Being clear up front saves confusion down the line and leads to a better partnership for pub and sports team

TIPS FOR SPORTS CLUBS SEEKING SUPPORT FROM LOCAL PUBS

Identify which local pubs you would ideally like to ask for support – the nearer to where you train or play matches the better

Think about what support you are seeking and how a pub can help – the clearer you are to the publican, the more likely they will be to support

Remember that in-kind support from a pub is just as valuable as financial support – such as free post-match meals and room hire that save sports clubs money

Also remember that pubs are businesses – in return for their support a pub will need your club to use it. If you don't use it, you might lose it!

Enjoy the support of your local pub! Pubs are a great place for your sports team or club to bond – you may even find it helps you recruit more teammates!



British Beer & Pub Association, Ground Floor, Brewers' Hall, Aldermanbury Square, London, EC2V 7HR

The British Beer & Pub Association is the leading body representing Britain's brewers and pub companies. The Association is more than a century old and was originally founded as the Brewers' Society in 1904. Its members account for some 90 per cent of beer brewed in Britain today, and own around 20,000 of the nation's pubs.



PubAid Ltd, 1D Colet Gardens, Hammersmith, London, W14 9DH

PubAid is a working party dedicated to celebrating the great work done by UK pubs in supporting their local communities. The PubAid team works with press, broadcast media, social channels, MPs and others to showcase the great work that pubs and their customers do for charity, raising over £100m every year.



Sport and Recreation Alliance, Holborn Tower, 137-145 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6PL.

The Sport and Recreation Alliance is the umbrella body for sport and recreation in the UK and represents 320 members – organisations like The FA, the Rugby Football Union, British Athletics, Ramblers, British Rowing and the Exercise Movement and Dance Partnership. It also helps get the nation active at the grassroots by providing advice, support and guidance.



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