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DUKU

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NON-LEAGUE DAY IS ONE TO SAVOUR

HAPPY New Year! As always, when the clock hits midnight it's natural to look ahead with excitement at what the next 12 months might bring.

We know March 28, 2026 will be Non-League Day. It's our 15th year. As someone who has supported him since the second campaign, I was proud to be alongside founder James Doe and the rest of the team just before Christmas as we were recognised with the Best in Non-League Award at the Football Supporters' Association's annual bash in London in December.

The way the campaign

has grown over the years is just phenomenal.

Clubs get so excited about Non-League Day – they get in contact really early looking for ideas for things to do or to share info about what they will be putting on.

Encourage

I say it to James all the time – it's such a brilliantly simple idea he had to encourage people to go and watch their local Non-League club on an international weekend.

He always says how surprised he was at how quickly it blew up all those years ago. It's so simple – but the best ideas so often are.

It's a big celebration of

the Non-League game and a weekend of the year people really look forward to.

Of course it takes a lot of planning. Conversations have been ongoing since September with the likes of the Premier League and Prostate Cancer UK. Those large organisations really help us spread the message far and wide as the day deserves.

There have been other chats with various leagues who are particularly active and lots of interactions with fans and clubs on social media.

Now the big day is just a few months away, I imagine we will see that activity pick up even more as we all get prepared.

Clubs who haven't thought about it just yet certainly will soon be if they're at home that weekend. We've seen so many brilliant initiatives down the years.

But it's also going back to that start point for the whole idea in the first place – it doesn't need to be overly complicated. It's about getting involved and making people aware so they can too.

Non-League Day is really a firm part of the calendar. It's an occasion to be enjoyed and celebrated each year. And 2026 is no different!



COMMUNITY ASSET: Young Havant & Waterlooville fans enjoy a game on Non-League Day

PICTURE: Dave Haines

DOWSE'S SUCH A FOOTBALL GUY

CONGRATULATIONS to my former Kingstonian boss Alan Dowson on reaching 1,000 games as a manager.

As everyone knows, he's a character-and-a-half! He's so passionate and puts his heart and soul into everything.

Dowse is not just about what happens on the pitch, he also

tries to build around the pitch too.

He dedicates lots of energy to things like fundraising to help clubs and spends times in schools and the community to help clubs grow.

He's a real football guy. Here's to many more games in the dug-out.

CONNECTING PEOPLE WITH SCREENING IS BIG PRIORITY

IMPROVING player welfare has always been a priority at The Sports Circle, and one of our most important developments for 2026 is the launch of Circle+, our new Community Interest Company (CIC) which has been created to deliver health and wellbeing services to our members in a way that has simply not existed before.

The first service we will be leading with is cardiac screening. In professional football, heart screening is routine. In Non-League football – despite involving significantly more players – there is no consistent provision at all. Quite simply,

this is dangerous. Research from Cardiac Risk in the Young (CRY) shows: At least 12 fit and healthy young people die every week in the UK from undiagnosed cardiac conditions – 80% show no prior symptoms. One in 300 people screened has a potentially life-threatening condition. And one in 100 has a condition requiring ongoing monitoring, which may affect them later in life.

While playing sport can be an aggravating factor, it can also be part of the solution. Effective cardiac screening has been shown to reduce deaths by up to 90%, yet there is still no na-

tional screening campaign for the Non-League game. That is why The Sports Circle, through Circle+, is leading one.

Circle+ introduces infrastructure that turns everyday physical activity into increased access to things like health and wellbeing services.

Through a programme we have partnered on with Vitality, members gain access to their award-winning health behaviour-change programme – typically available only to elite sports clubs or large organisations – including physical and mental wellbeing support.

Members who connect a

wearable device and track activity as simple as daily steps, training or matches can earn credits for their exercise. These credits can then be used to access Circle+ services for themselves, or be paid forward into the community – including heart screening.

Our screening pathway is delivered in partnership with the award-winning Dr. Teresa Castiello and the MIAL Healthcare team.

Alongside an accurate clinical questionnaire and expert cardiac review, we utilise CardioHart: an AI-powered technology that delivers ECG

and echocardiogram-grade results in a single non-invasive test taking less than 10 minutes.

By converting exercise into access, Circle+ can deliver this advanced screening with savings of up to 60% compared to standard market prices, removing one of the biggest barriers to uptake.

As part of this holistic approach, members also have access to 24/7 mental health support and up to six face-to-face sessions, ensuring responsible care for those who may receive difficult news.

For member clubs, screenings can be delivered on-site,

serving both players and local communities.

In October, the government's new men's health strategy highlighted the unique role football can play in delivering health messaging. The Non-League pyramid is perfectly placed to act.

With other sports, such as netball, already responding positively to cardiac incidents, the question for non-league football is no longer whether something should be done – but why it hasn't been already?

This is about prevention, responsibility and protecting the people at the heart of the game.