

United Reds Football League

SEASON 2022









INCLUSIVE FOOTBALL CARNIVAL

The United Reds season kicked off with a bang in 2022, with the launch of Football Futures Foundations “Football For All” initiative. This was launched alongside the WA Paras, blind/partially sighted football players, and also players from Dianella Junior FC, Whitfords FC, Vic Park FC and Baldivis Districts FC. Players from all-inclusive and mainstream football clubs came together to celebrate the beautiful game!

The day started with a spine tingling “Welcome to Country”, by Danny Ford a local Noongar elder, which also highlighted the inclusive nature of the day, and the importance of recognizing First Nation people and their amazing land we all play our football on!

All United Reds players were treated to some awesome “skills drills”, organised, and ran by WA paras and Football West coaches. We had a blind football demonstration, where everyone was invited to have a go to match their skills against blind and partially sighted athletes. This wasn't an easy task - which just shows how talented these players are!

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

-  *Inclusive Football Carnival*
-  *Launch of Football For All*
-  *Third Year of URFL*
-  *Optus Tour and Channel 7 Promotion*
-  *Rio Tinto and Telethon Visit Seeing is Believing*
-  *Open Training with Manchester United*



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"My son has fallen in love with soccer, he gets changed for training and waits in the car.

This is completely unlike him. He is usually late to everything!"

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SEASON THREE OF THE UNITED REDS

The season kicked off proper the following week, running alongside the Mini-Roo's and junior leagues, with our first cluster being at Dianella JFC. Even though a couple of clubs couldn't field a full team (which didn't matter due to the cluster formation), there was still a lot of interest in the league, with several clubs showing a willingness to be involved. So, next season looks promising!

One club wasn't able to supply a coach, but players were still involved representing their club. Each club hosted clusters at their ground, which again shows the importance to remember, that even if you can't find a coach straight away, you can still be involved in the league.

Key successes this season were players gaining the confidence to play in mainstream teams within their clubs and really build and develop their skills, fitness and confidence.

This really highlights the need of the league for harnessing all these skills, to not only progress in football but also in everyday life!

As the season progressed, the skills, confidence, and just sheer enjoyment of playing club football for all the players really shone through!

Not just for players, but for parents too, being able to come down on game day and cheer on their kids alongside all the other parents around the ground. This is such an important factor of the league. Clubs also welcomed members that had never played for a club before, and some amazing volunteers along the way.

One of our final clusters at Yokine Reserve featured the **Rio Tinto – Telethon “Seeing Is Believing”** round! Families and representatives of Rio Tinto and Telethon came down to join in the fun, learning some new football skills, and marveling at all the awesome United Reds players skills.

It was a great day for all involved and big thanks and shout outs must go out to Nicole and all the crew at Telethon and Rio Tinto for coming down and getting involved.



A VISIT FROM MANCHESTER UNITED

Of course, the biggest highlight of the year was the visit of Manchester United and other premier league teams.

Both Manchester United and Aston Villa really highlighted the importance of football being inclusive and available for everyone. Aston Villa was also involved in the launch of a blind football league for next season with Football Futures Foundation. They also held a training session for the kids through the Telethon Speech and Hearing Institute.

Lucky United Reds players had the opportunity to join Manchester United players on the pitch after their training session at the WACA.



Taking shots at David De Gea, with the help of Bruno Fernandes, Harry Maguire, Fred and other players from the team, it was by far the best experience. It was an amazing gesture by the whole Manchester United team. From John Shiels and Alex Wilson at the Foundation, to the Coach, players and the backroom staff - they all went out of their way to make sure the kids had the best time possible.

One of the mums was even in tears with happiness on the day, being a massive Manchester United fan herself. Oh Boy will they remember that day forever!



BLIND FOOTBALL

Blind Football (called B1, for folks with no or very limited vision) had some great success this year too.

The Perth Soccer Club really took the reins with their version of the game, and the launch of a new B1 league and hopefully a B2/B3 (partially sighted) league. Their emphasis was on developing a youth program to really build up the sport, focus on sustainability and regular competitions in the future.

Blind Football or B1, is the only version of football played at the Paralympics at the moment, so it is important we try and build the sport up. It is a fantastic and exciting game, which really highlights the importance of teamwork between the coach and players.

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*Friendship, sense of belonging,
playing as a team, gaining
confidence, gaining new ball
skills, enjoying sport!*

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SUCCESSES FROM THE WA PARAS

The WA Paras have had some fantastic successes as well. Three players were selected for the National team to compete in the Cerebral Palsy (CP) World Cup in Spain, and the first ever women's CP World Cup held at the same time. Western Australia (WA) provided two players for that team. Although the ladies were beaten in the final by the USA, our very own Katelyn Smith won best GK at the tournament. A fantastic achievement by all involved!

It doesn't end there though! Six players from WA were invited to an Under 23s Australian training camp, with one player playing for a spell in the first season of the United Reds league.

With the CP National championships being held in September, for the first time in three years due to COVID-19, WA is right up there with a genuine chance, after being beaten in the final at the last tournament by New South Wales.

With scratch matches being played, Paras vs Equal Footing Ball and Special Olympic players, in preparation for Special Olympics Nationals in Tasmania, it really shows the importance of leagues like Equal Footing Ball and United Reds to develop these players for their journey in football, with pathways in place to excel, and play vs the best in Australia and the World!

Not forgetting the launch of Special Olympics bid to host the World Special Olympics in Perth in 2028, inclusive football has never been so exciting!

The potential is there with Football Futures Foundation and Football For All, to make WA the best State in Australia for inclusive football. We need clubs to look within their own clubs, chat with their committees, and ask, "what more can we do"?

United Reds is an easy start to include players with and without disabilities, and kick start your inclusion journey!



TOURING OPTUS STADIUM AND MEETING FAT CAT

In a wonderful gesture by Optus Stadium, Telethon and Channel 7, players from the United Reds League were invited behind the scenes at the Stadium earlier in the year.

The players got to meet the infamous Fat Cat, and see were players prepare for the big game.

A nice gesture by all concerned, adding yet another memorable experience to the kids season!



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This All Abilities program (URFL) is really important. For some children this has been their first positive experience in sport. A whole other world opens up for them and it's exhilarating to watch as their confidence grows.

It's a huge reason to jump out of bed in the morning and every training or game night he declares that the program was his favourite thing. The experiences he has on the pitch, through training and with his team, shape the way he sees the world and where he sees his place in it.

He is really thankful for the opportunity to participate and so are we as his parents. It would be so very good for this program to find more kids and give them the opportunity to experience this.

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THANKS FROM MICK!

You all know football is in my blood, so it's a pleasure to get to work alongside you all to promote the sport and make it the most inclusive game possible.

I have recently joined the Football Futures Foundation crew, with the hope of progressing the sport, and giving all people, including people with and without disabilities the chance to play the beautiful game at their level, whatever level that may be.

Thanks everyone for a great year!



Mick Owens

*United Reds Football League
and Inclusion Programs Lead*

