

Real Brazil



Futsal is a Brazilian game that's huge in North Kensington, discovers
NEIL MCKELVIE

IT'S PROVING A TAD tricky to interview Phil Amos. We're in the Holland Park HQ of Active Planet, his sports and health organisation, and Phil himself is a friendly, chatty host. The snag is, no sooner do we settle in with the tape running than a stream of smiling boys and girls from the local estate, who all treat Phil like a favourite uncle, materialize as if by magic at the door or window. When, they want to know, will the futsal

be happening? And, by implication, could I please leave Phil in peace so that he can get on with running the next session?

If futsal doesn't immediately ring any bells, don't worry: you're in the majority. It is, in fact, the South American five-a-side version of football in which generations of Brazilian superstars – Ronaldinho, Ronaldo and Robinho to name three – have honed their skills. According to official statistics, futsal is now also the world's fastest growing sport, with World and European championships for club and national teams. And, all too predictably, this globally popular,

tried and tested soccer nursery is barely known, let alone played, in the UK. "The game originated in Uruguay, but it was the Brazilians who popularised it," Phil explains. "Kids there start playing at about five years old with a small ball that doesn't bounce too high and the emphasis is on passing, dribbling and movement. Matches are played on a pitch marked out by lines (so no kicking off walls) and

with hockey-sized goals. No one stands still and players rotate after five to six minutes; everyone must work together, make decisions and stay involved."

Phil talks with messianic zeal. He may be frustrated that futsal is in its infancy here – "It needs to be marketed and the FA has limited resources" – but that's something he's determined to rectify, and not just for sporting reasons. Through Active Planet's innovative coaching programme in local sports centres, estates and schools, Phil has seen how futsal can be used to engage with young people, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, with behavioural problems and with no interest in physical fitness.

Set up in 2002 as a social enterprise venture with twin commercial and charitable arms, Active Planet provides after-school, weekend and holiday coaching in dance, tennis and football. But futsal is by far and away the most popular activity. "We hold Saturday sessions at Kensington Sports Centre, for which we charge £15," Phil tells me. "At the same time we've got a major programme on the estates; those kids are only charged £1 or it's free. We've found that our clients in Kensington really appreciate knowing that their money is being channelled into helping less fortunate children."

Phil himself is a relatively recent convert to futsal. "I shared a flat with some Brazilians and they introduced me to it – I thought it was amazing," he smiles. "So, a few years ago we advertised for coaches and one of the guys who responded used to teach the game in Brazil. Since then it has taken off and, to be honest, we could be on the pitch all day. One of the reasons for the sport's popularity on the estates is that we can use a small pitch – it is usually played on a basketball court – and in the long-term we'd love to set up an academy. Our coaches already run classes in primary schools and we also have an open session at the Harrow Club on Freston Road on Monday evenings when anyone (children or adults) can come and play." Even though futsal's profile is still lamentably low, there are signs that the tide is turning. "Some pro clubs have cottoned on and now, when we enter our kids in tournaments, there are scouts sniffing around," Phil continues. "They have invited the



best ones to their academies. They know that kids with a futsal background make good prospects." While some of his protégées may end up entering the professional ranks, it's the game's positive impact on every child that truly inspires Phil. "One of the best examples of what can be achieved was at Burlington Danes

reads: "The implementation of futsal saw a significant shift in behaviour in PE. We believe that a key reason for high achievement in futsal is the nature of the small-sided game. Many students who struggle with football due to body weight issues or a lack of size and pace discovered that they could compete in a more

“Clients in Kensington really appreciate knowing that their money is being channelled into helping less fortunate children

school,” he tells me with obvious pride. “We were invited to take some sessions and they gave us the toughest class, which we didn’t know at the time. Some pupils had refused to take part in any PE and others had a negative attitude; however, they really engaged with futsal – the teachers said they had never seen such an impact on the kids.”

The proof of this is in a letter that Phil received from the Director of Sport at Burlington Danes. It

even setting. This allowed the lower end of ability to scale to achieve, whilst simultaneously stretching the more able due to the confined space and new skills and tactics. Futsal has been a major success.” ●

**For more information call
020 3266 0087 or email
info@activeplanet.org.uk
www.activeplanet.org.uk**

Active Planet provides futsal coaching in primary and secondary schools, leisure centres and estates. It also has its own development squads for boys (under 10 to under 14) based at the Harrow Club that play matches against other teams. Coaching sessions:

Saturdays (8-12 years, players grouped according to age):
9.30-11.30am at Kensington Sports Centre (£15)
Mondays (adults): 8.30-10.30pm at the Harrow Club,
187 Freston Road W11 (£1)

If any individual or business is interested in sponsoring Active Planet's community social inclusion programmes please call **Phil Amos on 07931 766833**