

Hitchin Belles celebrate a decade of playing the beautiful game

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From standing start to thriving girls' football club in just 10 years – we look at why Hitchin Belles' membership just keeps growing and growing.

Back in the late '90s, Hitchin youngsters looking to join a local football club were spoilt for choice. If they were boys, that is. For girls, it was a completely different story; there simply were no opportunities available.

Wind the clock forward to the present day and our town is now home to a thriving girls' football club with more than 80 members – and fair few trophies to boot!

It all kicked off in 1997 when, after returning from the States where he'd been coaching women and youth players, it dawned on local football hero Roger Spicer that what Hitchin needed was a girls' football club. He wasted no time in dropping flyers at every school and club, and the ball started rolling –

Thanks to the commitment of the girls, their families and their coaches, when Roger stepped down a year later there was no loss of momentum – it was clear that girls' football in Hitchin was here to stay. In 1999, Hitchin Belles (now Hitchin Herts Belles) Football Club registered with the local league.

Phil Gregory has played a pivotal role in developing Hitchin Belles into the success that it is today. Now the club's Chairman, he says: "I've had a great team helping me over the years, including outstanding contributions from people like Paul Rogers. My personal view of success is not about filling the cabinet with trophies – although we've won quite a few of them! No, it's about getting as many girls as possible out there playing on the pitch, win lose or draw."

The club is thriving, with five teams (Under-9s, Under-10s, Under-12s, Under-13s and Under-15s) and nearly 100 members and associate members.

All girls are welcome at the club's weekly training sessions – no experience required! To find out more, visit www.hitchinbelles.com. And if you know someone who'd like to join, contact Phil Gregory on Hitchin 458290

"Some clubs are determined to win at all costs, but our ethos is 'fun at all costs'. It's playing the beautiful game that counts, not how well you play it, so all girls are welcome at Hitchin Belles."

Phil Gregory
Hitchin Belles Chairman

"For me, it's not necessarily about being the best team. It's about giving young girls the opportunity to take part in a fun community activity that enables them to be active, keep fit, build their football skills and learn to work together as a team."

Nigel Payne
Manager, Hitchin Belles Under-15s

"I was quite shocked when I won the Club Player of the Year Award. I got it because I always turn up for matches and training, and I always try my very best. I'd recommend anyone to give Hitchin Belles a try, because even if you're not very good, you can still get involved and have a lot of fun!"

Ilana Barnes
Hitchin Herts Belles
Club Player of the Year 2009

"I started playing football at Hitchin Belles when I was nine. It's a great club to play for. I got so much out of it – not just football skills but learning about the importance of teamwork and good communication, too. Now that I'm 18, I apply those same skills as a player in the ladies' team."

Georgina Mumford
Hitchin Herts Ladies