

Kiwi Boy becomes Professional Footballer



Chris Wood with mother Julie on visit to St Paul's Collegiate in 2009

St Paul's Old Collegian Chris Wood (School 2005-2008) was offered a two year Scholarship at the Academy of West Bromwich Albion in 2008, after being spotted by a visiting football talent scout in New Zealand. Chris took up the scholarship, at age 17, when he and his mum Julie moved to Birmingham, leaving the rest of the family in New Zealand.

The first six months at the Academy were been the hardest for Chris. Not only has he had to adjust to the new environment he lives in, but also to working with a large team of doctors, sports scientists, podiatrists, physiotherapists and psychologists: it is their task to turn a young Kiwi boy into a professional footballer. Each week Julie receives an email each week telling her what has to be increased or decreased in Chris's diet. If Chris becomes ill, he is required to see the Academy doctor only for assessment: Julie is not even permitted to give Chris a Strepisil as he is regularly tested for drugs. Chris also has to be constantly aware of his professional image, whether he be drinking orange juice in the local pub or going to the cinema with a group of mates.

As part of Academy life Chris is expected to attend academic classes three days a week, as the code of conduct, academic marks and football skills are all considered to be equally important. Continuing with academic classes is essential, as the chances of making a career as a professional player at any level is a mere one per cent. Chris must also complete his coaching badges, train each day of the week, complete set tasks and jobs, play on Saturday and rest on Sunday. In addition, he must make sure that he gets nine hours sleep each night.

Chris always begins his mornings by cleaning the boots of one of the senior professional players in the "First Team", followed by putting out the nets and cones, etc, for the day's games. At the end of the day, he has to bring it all in again.

Julie is very proud of her son and says that she enjoys seeing Chris live his dream.

What does Chris say?

"I am very grateful that Mike Groom allowed me the freedom to play football every day."

To help get himself into "the zone", Chris still listens to his iPod with the Brazilian beat of the Ginga a piece of music written by one of Chris's mates at St Paul's.