



The Academy - <http://www.liverpoolfc.tv/team/academy/>



Liverpool may have the financial wealth to compete for the best players from around the globe, but their decision to fund and build a multi-million pound Academy five years ago demonstrated their desire to continue to nurture and develop their own young talent.

Under the guidance of Academy Director and Liverpool legend Steve Heighway, the Academy is a world-class facility designed to give every young boy on the club's books the best possible chance of following in the footsteps of some of the club's greatest players.

Michael Owen, Steven Gerrard, Robbie Fowler, Steve McManaman and Jamie Carragher all came through the youth ranks of Liverpool FC to prove that locally produced players can develop into world class stars having been groomed by the Reds from an early age. Hopefully there will be many more on the way over the coming years.

Frank Skelly, the Academy's Operations Director, takes us on an exclusive tour behind the scenes and explains the facilities on offer to the potential future stars of Liverpool FC. To take a virtual tour of The Academy [Click Here >>](#)



TOM SAUNDERS LECTURE THEATRE

Frank Skelly: The Tom Saunders Lecture Theatre has only been named in the last two years, but we were very proud and honoured to be friends and acquaintances and colleagues of Tom Saunders', whose contribution to the football club is quite unique. He was a mentor to every manager since Bill Shankly and being an ex-headmaster, he was also the first youth development officer in England really.

It's an education room. On Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings our boys can use this partly as a classroom and a lecture hall. Dave Shannon and John Owens have their games videotaped and they will come in on a Monday afternoon and they will go through and discuss and analyse, with the boys, certain aspects of their game.

LEGEND WALL

Frank Skelly: Our legends wall celebrates the achievements of the likes of Bill Shankly, Bob Paisley, Joe Fagan and obviously Steve Heighway, who played over 300 times for the first team and is one of the most famous legends that we have.

We never forget where we've been because these guys were the start of the regeneration of Liverpool Football Club. We're doing well and we're playing in a difficult environment and a difficult time for football, but we'll make it.

EDUCATION

Frank Skelly: It's useful to see the degree in which the football club have invested in the facilities. Our education room has changed in the last eighteen months into a very high-tech room with computers and both our education and welfare managers have made a significant contribution education in terms of good accreditation.

The boys do a lot of subjects, it is very well managed and an awful lot of good work takes place and I'd say that they boys really enjoy the work. A lot of it is sports-related in terms of Sports science and it sets them on a good career path after they have finished playing football. It certainly makes them a rounded person in terms of what we are trying to do, not only as a footballer but to deal with the media at a very young age and to be able to use their finances in the right sort of way.

The education side of things is a large part of the infrastructure of the development of an Academy player and as such a lot of emphasis is placed on it.

POOL ROOM

Frank Skelly: This is essentially a classroom area, but as you can imagine, you can't have the boys having to always concentrate on the football side, so this is where they relax. We've developed it with a pool table and a little foody table and table tennis. It's important that during their lunch times they can relax because it's hard work. People think it's easy coming from Monday-Friday and playing on a Saturday, but it is actually quite hard physically and mentally. This is provided for them so they can chill-out for the hours in between the hard work and concentration.

CAFETERIA

Frank Skelly: All the boys will eat in the cafeteria have a breakfast here and will eat at lunchtime all together. There is no top table. They have a very healthy diet organised by John, Di and Joe, our fitness coach, to make sure that the boys are getting good nutrition and not eating fat.

John and Di work up at Liverpool University and they helped us for three years and when they came here, we enjoyed their bacon butties so much that we decided we'd bring them with us.

PITCHES

Frank Skelly: We have 10 grass pitches altogether, of which four are full size. Two are intermediate and three are junior pitches as well as the front pitch. The quality and the work that Neil Holden and his boys put in is tremendous.

The water is pumped out of bore holes, which are 300 feet underground and we have 200 sprinklers to make sure the pitches are always being watered and fed. They're basically sand based, so they do need water in order to stay healthy.

The standard that we're working to is second to none and it's a credit to the lads that they're able to do it. I've worked out that we need eight playing surfaces a week to meet our commitments and if you put that in perspective it tells you the amount of work that's necessary to keep us going and maintain those standards.

MATCH PITCH

Frank Skelly: We're very proud of our main match pitch. This is where all the boys from 9-year olds and upwards aspire to play because then they will be playing for the U18s team or U16s team, which ultimately means they might be of the standard necessary to join up with the Melwood squad.

Every Saturday morning some of the staff from Melwood will be here watching our games, so that they can see how our boys are developing. Then they can have friendly matches down at Melwood, where our boys can go down and mingle with the boys down there, which will help their development. It gives them a good awareness of what they have to do in order to meet the standards necessary for us to take them through and basically earn a living from the game.

GYMNASIUM

Frank Skelly: The gymnasium is well equipped and well set out. Each boy has his own programme as they each require different things. It might be upper body strength, or it might be abdominal strength, but essentially it's providing a fitness programme and a strength programme to meet the requirements. First and foremost, the boys have got to be athletes these days because the rules of the game have made it faster and so the boys have got to be able to cope with that as well as the skill side of things.

The emphasis on technique work is because we've been behind other countries such as the Spanish or Italians. I'm not saying we've actually achieved those levels, but in my view if you look at the England set-up, the technique is much better than it used to be.

MEDICAL CENTRE

Frank Skelly: We have a hydrotherapy pool, two full-time chartered physios and a doctor. We have a very quick fast track to getting the boys up and running and going again.

Even though we're on the youth side of things, these facilities are probably better than a lot of league clubs and those are Liverpool Football Club's standards shining through again.

We thought at one time that we'd be getting money from the lottery and the sports council, which never materialised, so everything that has been put into it has been a result of Liverpool Football Club's commitment to the youth side of things. It's been paid back as we haven't done badly in terms of what has come out of the hard work of the Academy director and the coaches here.

LAUNDRY

Frank Skelly: When our laundry lady comes in on a Monday there will be somewhere in the region of ten kits ready to wash. She'll have to come in on Saturday and Sunday to do work that's been left over from Friday. Then she has to prepare all the kits for the boys to go out and train in. It's quite considerable in the winter because there's winter clothing and winter tops.

Very similar to any club, part of her work is doing some sewing and putting some numbers on. Each boy has his own number and has all his own kit which is renewed every year. All the junior boys from 7-8 years upwards get a full kit as well to train and play in, the same as the first team.

DRESSING ROOMS

Frank Skelly: We have 10 dressing rooms at The Academy. The youngsters have got their own showers, hairdryers, washbasins and it's always maintained immaculately. Whether it's the away teams that we play or whether it's our own youngsters in the evenings, we set the standards in terms of hygiene, cleanliness and the way it's looked after. If it's allowed to drop, then very quickly you can get into bad habits.

We can play six games in one day with the facilities that we have. Invariably we don't because generally four is a good amount to cope with.

