

## Pass of the season: Thameslink supports young Hatters promoting safe rail travel

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Luton Town FC apprentice footballers have this season joined forces with Thameslink to encourage reluctant teens to wear face coverings on trains.

For the 13th year running, Thameslink have given the latest intake of 17- and 18-year-olds at the Hatters a year's free travel to their places of study and training. Some could not afford to attend otherwise.

In return the Academy players are acting as role-models for young rail passengers. Research shows that young men especially are more likely to underestimate the risk of catching or transmitting COVID-19, and are therefore less likely to wear a mask or covering than others.

Tom Moran, Managing Director for Thameslink and Great Northern, said: "Passengers can rest assured that we're keeping our trains and stations clean and safe with long-lasting viruscides. All passengers must wear a face covering at all times, at the station and on the train. This includes young people who might not be affected so severely by COVID-19 themselves, but are just as likely to catch and transmit it.

"We work a lot with young people, to provide confidence building and upskilling opportunities that make a

difference to their lives. This partnership with the Hatters not only allows young sportsmen to take up opportunities they would otherwise not be able to enjoy but it helps us spread this important message: wear a face covering to protect everyone around you.”

Dale Brunton, Head of Education and Welfare at the Academy, said: “Thameslink have been an excellent partner for Luton Town Football Club, especially for the young men within our Academy, allowing them to develop both on and off the field.

“We have young men from a wide range of backgrounds and some wouldn’t be able to attend training and games if it wasn’t for Thameslink’s generosity. The partnership also allows our apprentices to give back to the local community via social action days, and at this challenging time they will be proud role models for safe travel by train.”

Second year apprentice Coree Wilson said: “The train pass from Thameslink has been invaluable for me during my apprenticeship at Luton Town. I have to travel on the train every day for training and games and the pass enables me to focus fully on working my hardest to try and gain a professional contract.”

First year apprentice Adam Wedd praised the scheme by saying: “The link between Luton Town and Thameslink is fantastic and allows me to travel to and from training and games whilst I’m on my apprenticeship. Without the pass I’d really struggle to get in every day.”

Academy graduates who have benefited from GTR’s travel support in past years include Sam Beckwith, Corey Panter and Josh Neufville, all now full-time professionals in Luton’s first-team squad, and James Justin, now Leicester City’s right back, who recently scored his first Premiership goal.

Midfielder Sam Beckwith said: “The train passes were a massive help during my time as an apprentice within the academy at Luton Town. The pass allowed me to attend all training sessions and games during my apprenticeship, which had a hugely positive impact on my development. Without this opportunity I’m not sure I would have developed as a player as much.”

*Photo credit: Peter Alvey*

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