



May 2025

Football on the Brain newsletter

Welcome to the latest edition of the Football on the Brain newsletter. This newsletter is sent every few months to Football on the Brain partner organisations, University of Oxford members, and members of the public who are involved in or interested in the project. It is also available for download on our website.

Please feel free to forward it to your colleagues, or encourage them to sign up to the newsletter mailing list by emailing hanna.smyth@ndcn.ox.ac.uk. In this month's edition below you will find updates about the various strands of the project, including ways to get involved and stay in touch.



FOOTBALL
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Conference registration now live

We are excited to host the first ever Football on the Brain conference on Wednesday 24 September 2025, at the Iffley Sports Complex in Oxford.

Researchers, coaches, and players are all invited!

Register here:





FOOTBALL ON THE BRAIN CONFERENCE

For researchers, coaches, and players

SESSIONS WILL INCLUDE

- ✓ Neuroscience & performance
- ✓ New research directions
- ✓ The power of partnerships
- ✓ Networking opportunities



 **WEDNESDAY 24 SEPT 2025**
10AM-4PM

 **IFFLEY SPORTS COMPLEX, OXFORD**

Register:  or <http://bit.ly/3DSM1cj>



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October: Football on the Brain in Paris

Allez les rouges!

In October 2024 some of the FoTB team were fortunate enough to be able to take some of our activities on the road to Paris to make the project officially international! We were invited to run some of our roadshow activities at university Ecole Normale Supérieure's annual "Fête de la Science" (science festival) in a session entitled "Dans La Tête D'Mbappe" (Inside the head of Mbappe). We teased the event and tried to spread the word by sharing some photos of the FoTB team and kit at iconic landmarks around Paris and we were kept very busy at the science festival itself, as ~1500 people come to explore a range of different science activities on the afternoon of Sunday 13th October. It was great to be visited by adults, families and young people alike - all interested in getting to know more about what makes the brain of footballers, like Kylian Mbappe, tick. As ever the penalty kick with prism goggles task was especially popular, while there was keen interest in the snap card game, while and Holly was able to engage people in what the brain looks like and how it develops across the lifespan.




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November: FBB training

Training of Football Beyond Border's practitioners continued in November with an afternoon in their Brixton Offices. Louise introduced the brain-based football activities on the pitch. The session included some great discussions on neuroscience theory and research and how the activities could be incorporated into FBB's role in schools.





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October: Chancellor's Court of Benefactors

We were honoured to be invited to bring Football on the Brain activities to a donor event for the Chancellor's Court of Benefactors (the university's "most significant supporters").

These twice-yearly events showcase the range of research and engagement happening across the university. We provided a very active and participatory experience for the donors, who gamely chatted to us about all things neuroscience and sport.



Image credit: Nils Lindner via Unsplash



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New Sports Engagement Ambassadors for 2025

Following prior successful cohorts in 2023 and 2024, we have recruited a third cohort of Sports Engagement Ambassadors . They will develop and deliver activities that connect research with various sport audiences.

Welcome to our 2025 ambassadors:

- Aria Appoo (medical student)
- Harry Manship (PhD Student, Podium Institute for Sports Medicine & Technology)
- Erik Vanegas (PhD Student, Podium Institute for Sports Medicine & Technology)



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Feb: Football Beyond Borders visit to Oxford

During half term a group of FBB boys from London visited Oxford for an aspirational tour of the University of Oxford, in collaboration with OU Football Club and the Community Impact Lab.

The day included a tour of the sports facilities at Iffley Road, lunch at St Hilda's College with Principle Professor Dame Sarah Springman, a whistle stop tour of Magdalen, and a guided tour of New College by FotB's very own Professor Holly Bridge. The day concluded with a game of football hosted by Worcester College.



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Feb: FBB and She Kicks Manchester workshop for #IWD2025

Over half term, Football on the Brain joined She Kicks' Jen O'Neill in a workshop with FBB girls from Manchester and Liverpool. The girls prepared posters and presentations celebrating their #SheKicks heroes as part of International Women's Day 2025!



A summary of the day and the girl's presentations featured in She Kicks Magazine.





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#SheKicksHero campaign

Following a joint workshop with project partners SheKicks Magazine and Football Beyond Borders, we asked young people and neuroscientists to share who their #SHEKICKSHERO is and why.

Here is how Football on the Brain lead researcher, Professor Heidi Johansen-Berg, responded!

MY #SHEKICKSHERO IS...



“Jill Scott, footballer

#SheKicks because she's cool, calm and collected on the pitch, off the pitch, and in the jungle. She's a great leader who inspires others, makes people laugh, and gets stuck in.

Heidi Johansen-Berg

Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, University of Oxford

#FootballOnTheBrain



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February: Oxford United in the Community half-term camp

We were delighted to bring some of our Football on the Brain activities to nearly 100 children at Oxford United in the Community's February half-term football camp.

Campers got to try out activities including an attention-splitting task, vision-distorting prism goggles, and blind football, all to emphasise the key message that brains are relevant to every skill and action in football.

At the end of the session, the children got to demonstrate the activities to two visiting members of the Oxford United women's team, to great delight!





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March: SDG Impact Lab visit

In March we hosted another visit from the university's Young Sport Leaders (SDG Impact Lab) programme, welcoming 45 students from three local secondary schools for an afternoon of MRI scanner demos and hands-on Football on the Brain activities at our research centre on the JR hospital site.

Activities included brain card games, scoring goals with our vision-impairing prism goggles to learn about brain plasticity, and learning about how chronic pain and decision-making research relate to sport.



Image credit: Kerri-Louise Howard-Slaughter



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Update: Ignite Youth module

The FotB Youth Module completed its pilot in collaboration with Ignite Sport's Velocity Programme. Most of the sessions are designed for classroom delivery, with additional pitch based activities.

Following the pilot, Ignite's Dom Wheway tried out the tutor plans by delivering a session on Neuroplasticity and skills development with only a few hours notice.



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March: Oxford United women's match

Bringing Football on the Brain to an OU women's game has also been a highlight of 2025 thus far. With a pitch-side stall sharing Football on the Brain materials, and half-time activities on the pitch which dozens of girls took part in, the match was an exciting opportunity for us to bring neuroscience straight to players and fans in a hands-on way.

Half-time activities included 'football snooker' (aiming a ball to intersect with another ball being passed parallel in front of a goal)



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March: Oxford United in the Community staff training

We are in the process of training staff from project partner Oxford United in the Community to deliver Football on the Brain activities to their own audiences.

On 28 March, the majority of OUitC staff attended a two-hour training session (a combination of pitch and classroom) to learn more about how neuroscience can benefit their players and fans, and how Football on the Brain activities can support this.



OUitC staff try out blind football!



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April: FBB train the trainer

As part of the FotB legacy preparation, Louise Auckland spent the afternoon in FBB's London office (on the pitch!) training FBB practitioners in delivering the FotB activities.

Participants tried out some of the activities before having a go at delivering themselves and explaining the neuroscience that underpins the activities.



FBB practitioners practise delivering the FotB activities.



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April: Oxford United versus Leeds pre-match activities with OUtC

FotB joined partners Oxford United in the Community for their big match against Leeds at the Kassam Stadium. OUtC paired up with Oxford University Researchers to deliver fun brain-based activities to fans in the run up to kick off.

The activities included the prism goggles shoot out and multi-task dribbling, a challenge even for the ball mastery of OU players! Alongside the activities, fans were able to talk to FotB about research opportunities at the University.



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April: Oxford United Half time cross-bar challenge

The final Oxford United Match of the season against Sunderland and a packed stadium of over 11,000 fans. Football on the Brain paired up with OUitC to take part in the cross-bar challenge... with a difference!

Coach Aaron, supported by Louise, took the challenge with FotB's prism goggles on, whilst Club Ambassador, Peter Rhoades Brown *aka* Rosie, described the project and collaboration with OUitC to watching fans.



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New blog post by RuoHan Liu

In March we published a new blog post on our website, by 2024 Sports Engagement Ambassador, researcher RuoHan Liu. In the post she introduces her research into pain and performance in sport.

The post explores big questions:

- Is there an optimal training intensity that leads to progress without having to feel pain?
- If there is, how would it be calculated for each individual?

Read the full post here: <https://footballonthebrain.uk/article/improvement-always-accompanied-pain>

Is improvement always accompanied by pain?

14 March 2025 RuoHan Liu

Have you ever had a coach tell you "No pain, no gain!" in response to your moaning after the latest fitness routine? Ever wondered what the evidence base is? Do you have to have pain in order to improve? Read on as 2024 Football on the Brain Sports Engagement Ambassador, [RuoHan Liu](#), introduces her research into pain and performance in sport.



Image: Yogendra Singh via Unsplash

Pain in our daily life often has a very negative connotation. Natural evolution has granted us sophisticated pain receptors, ways of processing pain, and behaviours that help us avoid hazardous endeavours and protect us from danger. However, pain can also bring a



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Keep in touch

The Football on the Brain website tracks all strands of the project, has [blog posts](#) about related topics and links to [resources the project has developed](#).

You can also follow along with the latest updates on X (Twitter) and Instagram - @FootballOnBrain. We are always open to suggestions (or submissions) from project partners for the blog, so please do get in touch with hanna.smyth@ndcn.ox.ac.uk if you have an idea.

