

Meet the girl who took the boys on at football - and won

Since she was 12 years old Niamh McEvitt has been the only girl in the whole of England playing boys football in her age group. Now having written a book about her experiences on and off the pitch, she talks to Sarah Freeman.

By The Newsroom

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"I was five years old when I first became interested in football," says Niamh. "Every Tuesday, my dad used to play in a five-a-side team and with mum working nights, he used to take me and my little brother Evan along to watch. It wasn't long before we got bored and started playing with one of the spare match balls at the side of the pitch."



Later when Evan joined Sheffield Wednesday Soccer Skills sessions on a Saturday morning, rather than sitting on the sidelines, Niamh was persuaded to join in. Bitten by the footballing bug, she was encouraged by the club's coach to develop her skills, but in those early days she admits that there were some who doubted her talent.



"I was the only girl and always the last to be picked," she says. "I remember one time when it was a choice between me and tiny four year old boy. By then I'd been playing for a year and it was his first week. Even so, he was picked ahead of me."

Despite those early prejudices, Niamh fell in love with the game and by the time she celebrated her 12th birthday there was a decision to make. In 2011, the Football Association announced it had amended its rules to allow girls and boys to play in the same teams up to Under 13 level. Prior to that, they had been separated at 12. Not many young female footballers took up the offer. In fact Niamh was the only one.

Niamh should have had just one year playing for a boys' side, but as that first season came to an end, the FA again extended the age cap on mixed teams. It was the same story the next year and the decision was partly due to the success of Niamh.

Source : <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/>