English amateur women’s football pioneer awarded UEFA grassroots gold

The 2018 UEFA Grassroots Award for Best Leader has gone to Parm Gill from English amateur team Guru Nanak.

Parm Gill’s years of service in trying to give girls and women from the local Sikh community in the south-east English town of Gravesend greater opportunities to play and fall in love with football have been rewarded with a UEFA Grassroots gold award for her leadership qualities.

“I'm overwhelmed to be nominated for this award,” said Parm. “I really don't know how I've done it! Obviously, the work I do for the club has been recognised, and I am just going to continue in the same way, let it grow as much as possible and go from strength to strength.”

To celebrate the accolade, Parm attended an awards ceremony at UEFA’s headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland to pick up her prize, which was presented to her by UEFA President Aleksander Čeferin.

“I would like to congratulate Parm Gill and Guru Nanak for their fantastic initiatives. They have worked tirelessly to give members of the Sikh community more chances to play football,” said Mr Čeferin.

“Grassroots football is crucial to the well-being of sport and I want to ensure that UEFA continues to work closely with all our member associations to enable everyone to have the opportunity to play and enjoy the sport which we love.”

The UEFA Grassroots Awards have been run annually since 2010, and invite national associations from around Europe to put forward candidates in the following categories: Best Leader, Best Club and Best Project. The awards reward excellence in the grassroots field – seen by UEFA as crucial in helping to nurture football's overall good health.

The criteria behind the Best Leader category, which was won by Parm, looks to find a person who actively works with a club and who has initiated, started or created a club.

**Parm’s Story**

Having taken her boys to play at Guru Nanak Football Club in Gravesend for over a decade, Parm decided three years ago that she wanted to start up a women’s team. With support from Natalie Curtis, an inclusion football development officer for the Kent Football Association, the pair decided to go onestep further and focus on getting young children involved.

“I think it's important to work with Sikh women, because basically, football is a ‘no-no’ [for them] in our culture; it's just for boys or men,” Parm explains. “We have to educate the community first to bring in the Sikh women and the diverse community. I think it's very important for the girls to have female role models to look up to.”

The club started with one girls’ side, but this year, the number of teams has already increased to four. Parm is adamant that girls should have just as much right as boys to play football, although she has faced some obstacles in trying to convince parents to let their daughters join the club. However, by visiting local schools and working with the community, she has seen more and more girls becoming interested in playing football.

“I never knew I was going to be part of football myself, and it means a lot to me. The fact is that it does help you with your confidence. It helps you in every way possible: in school, academic subjects, anywhere you go, your workplace... It's the love of a game, isn't it?”

Nims Dingri, has been associated with Guru Nanak FC for the last 35 years – firstly as a player, and now as the club’s manager and chairman. He accepts the challenges the club has faced in order to break down traditional ways of thinking, and is full of praise for the work Parm has done.

“You always need someone who needs to stick their head above the parapet,” he said. “Parm put herself out there, she instigated a lot of it, got the girls interested, and she’s done a lot of PR for us to try and get players in, a lot of footwork out there. She’s been instrumental in the club pushing the girls’ and ladies’ teams, and that’s brilliant.”

Parm gives a lot of her life to Guru Nanak. She is officially the club’s welfare safeguarding officer, but is also a coach and plays for the women’s team. However, more than anything, she would like to see other people following her lead to get even more girls playing the sport.

“It's very important to have female role models,” she reflects. “We see a lot of men everywhere, but I think we have to show the equality side of it. So, basically, I would love to see more females doing what I'm doing, and helping every community they're within.”