



# AMERICAN DREAMS

West Ham United's International Academy is boosting the club's profile in North America and beyond

As the world game, football has reached all corners of the globe.

West Ham United are doing likewise courtesy of the club's International Academy, which was founded in 2006 to boost the club's profile overseas.

With the blessing of Academy Director Tony Carr and his coaching staff at Little Heath, the International Academy has already made a huge impact in North America, where the Hammers have signed partner agreements with 18 clubs.

The agreements provide both West Ham and their partner clubs with major benefits, with the Hammers maintaining a strong presence in one of the world's fastest-growing football hotbeds.

As the official partner of the United Soccer Leagues – North America's equivalent of the Championship – the club holds regular events on the continent, including the setting up of

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a scouting network and the holding of regular Elite Player identification camps, where West Ham staff run the rule over the most promising young players.

Those who catch the eye will receive special coaching from Carr and his staff in the United States this summer, while groups have also been invited to visit Little Heath to experience the 'West Ham way' first-hand.

Carr has led youth teams to North America this year, taking part in the Clyde Best Invitational Tournament in Bermuda in February and the International Amateur Soccer Tournament – The Challenge for the Tiffany Trophy Cup in Washington D.C. last month.

Looking forward, the club will be launching the West Ham United Academy Cup in 2011, with Hammers Academy sides taking on clubs who have qualified through regional tournaments being held across North America. Further afield, West Ham are planning to make similar inroads in both Asia and Oceania.

To solidify West Ham's ties with their partner clubs, representatives were invited to visit Little Heath for four days in March, while also attending the Barclays Premier League fixture with Stoke City.

The North American contingent was led by International Academy Partnership Development Manager Mike Kelleher.

the Long Island Rough Riders, the United Soccer Leagues side based in Uniondale, New York state.

"We are a men's and women's soccer franchise in the USL, which is basically a semi-professional league, and we have a youth program underneath it called the Junior Rough Riders.

"Our goal is to provide opportunities for our players. One of our recent graduates is Mike Grella, who plays for Leeds United, and our aim is to produce the next Mike Grella for West Ham and to provide more players like that.

"At the same time, we'd also like to take players who don't make the senior squad at West Ham to the States and offer them college opportunities there. We're looking for that type of partnership – offering our players opportunities but also offering players from abroad opportunities in the United States."

While the majority of West Ham's partner clubs are based in the United States, the Hammers have also signed an agreement with the Future Sports Club of the Cayman Islands.

Future Sports Club representative Olsen Bush said: "Soccer is very small in terms of participation in the Caribbean compared to England, but in the Cayman Islands it is growing and is the sport.

"We want to see growth so we have embarked on this adventure with West Ham to increase our chances of producing quality players. With their track record, there is no better place to be than with West Ham. We feel this is going to be something very beneficial for both parties.

"I'm hoping that the Cayman Islands will one day produce a Premier League player. A couple of years ago, we had a player who was offered a contract by Luton Town, so the potential is there. What we want to do now is to enhance the percentage of players who have the raw talent and the tools to expand on their natural gifts and produce more players."

For more information, visit [www.westhamacademyinternational.com](http://www.westhamacademyinternational.com)



West Ham United signed their latest partner agreement with the Minnesota Thunder Academy on 9 March – the 12th such agreement reached with a North American club.

The Thunder draws players from across the state, having been formed in 2008 following the amalgamation of the successful Wings Soccer Club and Bangu Tsunami FC clubs.

With 42 state championships, three regional championships and two national finals on their resume, the Thunder's predecessors have also produced five United States youth internationals, and International Academy Partnership Development Manager Mike Kelleher is hoping that success continues.

"We are looking forward to working with an organization of the stature of the Minnesota Thunder Academy, they have a great reputation in the Midwest and will be a first class addition to our family of clubs."

Thunder Academy Director Mark Cook was among the contingent of North American coaches to visit Little Heath last month, and he is excited about the opportunities created by the partnership.

"We have signed this agreement and, for us, we're looking for the development aspect of it. For me to come over and see the West Ham Academy train and the methods they use, and to bring them back to our club, is really what we're looking for to help us produce better players.

"The kids see the big clubs, but we want to promote the fact that West Ham have produced players like Rio Ferdinand and Michael Carrick, so that's where we're really coming from."

The Thunder will host the MTA College Showcase in June, with the winner of the tournament qualifying for the inaugural West Ham United Academy Cup, while an Elite Player identification camp will be held by the club in September.