

Levein admits to gambling habit

Former Scotland manager Craig Levein has opened up about his former gambling habit and told how his experience has helped him provide help for footballers in a similar situation.

Levein, 59, who is currently manager of Scottish premiership club St Johnstone, said he was introduced to gambling at a young age when his father took him to high street bookmakers and his mother played slot machines.

The former Hearts and Scotland defender, who retired from playing in 1997, said his own problems began with visits to the bookies but had “changed enormously” with the introduction of online gambling.

Levein told his BBC Scotland sacked in the Morning podcast that he got to the stage of inventing excuses to his wife for having no wages and eventually stopped gambling altogether due to “the shame”.

He said: “I myself was caught up in this for a little while. You used to have to go to the bookies – at times you’d be in the bookies and you’d be losing money and there’s shame attached to that.

“I could convince myself not to go in because people are in there and they’re talking, and they say ‘oh he’s spent 100 quid’ or he’s spent this or did that. But it was the shame

attached to it.

“In some regards (with online gambling) you didn’t have to go into the bookies, you weren’t seen in the bookies. What you had was your phone and you had access to everything that you would have had.

“So that’s a game changer. What happened then, people become transfixed with this and once you start burrowing down into it it’s really really difficult.

“There’s the lying part of it. I’d tell my missus oh, I didn’t get paid this week or something like that, and that then brings the shame.

“And it’s the shame for me that eventually got me to stop altogether.

“The bigger the hole you dig, the worse it gets. That’s it. I really had to just say ‘I’ve done with this’.

“It was quite a long time ago actually but I completely understand these emotions and the feelings.”

Levein said his own experience meant that as a manager, he now recognises traits in players he works with and has been able to offer help.

He said: “I’ve had a number of players who have approached me over my managerial career. Because I understand it, I can have a conversation and try to point people in the right direction.

“But you can actually tell sometimes. If you’ve been at a club for a while and you’ve got a player who’s normally lively and he’s the heart and soul of the dressing room and then something happens and he’s changing and there’s things that don’t quite add up,.

“Twice it’s happened to me, I’ve asked the player ‘is there a problem’ and basically they’ve had gambling issues and got

themselves in a hole.

“I’m quite big on this with players, if they behave in a certain way on a daily basis and then even three or four months from now their behaviour changes there’s always something behind it.

“I’ve spoken to a number of players who have had the same problem.

“Because I’ve grown up (with gambling). My dad was into taking us to the bookies when I was about five years old or something and my mum played the slot machines so it’s always been a part of my life.

“It’s something that I do realise just how difficult and dangerous it is, and how lonely. It’s a horrible place to be.”

Levein revealed his experiences in conversation with English footballer Steven Caulker who has spoken widely about his own addiction issues in the past. Caulker, 32, has turned his life around and recently embarked on a managerial career.