

Man and guide dog complete challenge to visit every SPFL stadium

A visually impaired football fan and his Labrador guide dog have become the first man and dog pair to visit every single SPFL stadium.

Dundee United supporter Jon Attenborough, 34, and his beloved dog Sam, eight, completed the SPFL's 42 grounds when they attended League Two Forfar Athletic's 2-1 victory over Stranraer at Station Park on Saturday.

The self-employed accountant from Perth said he was "thrilled" to complete the stadium tour challenge, which involved man and dog travelling hundreds of miles across the country in his attempt to raise awareness of how accessible Scottish football is for people with visual impairments.

After completing the challenge, they were presented with gifts from the SPFL for their achievement – with Jon receiving a special commemorative plaque and Sam a version of an SPFL medal to wear around his neck.

And Jon was full of praise for all the clubs who hosted them across Edinburgh and the Lothians.

Jon said: "I'm a big football fan and love Scottish football, so it's amazing to have visited every single ground with Sam. It was such a special day completing it.

"It feels like a massive achievement being able to visit them

all – I never thought I'd be able to do it. It's all down to Sam that it's been made possible.

“I didn't have the confidence to navigate big crowds on my own before Sam. He's made a massive difference to my life.

“The aim of this was to raise awareness of how accessible Scottish football is for people with visual impairments, and I believe it's been successful in doing so.

“Receiving these awards from the SPFL was a lovely added bonus and one that I'll really treasure.”

Lifelong football fan Jon has been visually impaired since birth. He has no sight in his right eye and limited sight in his left eye.

He was partnered with guide dog Sam in 2018, and his confidence in attending games has grown in the years since then.

He had attended a number of Dundee United home games over previous years, but started his challenge to “Complete the 42” in February 2022 when he watched his team draw 0-0 at derby rivals Dundee.

His challenge has ramped up since the start of 2024, with Jon and Sam travelling to two or three games some weeks across the SPFL's four divisions.

The pair have travelled to every game by public transport, usually by train and they have also sometimes used taxis for the final leg of his trips.

Jon said his experiences in Edinburgh and the Lothians had all been positive.

He said: “All of our visits to all 42 grounds were extremely positive and the Edinburgh clubs were no exception.

“Hibs really stand out. We went to Hibs v Livingston towards the end of last season and they were really welcoming to us.

“We’ve been to Easter Road a couple of times now and the club’s disability access officer Joyce actually invited us to a consultation for supporters on audio-descriptive commentary so I went along as a speaker and shared my experiences as well.

“The other Edinburgh clubs were also really good. At Tynecastle we went to the women’s cup final between Rangers and Partick Thistle and it was a really good experience as well. Tynecastle has really amazing disabled access facilities and Hearts is another club that does really good work.

“We also went to Edinburgh City along at Meadowbank. They played Montrose and got a much needed win. Meadowbank, with it being a community facility as well, was really accessible and the staff at the club were particularly welcoming to me and Sam.

“It was the same when we visited Bonnyrigg Rose for the League Cup game with Arbroath earlier this season. It was a really good experience visiting them because they’re another brilliant community based club.

“We went to a women’s game at Spartans, when they played Dundee United, and that was another really good experience. The staff were really helpful to me and Sam and they also have amazing facilities.

“In West Lothian, there’s Livingston. We went for a preseason game against Broxburn so it was a bit of a local derby and a pretty decent crowd. It’s one of the more difficult grounds to get to by public transport I found but the staff at the club were brilliant.”

Jon chose Station Park, Forfar, as the final destination on his challenge as the town is home to a Guide Dogs for the

Blind training school.

He added: "I love everything about gameday – the matchday atmosphere and the crowd noises.

"A growing number of clubs in Scotland now have audio-descriptive commentary, which really improves the experience.

"Sam loves it too. He's usually doing one of two things. He's either dead alert and watching the ball or he's sound asleep and couldn't care less.

"I've had such positive feedback from fans across the country about what I've been doing, so it's been a really positive experience for me."

Calum Beattie, the SPFL's chief operating officer, said: "Everyone at the SPFL would like to pass on their congratulations to Jon and Sam for their successful tour of our 42 league grounds.

"We wanted to get them a little something by way of thanks for all Jon and Sam's hard work, and we're really pleased it has been so well received.

"It's been great to hear Jon has such positive feedback of his experiences at our clubs and I'm sure that they'll both be more than welcome at any of our games in future."







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