

Case Study

Manchester Powerhouse

Men's Football Club, Islamic Faith



Who are Manchester Powerhouse?

Established in 2008

Manchester Powerhouse is a men's football club consisting of predominantly Somalian Muslim men. The organisation offers football in 3 different capacities; Friday night open football, a men's competitive side, and a children's youth programme. A group of 20-40 men from the community attend the Friday open session which is primarily designed to provide sport to the local, underserved community but the sessions are welcome for anyone willing to travel from further afield. The competitive team was involved in pioneering the Somali British Champions League and has been competing since its conception in 2018.

The organisation collaborates with local charities in order to address the lack of representation and resources for the Somali community in sports.



Key features about the organisation

- Passionate
- Devoted
- Community driven
- Authentic



"I feel like we're still not at a level playing field, we're still not where we need to be. There's still talent that's going to waste, there's still lack of funds and resources that we're not obtaining or getting. There are still gatekeepers, it saddens me."

Meet Ahmed, Founder

The Organiser's Story

Ahmed has lived in Manchester's Moss Side area for 30 years, an area that despite facing socio economic challenges, is known for its strong community spirit. Ahmed grew up as part of a big family, and now raises his own. He has played football his whole life and was prevented from signing a professional contract due to an injury. This experience led him to notice that there's not enough support for young men stepping up from youth to adult sport, and that, within the football community, there are gatekeepers who control opportunities and favour those most like themselves.

He initiated a 10 year project to develop youth sports programmes, initially focusing on integrating sports with early crime prevention and gathering data on youth transitions from grassroots to professional environments. Ahmed coached a local youth team at Whitworth Park FC which he later merged with Manchester Powerhouse when the previous club liquidised and there was a lack of support for his players once they turned 18 years old. He began to expand the offer of the organisation, partnering with local charities and creating a competitive team.

Ahmed has experienced the discrimination in the game and advocates the need for a safe space for players from his community to enjoy football. The competitive side that Ahmed has created has come with multiple challenges due to unfair treatment, leading to the development of the Somali British Champions League, a tournament created by the community for the community.



"A big thing about football is dealing with people... You got to learn how to deal with people. Everyone's got different personalities, so dealing with people is definitely another trait. So many things. Communication, being confident, speaking in front of people."

Meet Mo, Coach

A Coach's Story

Mo began coaching at Manchester Powerhouse in 2021 after being diagnosed with a medical condition meaning he could no longer play. Mo's love for the game made him keen to pursue a career in coaching. He recognises the need for strong leadership and interpersonal skills, something he knew he would bring to the role to support those around him.

Mo acknowledges that his journey into this role was not the easiest, and coaching at Manchester Powerhouse at a young age came with the significant challenge of feeling like he had to gain the respect of members. Through determination and his approach to the role, Mo has grown in confidence and now has the respect of everybody at the organisation.

To be a successful coach at Manchester Powerhouse, Mo emphasises the need to be authentic, a clear communicator and flexible to meet the needs of the different players. Manchester Powerhouse is known for its unique culture, with a focus on inclusivity, and as a coach Mo knows his role is pivotal in supporting that.

Through his approach to coaching and weekly attendance at the Friday and Monday sessions, Mo makes all players feel welcome and supported on their football journey - helping with their technique, tactical mindset and encouraging players to also excel in their personal lives living in Moss Side.



"It's a community thing now. It doesn't stop once the whistle finishes, it doesn't stop with us. We continue, we spend time together. Families get to know each other."

"To have a place where we can go and just, you know, enjoy ourselves... without any issues in terms of feeling any threat. Because playing in a park there can always be trouble, it's a public place."



How does Manchester Powerhouse successfully support the community to be active?



Passionate, locally representative leadership and workforce

Passionate individuals who understand the power of football and how it can support the community.

Those with lived experience in and around the world of football...

...and as a Muslim Somali man living in Moss Side.

Competitive yet respectful environment

Playing with a high degree of focus and intensity, but with a matched respect for one another - no matter the outcome.

Shared needs, experiences and identity creates unity.

Showcase football talent to engage young men in the community

Renowned within the Muslim Somali community through proudly competing in Somali British Men's Champions league and using YouTube to showcase the team's talent.

Gaining respect locally in and outside their community through collaborations with local charities and the community - e.g. partnering with Families Against Violence, Claremont Youth Project, running children's youth camps for community members.

Varied formats but something to suit everyone

Competitive team: Weekly Monday training (invite only), Saturday fixtures during the season.

- Drills / skill focused.

Open football: Weekly Friday sessions, from 5-7pm

- Informal 'winner stays on' format
- No need to play to a certain standard

Respectful of faith and prayer times, ensuring games are stopped during prayer times.

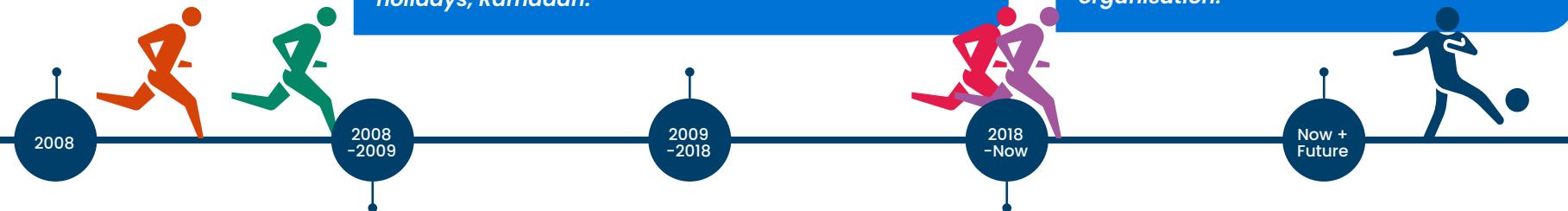
All members offered guidance and mentorship both on and off the pitch from more senior coaches and players.

Manchester Powerhouse: The journey so far...

Original inspiration

Previous organisation was partly liquidised and there was no offer of adult football.

A desire to keep the team together and watch them grow into open age football together.



Early days

The competitive team continued from where they'd left off, but it was recognised that the organisation needed to be more inclusive, and so a Friday evening 'open session' for men of all abilities from within the community was set up.

Meanwhile the competitive team experienced racism and unfair treatment in local leagues.

Formalising and progressing

Currently looking to grow the presence of the tournament to drive greater awareness and catch the attention of mainstream organisations.

Build and get the word out

Joining the existing Manchester Powerhouse FC with their own players and an established team meant they were already tapped into a football network. Manchester Powerhouse provided a suitable facility where they could train regularly.

Growing

Growth required a step back to assess what the members of the club needed, removing themselves from local mainstream leagues and focusing on their own needs. Utilising members networks across the country, Manchester Powerhouse were involved in creating the Somali British Champions League tournament.

However, Manchester Powerhouse were constantly fighting a battle against other organisations that could pay more money to use facilities and could sometimes lose out at short notice.

Constant threat of other organisations e.g. another local football team paying to use the facilities, meaning Manchester Powerhouse lose access.



What does Manchester Powerhouse provide to the community?



The emotional

- Pursuing their passion (football) with like minded individuals.
- Provide a sense of belonging as a Muslim, Somali man.
- Mentorship for younger men within the community, role models to look up to and discuss any broader issues and concerns.
- Making new friends from within the community who share common interests and live a similar life.



The functional

- Playing football in a safe space within the local area.
- Improving overall fitness.
- Developing football skills and becoming better players.