

FUTURE OF WELSH DOMESTIC FOOTBALL

The domestic game in Wales is evolving, and Welsh football is heading towards a period that will define the next decade. The Cymru Premier is about to expand and suddenly the conversation has changed. It is no longer just about who goes up. It is about what going up actually means and whether the system is ready for it.

League expansion is not new in Wales, but this time it feels different. There is more interest, more scrutiny and more expectation. Crowds are growing, coverage is improving and talk of sponsorship and future TV deals refuses to go away. Momentum is building, but so are the questions.

That interest is not limited to the top tier either. This season has shown just how strong the appetite for domestic football is further down the pyramid.

We have seen excellent crowds across Tier 2 and Tier 3, and Bangor City 1876 pulling in over 1,000 supporters for two cup matches is a clear example of what is possible when clubs are visible, well run and properly connected to their communities.

For years the Welsh domestic game has been dismissed by people who do not watch it. Anyone who turns up week in, week out knows the truth. This is competitive football, rooted in local identity, driven by volunteers and sustained by people who care deeply about their clubs.



When Expectation Meets Reality

This season is a perfect example. With the league expanding to 16 teams, three clubs from both the north and south will be promoted. That alone has changed the nature of the promotion race. More places have meant more belief, more spending and in many cases clubs throwing the kitchen sink at it in pursuit of a rare opportunity.

As the season has gone on and more detail has emerged around the revamped league, that optimism has been tempered by uncertainty. A lack of clarity around some key areas has raised an uncomfortable but necessary question. What happens if clubs finish in a promotion place but cannot go up because of licensing, or choose not to go up because the financial and structural jump no longer makes sense.

The Real Cost of Going Up

The true cost of promotion is often the first shock. Going up is not just about better football. It brings higher wages, more travel, additional officials, increased administration and tougher compliance. For many clubs, those costs arrive immediately, long before any extra income does.

That exposes the growing gap between clubs. Right now, only one side in the Cymru Premier operates on a fully professional basis. Others may want to follow, but for many clubs that simply is not realistic. Geography, finances and player availability all matter. Professional teams can train more, recover better and recruit differently. Semi pro clubs have to juggle football with work, family and travel. Over a season, that gap shows.

As expectations rise, the balance becomes harder to manage. Push standards too quickly without support and the gap only grows wider. Clubs end up chasing ambition while carrying risk they cannot afford.

That leads to a difficult but necessary question. Is promotion always the right move. For some clubs, being strong, stable and competitive at Tier 2 may be healthier than overstretching for a single season at a higher level. That is not a lack of ambition. It is sensible decision making.

Licensing, Travel and Player Availability

Licensing and infrastructure requirements add another layer of strain. Floodlights, seating, media areas, ground grading and ongoing maintenance all cost money. These standards matter, but without meaningful support they risk becoming obstacles rather than targets.



Travel and player availability are already major factors and they are only becoming more important. Longer journeys, midweek fixtures and the growing idea of the Cymru Premier becoming a Friday night league all add pressure to semi pro squads. What looks good on paper a regular slot, fewer clashes with the English game and something easier to sell to broadcasters can be far less practical in reality.

Friday night games and long distance travel often mean players having to take time off work or lose income just to play. For players balancing jobs, family and football, that sacrifice adds up. Over time, the risk is obvious. Better players may simply decide it is not worth it and either drop down a level, look elsewhere or walk away altogether. Supporters and volunteers feel it too. Weekend football suits communities. Move too much into working days and you risk losing fans and stretching volunteers even further. What works for a TV schedule does not always work for a community club.

That does not mean change should be rejected outright. Selective Friday games or showcase fixtures could work. But forcing every club into the same model risks prioritising how things look over how they actually function.

Volunteers and Youth Development

And without volunteers, none of this exists. The same people opening gates, washing kits, running socials and dealing with admin are being asked to do more, more often and under greater pressure. That is not an infinite resource.

Youth development is becoming essential rather than optional. Clubs that can bring players through locally give themselves a chance to compete without overspending. Those that cannot are pushed further into the market, usually at greater risk.

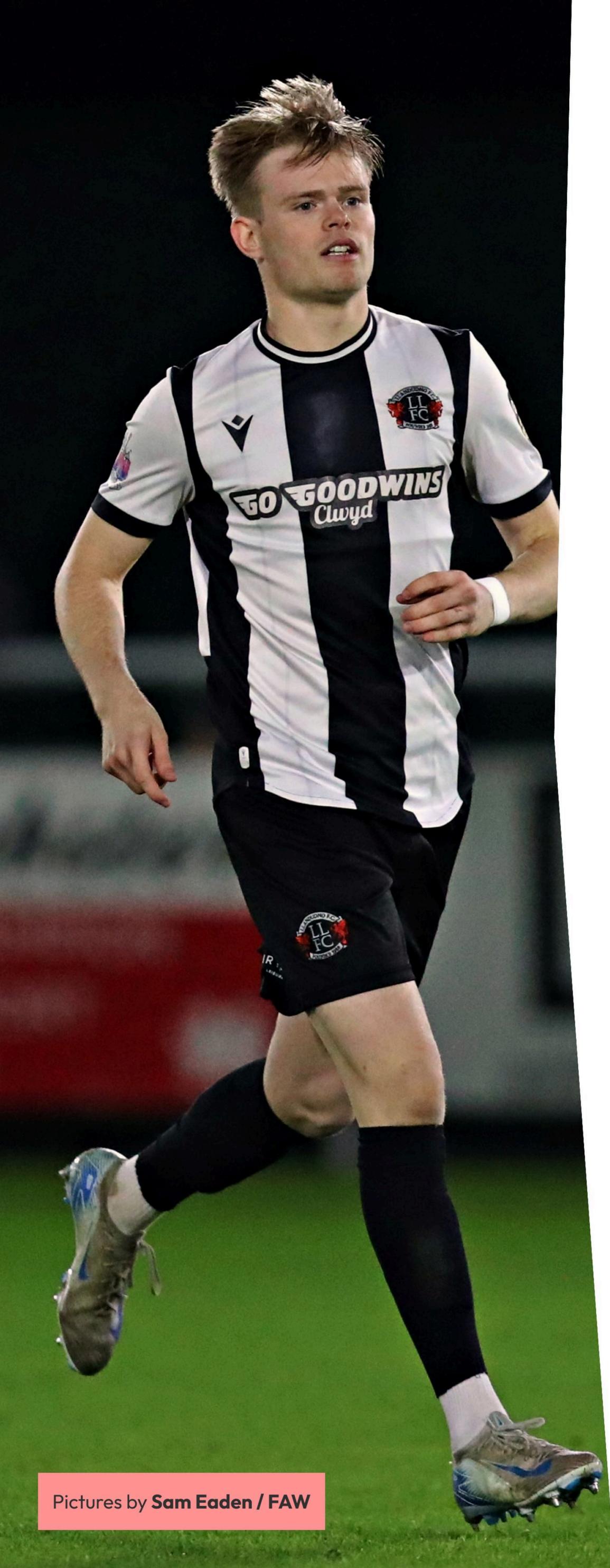
Could Tier 2 Become the Stronger Product

There is also a scenario Welsh football needs to take seriously. Over time, the Cymru North and South could become stronger than the Premier in certain ways. If good players prefer to stay closer to home rather than commit to increased travel and demands, Tier 2 becomes attractive, especially where the money is good enough. Add clubs who are financially stronger staying at that level because promotion simply does not stack up, and the balance of quality can shift.

That is not failure. It is a rational response to the structure in place.

If Tier 2 football does begin to offer the better overall product, the FAW will face some big decisions. Pathways, incentives and structures would need rethinking so that progression reflects reality, not assumption.





Consultation, Governance and Broadcast Coverage

It is also important to recognise the pressure the FAW are under. Delivering meaningful change in Welsh football is not simple. Balancing ambition, sustainability, governance and limited resources across a diverse pyramid is a difficult task, and senior leadership have consistently shown a willingness to engage and listen.

That said, responsibility cannot sit with one individual alone. System wide change requires broader consultation and shared ownership, particularly from those clubs most affected by reform.

There is a growing sense that the right people may not have been asked at the right time. Many Tier 2 clubs feel they have had limited opportunity to shape decisions that will affect them significantly. By the time the implications became fully clear, the window to influence those decisions may already have closed.

A pyramid only works if those most affected by change have a genuine voice in shaping it. Without that, even well intentioned reform risks drifting away from the realities clubs face week to week.

The same applies to broadcasters. Live coverage currently focuses almost entirely on the Cymru Premier, with only occasional exposure for the north and south through highlights, interviews or cup games. That is understandable, but it also reinforces the gap.

There is no need for big budgets or heavy production to improve that. A small increase in live games from the Cymru North and South would raise visibility, reward strong support and give more clubs a platform. If the best stories, crowds and contests are happening outside the top tier, coverage should be prepared to follow.

What Comes Next

All of this feeds into the wider question of professionalism. Is going pro the answer. For a small number of clubs, maybe. Full time environments can raise standards. But professionalism without protection risks creating a league split between those who can afford it and those who cannot.

What feels unavoidable is the need for investment across the board. Facilities, staffing, youth systems and player welfare all need support if expectations are going to rise. Ambition alone is not enough.

That also brings governance into focus. If more money is coming in, safeguards matter. Proper owner and director checks might slow things down, but without them the risk of short term thinking and long term damage grows quickly. Expansion and TV deals sound exciting, but the same question keeps coming back. Who really benefits. If new money only helps a few clubs, the gap widens rather than closes.

By 2030, Welsh domestic football is expected to look different. That timeline comes from a long term strategy developed by the FAW alongside Cymru Premier clubs, including former Premier sides like Newtown and Aberystwyth. It may not set a hard deadline for going professional, but the direction of travel is clear. Expectations are rising.

The challenge now is making sure ambition is backed by support. Progress cannot be built on pressure alone. If Welsh football is going to grow in a sustainable way, success should be measured by stability, credibility and clubs still standing at every level of the pyramid.

