

# HARCHESTER UNITED SKY ONE'S DREAM TEAM HISTORY AND INFO

Sky One's cult football drama show has now completed its 7th series having first hit our screens in 1997. The show is now watched by around 800,000 people when first screened on Sunday nights.

The football drama show follows the fortunes of imaginary Midlands-based Premiership club Harchester United who play at the Dragon's Lair Stadium. The exact location of this stadium does remain a little bit of a mystery but geography shows us that it is based quite near to Tamworth with the club's local rivals being Aston Villa and Birmingham City. The club's colours have always been purple hence the team's nickname "The Purple Dragons."

The show is, in fact, filmed at Three Mills Studio in East London, home of the programme's owners Hewland International. All football scenes in the show are filmed at Waltham Forest FC for the club's training ground, also in East London, and all football stadium shots are filmed once every two weeks at The New Den, home of yesterday's FA Cup Finalists Millwall. The show itself has the full support of the Football Association and the Premier League to ensure that the show is as accurate with its fine detail as possible. Examples of this include correct letterheads for player's contracts, full size names and numbers on players shirts and the correct team sheets for games.

Many of the Harchester United squad are ex-professional footballers with some still regularly playing non-league football (including two Canvey Island players at today's FA Trophy Final Danny Potter and Pete Smith.) Only the principle cast members are actors and all these actors are required to undertake a second footballing audition to test their skills before being offered parts in the show.

The Harchester United Dream Team replica kit is one of the fastest selling replica shirts available and frequently sells out within weeks of going on sale. The shirt rises a lot in value as the fans try and get their hands on one, with many seen on internet auction sites such as Ebay going for over £60. The kit is the second biggest selling shirt in Ireland, behind Celtic, with Fletcher No 11 still accounting for 60% of printed player shirt sales.

The show is screened on satellite television in the UK but is available via terrestrial cable television in Ireland where it is as popular at Eastenders and Coronation Street. On initial screening the show has higher viewing figures than the first UK run of the Simpsons. The US channel Fox Kids has bought early series runs of the show in the last

year and these have proved extremely popular with viewers across the pond. All service-men in and around Europe have access to the show, even as far away as Cyprus.

The show has had football cameo roles from such famous names in the game as John Barnes, Dwight Yorke, Andy Cole and Neville Southall as well as Gordon Taylor, Chief Executive of the PFA (plus ex-Shrewsbury Town physiotherapist Simon Shakeshaft seen in Series 7 at Lee Presley's birthday party holding a bottle of beer!). It also has its own celebrity fan-base including a large number of Premiership players such as Patrick Vieira and other sporting celebrities such as boxing heavyweight world champion Lennox Lewis.

The cast of the show now regularly play charity matches and support a number of worthy causes playing on average somewhere between six and twelve matches a season. They are big supporters of Childline in Ireland, where they regularly visit, and have helped to raise over £300,000 in four years and support awareness of male cancers through the Keep Your Eye On The Ball campaign which, last year in Shrewsbury, raised over £20,000. They are also supporters of football causes having already visited cash-stricken clubs Oldham Athletic and Bury this season. We thank them for their attendance at Telford today.

