

Title: **Case Study
Sport & Leisure
in Wiltshire & Swindon**

Ben Thomson is combining his ambitions to become a professional footballer with studies that could eventually lead to a honours degree.

The 18-year-old from Corsham in Wiltshire is taking a two-year Foundation Degree in Sport at the University of Bath, while also playing for the university's side Team Bath FC.

"My ambition is to play football at the highest level I can," he says. "And being taken on by Team Bath is a great opportunity. The great thing about the course is that it fits in with my full-time training."

Ben attended The Corsham School. After taking his GCSEs he went to Wiltshire College to study for a two-year BTEC National Certificate in Sport.

He took the qualification with the help of a youth football academy scheme, which gives hopeful young players education towards an alternative career in case they don't make it in the highly competitive world of professional football.

For Ben, who previously played for Melksham Town Football Club, it meant he could take part in his busy football training schedule while still fitting in his studies.

And the National Certificate gave him skills and knowledge that will be useful in a career in sport, including first aid, coaching, fitness testing, and training.

Joining Team Bath was a real step up for Ben in terms of the club's status – the club is in the Southern Football League Premier Division. And the university has £30 million worth of sports facilities, including the Sports Training Village.

"The facilities are unbelievable," he says. "We even had the England rugby team here training for the World Cup. I still can't believe I'm here!"

The two-year Foundation Degree in Sport at Bath is specially designed for students performing at a very high standard in their chosen sport. At the end of it if he chooses to, Ben could go on to study for an additional year to gain a full honours degree.

He says the course is a vital safety net, in case he doesn't achieve his goal of playing professionally. "It's something to fall back on if I don't make it as a footballer," he says.

"If that doesn't come off, I wouldn't mind going to work in summer camps in America or becoming a fitness instructor, because I'll really know my stuff after two years' study."