

Sweet FA

Observer readers will be familiar with British football coach Vicky Wayman who received help from The Football Association to encourage women's soccer and launch a development side in Bethlehem.



Vicky

Cones and coaching manuals are helping the three women's sides running out of Bethlehem, one being the national Palestine team, to try more complex drills and empowering the young soccer stars to improve their own game.

The new development side consists of 25 girls aged under 14 from the Bethlehem region and it is hoped that in time they will come through to play in the national side, which continues to go from strength to strength.

The coaching manuals will help two of the girls, Tania and Shadda, both instructors in other sports and excellent footballers, to learn more about the game and to coach the young wannabees.

Vicky from Tonbridge in Kent said: "It is essential to have good role models for the girls. They need to see that this is a sport for women, and having women coaching or supporting coaching their sessions is essential to this."

The three teams in Bethlehem will compete in a first women's tournament on Palestinian soil once the period of national mourning following the death of Yasser Arafat is over. Vicky said: "What the girls need now is competition. It will help them develop their competitive edge and is crucial in terms of honing their tactical awareness."

Soccer for women in Palestine was launched in Bethlehem by University Athletics director Samar Araj Mousa with the support of the Ministry of Sport. It has taken off to an



Field of dreams: facilities are limited in Bethlehem

impressive degree in Bethlehem and the hope is to take the game to a wider participatory group across the West Bank.

Vicky said: "In my three months here I have been so impressed by what I have seen. We have no grass pitches - in fact the girls have no opportunity to play on 11-a-side pitches - but this hasn't stopped the players from grasping great skills on the concrete playgrounds we train on.

"We have some players here to rival those anywhere. The future looks really bright."

Vicky was also impressed by the male attitude to the game she found in Bethlehem. She said: "There are still some negative responses. Some girls say boyfriends would stop them playing. We can't wear shorts until we get to the training ground so we don't cause offence and in some areas we have been refused the chance to play at all, being told they are not ready for girls soccer yet.

"However, there are some amazing men who are helping to bring the game forward; Ra'ed the manager, Omar the University boy's star who helps, George the Beit Sahour defender who supports the development side, Mario the

club owner who wanted a female side to run alongside his men's team, and indeed the Sports Ministry itself who are eager to see the sport move forward."

Vicky, who travelled to Bethlehem as a Holy Land Trust volunteer, is coming to the end of her coaching stint on the West Bank.

She said: "My dream would be to see a summer soccer camp where girls from Bethlehem, Ramallah, Jenin, Gaza, Nablus and Hebron could all train together. Failing that, a mobile soccer camp, which saw us visit a host of venues would be really worthwhile.

"I also think the girls would benefit hugely from foreign competition and would love to have them tour to play and train in England. The Arab games in Jordan last year provided a huge surge to their learning curve and I know competition in England would do the same. I'd love to bring them to the home of football."

Vicky Wayman played for and was a cup winner with Coventry City and also has a wealth of experience as a coach in England. Her favourite moment in football was playing at Wembley in front of then England manager Kevin Keegan and being told she could fill the

trouble left wing position! She currently coaches soccer on the West Bank and back home coaches, teaches English and works as a freelance sports journalist for ITV Teletext.