

On benches

Sports psychologist
Michael Caulfield
has a place where
players and staff are
happy to air their
deeper thoughts,
he tells *Ben Fisher*

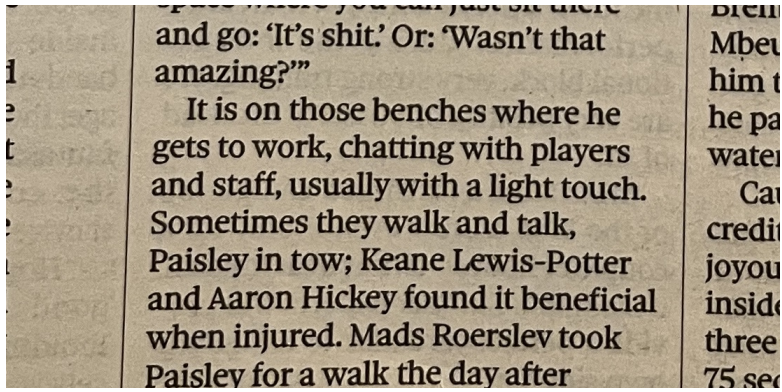
Any chance?" asks Michael Caulfield, Brentford's sports psychologist, and with that Paisley, a lurcher-whippet, hops out of the boot of his car at the training ground. He stops for a chat with the groundstaff, on their hands and knees repairing black netting chewed by urban foxes in this part of west London.

"When a fox sees Paisley, they scarper off to Surbiton," Caulfield says, walking past the immaculate pitches in front of the Robert Rowan Performance Centre named after their technical director who died six years ago. "It sounds pathetic but I walked past his portrait this morning and went: '1-1 last night [against Sheffield Wednesday], penalties, you wouldn't believe it, but we got there. Hope we get a home draw.'"

Soon Caulfield is talking about his open-air office. "There are four benches here now," he says. The first spot, he adds, was a "crappy tin bench" outside the original training pavilion. He sought an upgrade, ordering a wooden one, adding a plaque that reads: 'Michael's Bench; Just sit and talk, or just sit.'

"The most moving thing was Robert's widow, Suzanne, rang and said: 'Can we come and sit on the bench?' I could have filled the ground up with tears. We had 15 minutes in the sunshine. Some days no one comes near me but the next day you can't get on there. That was the whole point of it, to create a space where you can just sit there

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