

# 'It all began for me in my back garden in Milton Keynes'

Premier League left-back **Ben Chilwell**, 22, charts his rise from local grassroots football through to stardom with Leicester City and England



**BEN CHILWELL**  
*in his own words*

**M**y football career has been a rollercoaster so far with both Leicester and England, and not forgetting a memorable loan spell at Huddersfield Town.

For me though, it all began in the back garden at home in Milton Keynes, where I had a goal and I'd just play out there a lot with my dad.

He used to get me to try and hit the cross bar with my weaker foot, and that was the start.

I began playing for Woburn Lions, they were my local team, and it was just playing with my mates really.

I still remember my first game. It was against Willen, and I think we ended up winning that game 15-0 or 16-0.

There were a few of us from that team who played together from when we were six or seven, four of us went on to be scholars, two at Leicester and two at MK Dons.

As well as that, there was Brendan Galloway, Dele Alli and George Williams who are all the same age so there was



*Ben making his senior England debut in 2018*

a lot of young talent in Milton Keynes at the time.

We would all go to the Powerleague in the summer and play against each other at five-a-side. It was just good fun.

After Woburn Lions, I went to Bletchley Youth and we went on to win most of the local competitions.

The first time I was involved with a professional club was actually with Rushden & Diamonds and I was with their centre of excellence from maybe age nine until 12.

But the club were having a few problems at the time and I went back to just playing with Bletchley Youth.

A lot of my mates were still there, so it was just fun again and I wasn't really thinking about signing for anyone. If it happens, it happens and that's something I tell young kids now.

I eventually had a trial at Leicester City for six weeks. They wanted to take me on,

but Rushden & Diamonds were trying to get a lot of money off them for me, even though I was only a 12-year-old, so it meant I carried on with Bletchley Youth for another few weeks, but I wasn't complaining about that. Funnily enough, MK Dons never really wanted to sign me.

There was me and a lad called Andre Olukanmi, who had started out at Woburn Lions too, and MK Dons didn't want either of us so we both went up to Leicester.

I also had another choice to make at this stage, as I was probably better at cricket than I was at football.

The year before, I'd just been signed into the Northants academy and even went to Loughborough for an ECB England U15s trial for three days.

But it got to the stage where I had to choose between football and cricket,

and I wasn't really enjoying cricket as much.

They were long days and often with people who weren't really my friends.

It's just not the same dynamic as football and, while I probably wasn't as good at football, I just preferred it and it went from there.

My England career began with the U18s and ironically I was in the same squad as my old friends Dele and Brendan, who were now with MK Dons, for some games at St. George's Park to start with.

From there I went into the U19s and had a couple of games for the U20s, including one in France just before the tragic shootings in Paris of November 2015.

We flew back home and the coach, Keith Downing, told me I'd be joining up with the U21s when we landed as they had a game in Brighton with Switzerland.



**There was Brendan Galloway, Dele Alli and George Williams who are all the same age so we'd all go to the Powerleague in MK in the summer and play against each other at 5-a-side**



*Ben in action for England U19 in 2014*

That was my first time working under Gareth Southgate and a few months later, it was with the U21s where I'd say I tasted my first real achievement in football when we won the Toulon Tournament in 2016.

It was the first time England had won it for quite a few years, and even though I missed the final game through injury, it was great to be involved in and you could see what Gareth and Steve were starting to build in the way they worked.

Going to the U21 Euros Finals in Poland the year after was decent and getting to the semi-finals was a great experience to be involved in.

It's a big competition and the pressure on those tournaments compared to the younger age groups is something different so I'm looking forward to being involved again this summer in Italy, if I'm selected.

There's such a strong squad for the U21s at the moment, there's so many good players that you could form two teams from them all and if they played each other, it'd

probably be a draw. From being involved with them, I know there's a real confidence in the squad that we can go and win that this summer.

For now though, I'm still buzzing about my involvement with the senior squad. Making my debut was just a massive achievement for me and something that I've worked towards for my whole life.

Coming on as a sub is one thing, but you want to be playing every international and starting the games and that's everyone's aim.

For now though, I just need to keep working hard at Leicester, putting in the performances and then working hard to impress the staff and players with England to show that I'm good enough at this level.

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