



However, in October 2001 after running a pilot scheme in his home town of Leyland, Kevin decided to relaunch Teamtheme into a children's sports coaching company. Six months later he had sold his first franchise and within a few years there were more than 40 franchises nationwide, including Scotland and Ireland. Teamtheme is still going strong today!

After a total of 20 years with the company and generating sales of almost £2million, Kevin decided it was time to move onto pastures new and after a lot of research, designing products and developing prototypes, he set up a new business – RefStuff.

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Refstuff is a range of innovative sporting products designed to assist with the refereeing, scoring and management of matches, for referees, teachers and sports coaches around the world.

The range of items, all designed or invented by Kevin, have been developed to complement, aid, enhance and assist referees, teachers and sports coaches across many sports, particularly football, and to offer fresh alternatives to other items currently in use.

RefScorer was the first product released from the RefStuff range. It is a hand-held device that records the score of the game, while even serving as a reminder of the teams' colours too. The RefsWallet is a premium gold standard leather bound match day referee wallet. Other products currently on sale or being developed are RefsGloves, RefsGame, RefsCards and

RefSflags. However, the main product will be the RefScorer Digital watch, a patent pending and ground breaking design; an absolute game changer in sports watches, due to be released in May 2018.

“After refereeing myself, I was feeling frustrated at the quality of items that were available and I thought I could do better,” said Kevin. “I am creative, and I knew what I wanted to invent, and other stuff that I wanted to improve. Over time the range of products grew and I worked



with a team of good designers, including UCLan Preston and Burnley to get my products manufactured and to market.

“Twelve products will be out next year from the range. Three are already available to purchase and I’m so passionate every day about developing the other products, there’s some real special and unique ones on the way.

“I have self-funded the progression of the business so far, however I am open to suggestion of investment to take the brand to the next level and get there quicker. Even the patent lawyers deferred payment

as they believed it was a great concept. I am on the lookout for any angel investors out there that want to be part of a really big thing and of a concept with great potential.

“I do see this as a long-term future, that will only grow. I’m mindful of the brand leaders out there and one day if one wanted to buy me out, I’d be open to discussion, but I’d love to stay involved in a brand consultant advisory role.”

The RefStuff range of products are currently on sale worldwide with over 10 distributors in over 15 countries. Some big players in the industry are sales distribution partners whom Kevin says have supported him well and who believe in the products. They are also available to purchase from the website www.refscorer.com.

Kevin has plans to take on employees next year, and has further ambitions to have sports centres that are free for children during the day. “Sport in this country is not seen as a priority unfortunately, and there’s certainly not enough provision in our schools,” adds Kevin. “I’d like to change that by offering the right facilities, so kids become passionate about sport from an early age.”

He even visited Penwortham Priory Academy High School to present them with framed memorabilia showcasing the evolution and journey of the RefScorer prior to its worldwide sales release as the school helped make the original prototype. He gave an inspirational and motivational talk to the pupils with the message “never give up”, “always believe” and “dare to dream”, which is available to view on the RefStuff YouTube channel. ■

www.refscorer.com

BUSINESS HOUR

In this month’s Business Hour, *Tracy Hargreaves* talks to a Preston entrepreneur and inventor, who is scoring a great goal in sporting technology for the future

Forty-year-old Kevin Houghton, from Penwortham has always had a passion for sport, particularly football. He also had ambition, drive and the ability to be innovative and forward thinking right from an early age, having had a range of different jobs since the age of 10, he certainly isn’t a stranger to hard work.



In 1994, whilst at Runshaw College, he

took on an assignment at a company called Teamtheme, a sports tours and tournament company covering the UK, Spain and Portugal, regularly taking football teams on tour to major cities. After gaining a Level 1 distinction, Kevin was invited to join the company to help out on the next Teamtheme tour and gradually took on more responsibility, until eventually he worked his way up to run the business.

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But as the years went on, its database got older and there were no real new teams coming through. The company went from running 32 team tournaments for Euro 96 televised on Sky Sports to having six to eight team tours and business began to fade.