

# AMERICAN DREAM

**T**HERE does not seem to be many similarities between Lincoln and the Hollywood vision of the American dream, but for the Jabara family their connection with the city - and county - really is a home away from home.

The Jabaras - Harvey and Missy along with their sons Jensen and Jaxon - have been part of the Imps since the summer of 2021, steadily increasing their role in the Imps; group of investors and falling even more in love with the club, city and county every time they visit.

"We have fallen in love with the city, and Lincolnshire actually shares a lot of commonality with Kansas where Missy and I grew up," says Harvey, who joined the club's board of directors in 2023.

"We feel like we grew up in Lincoln and the city has embraced us. Our boys can't wait for their next trip - every time we return the question is: 'When are we going next?'

"There's nothing like walking around Lincoln for us, we couldn't have asked for a better place in which to be involved in English football."

The Jabara family had been looking for a club in European football to invest in for some time when the former USA international Landon Donovan recommended the Imps to them.

Landon had long been friends with the family after meeting at a San Diego Padres - the Major League Baseball side - game which led to the man widely considered the greatest American player of all time taking on a training and mentorship role with Jensen who was then still an aspiring high school athlete.

"We had an investment in the Padres and felt it might be interesting to see what might be available in Europe, particularly England where the game is played at the highest level," says Harvey.



Landon Donovan and (right) and Imps director Harvey Jabara.

"We literally went a few years at least looking at various proposals but nothing struck us as one we truly wanted to pursue until December 2020 when a proposal came to Landon. After reviewing it I handed it off to my wife and two sons, because we're all in this together, and everybody was very intrigued by what we saw in Lincoln City.

"Landon had a call with the chairman Clive Nates. And I remember him coming back to me and saying he really liked this guy. And, as he knew me, thought I was really gonna like this guy. And after our first Zoom meeting, we could immediately tell that this was the one for us.

"We spent six months researching the club and I think it gives you an idea of the faith that







we developed in Clive, chief executive Liam Scully and the entire club, that we made a commitment to invest sight unseen. We did all the due diligence and at the end of the day, our guts told us that Lincoln City was the one."

That may seem like a lot of trust to put in Landon, but he understood quickly that the strength of Lincoln City was not just in its history and growing infrastructure but in the group of people chairman Clive Nates had collected at the club.

"It was the people," says Landon.

"I know Raphael Geller, the intermediary, pretty well and knew he would not have brought Lincoln City to me unless he knew and liked the people through his existing relationship with Clive Nates.

"When I spoke with Clive I could tell there was something different about him, in San Diego we were fortunate to have a chairman who shares similar values and having been around football my whole life I know how rare this is.

"I knew this was going to be an all-in endeavour for Harvey, and in order to do that it has to be with good people who you can trust in the difficult moments."

Harvey took up a position on the board of Lincoln City Football Club in February 2023,

alongside associate Graham Rossini, as his family's commitment to the club continued.

The time difference, combined with the now international membership of the club's board, means meetings early in the morning for Harvey - and that Saturday matchdays mean watching the game via iFollow Imps over breakfast.

"We make it work, and I don't mind getting started early - though it has brought a new definition of early for my professional life," says Harvey.

"There are days where it starts quite early, but I also look at the other side of it where an 11am meeting for me is 7pm in the UK.

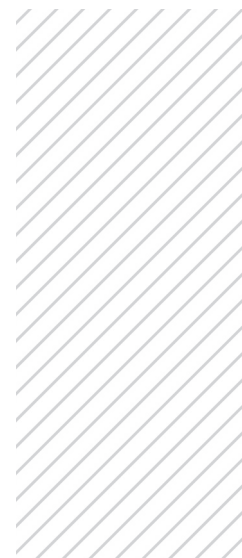
"And everyone on these calls are committing their evenings to Lincoln City. This is board members, committee members and staff - I see so many people giving up their time for the club that we all just make it work. We all share the timezone burden for sure."

"It's difficult to believe that we've been in this for more than two and a half years at this point, there's not a day goes by in which Lincoln City isn't some component of it.

"It's a labour of love, but a real passion for me and my family - seeing the work put in every day by the people at the club is a real inspiration.

"Our family now feels right at home in Lincoln, we couldn't have asked for a better place to be involved in English football."

*Above and right: Missy, Harvey and Jensen, along with Jaxon, now feel right at home at the LNER Stadium.*



## EXPANDING ROLE

Landon is hoping to increase his role with the Imps during 2024, with the arrival of a Major Soccer League expansion franchise in San Diego prompting the Loyal's decision to go out on their own terms.

He has acted as a special advisor to City since the Jabara family first took a stake in the club, combining this with his ongoing role with the Loyal which has now ended.

"I would now like to be more involved as much as possible, this feels like a very good time to do so in the light of the past few weeks" he says.

"I've tried to be very respectful: to not come in and step on any toes. I want to learn more than I tried to tell. And I now feel like I have a pretty good grasp on the club as a whole.

"I don't have all the answers, but I have been through this process now on almost all sides of the sport. I've been privy to the commercial side, I've managed a team, coached a team worked in a front office, I've played the game. I've been a commentator on the sport so I see all sides of it now.

"I'm not an expert on all of it, but I think there's ways I can provide more value going forward."

Landon has spent time in Lincoln, and



despite not being able to take in many games in person says he feels at home with the Imps.

"I feel extremely connected to the club and the city, even though I haven't spent much time there," he says.

"Ultimately a club and place for me is as much about the people as the material things, and maybe it speaks for the people of Lincoln that they are almost unequivocally humble and good people.

"There are many examples of Americans coming into English football who have done a horrible job, without respect for the history and traditions, so I'm really grateful for how Harvey and myself have been received."

Interest in English football has been growing in recent years, with a Netflix documentary on Sunderland followed by the high-profile investment into Wrexham from Ryan Reynolds and Rob McElhenney which included a documentary series which has become a global hit.

With the popularity of Formula One turbo-charged by the Drive To Survive series of documentaries, Landon feels there is a real appetite for traditional lower league English football in the States making now a perfect time for the Imps to develop a fanbase across the Atlantic.

"These clubs have a different and engaging storyline that non-football people in America have become attached to," he says.

"We're still so young and immature in a football sense in our country, so people are just learning about how the game works in other countries. When I was growing up the thought of people being interested in world football was a non-starter, but as the world gets smaller and people travel more they see the passion and how much it means.

"In our culture our professional sports are entertaining but there's not the same level of passion, so you don't know any different. But when you go to a European, or a South American, match you see something really different. And you'd have to be a robot to not feel that as a human being. Once people experience it for the first time, they fall in love. And that's what's happened over the past few decades."

Landon believes fans of the beautiful game in the USA are maturing and ready to take on more European-like connections with clubs.

"With San Diego Loyal we literally had to build it from scratch, much like Lincoln City did many decades ago," he adds.



"And when you build it from scratch, and you do it the right way, then you have supporters for life. If you go to a football match in Britain, or in Europe, or in South America, the fans are the emotional owners of the club. In American sports, people don't understand that concept.

"So we tried to build an environment in a culture where the fans felt that as well. And I think we did, and I've learned a lot from Lincoln City and from all of my travels about about that."



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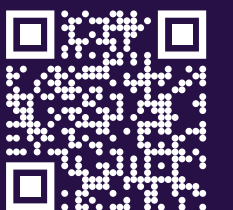
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