**Alex Cooper, Ross County.**

It's an unseasonably warm day for March. I've arranged an interview with separate Alex Cooper – ace footballer, Ross County player, and former Fortrose pupil. When I catch up to him, he's just finished coaching a class of second years, and now a gaggle of giggling fangirls are swarming around him, snapping selfies. The bell rings, and they slouch off to class. I introduce myself, and we shake hands. I have to admit, I'm a little nervous. I did have a sheet of prepared questions, but these have vanished somewhere into the dark recesses of my bag. It would be time to put my keen journalistic skills to work, if I had any. He gives me an easy grin, and I relax.

Alex was a rising star from an early age. Son of Neale Cooper, a player and manager himself, Alex's life revolved around the game. “I was always going to football, or going to training. I ended up doing it myself – I was playing football at home or in the street, going into games to watch my dad's teams.” His hard work paid off – Alex took part in the under-sixteen trials for Scotland. After a few tense weeks, Alex's PE teacher burst into his maths class with the news – Alex was in. “That was probably one of my best moments from school,” he says, smiling. Alex was certainly getting attention; in fifth year, he got a call from Liverpool. At age sixteen, he was signed to a major club.

When I ask him about the future, he pauses for a moment. “You're always got to be striving towards a higher level of play. In the future, I'd like to play in the English premier league, and play for Scotland. That's the aim. That's what I work towards.”

I ask him what the best part of playing football is. “It's just that... every day, you're doing something you're passionate about. You're always working towards a goal, you're always trying to improve, always trying to focus on the future...” Sounds like hard work, I remark, and he laughs. “I love the adrenaline, the buzz when you're playing in front of big crowds. I love it all, really.”

Paul Holden, S6