

Junior Squads Director's Report

Junior badminton in Kent continues to flourish with a host of junior clubs providing both coaching and match-play along with the immense social benefits that our game offers. These junior clubs and sessions provide the starting pathway for young players to achieve Kent County representation through the many exciting leagues, tournaments and competitions.

Training in Kent's junior county squads and representing the county provides the stepping stone for those youngsters who aspire to higher goals such as achieving international or senior county status. Kent's two most recent junior international boys achieved their success through regular attendance at county squad sessions in tandem with training by Kent's most experienced coaches.

Our young players will be the main beneficiaries of the partnership we established this season with the Badminton England accredited Bromley Performance Centre. Many County Associations have failed to achieve a working relationship with the PCs leading to catastrophic consequences. The PC's players now have access to our junior squads and County representation. We were commended in a recent report by BE's London Regional Manager who stated that he was "very happy with the clear communication between the parties and the support of the County Badminton Association".

Kent's three junior squads enjoyed their first season at the new Medway Park 12 court sports hall. Along with savouring the benefits of training at Kent's premier indoor facility, our juniors were lead by one of the strongest county coaching teams in the country including Paul Whetnall and Lesley Uphill, both ex-England Internationals and Number 1 nationally ranked players. Paul also holds Badminton England's highest coaching award and was coach to the UK Olympic badminton team as well as the Canadian national team.

Sixty-eight juniors were brought into the Kent squads this season – our highest ever number. At the start of the season only 22 Kent-based youngsters had Badminton England grades (there were none in the Under 13 age group) - numbers improved to 36 by the end of the season. This success can be attributed to quality coaching, a commitment to training, competing regularly at BE tournaments, and sterling support by the parents.

Our Under 15s were the most successful age group winning half their matches in a Shires League comprising some of the country's strongest counties. In the regional rounds of this year's Team Challenge our U15s came within one game of qualifying for the national rounds and a top 12 national placing. Our Under 17s won just under half of their matches and certainly could have improved on this if our top players were available for all matches. Our Under 13s found the going very tough in their league but considering that we started the

season without a graded player this was to be expected. Many U13s got BE grades during the season including a few of our Under 12s, so undoubtedly we will be stronger next season. Most of our junior squad players gained Kent representative honours either through Shires League matches or the host of B matches that were arranged to widen competitive participation.

Kent's involvement in the most prestigious event in the junior calendar, the annual ICT U17 Inter-County Tournament, was blighted by most of our U17 team going on a badminton trip to Denmark during ICT week. Therefore we went to ICT at Nottingham without an U17 player and with six of our 10 juniors still only 14 years old. They performed admirably winning 3 of their 10 matches and provided their coaches with the most enjoyable ICT trip ever – exemplary behaviour, camaraderie, determination, team spirit – I'm looking forward to future ICTs with this young team.

Finally, I would like to thank: the squad coaches for a season of hard work and commitment; all the squad players who loyally supported their county in the many matches and tournaments; and also the parents who provided the time and the means to enable it all to happen.

Edward Strilesky