

# NORTHUMBRIA SQUASH – SEASON 2022/23

## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This is John Thompson welcoming you to this year's Chairman's Report which I hope you will find both interesting and informative.

### GOVERNANCE

Northumbria Squash Rackets Association is affiliated to England Squash ('ES'), the national governing body for squash, and is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation ('CIO') regulated by the Charity Commission. The Association's affairs are governed by a board of up to six voluntary trustees.

Currently we have five trustees in post, with many years' combined experience of playing and administering the sport at local, regional and national level. Dave Barnett handed over as chair of trustees to me last September after many successful years in the hot seat. Dave has agreed to stay on as a trustee and our tournament co-ordinator, continuing to provide valuable support which I greatly appreciate.

I have previously held roles on the County governing board in the 1990s and returned to the board in 2016 when I took over the role of league secretary. I now oversee the Association's activities, helping to define roles and responsibilities and monitoring progress on the achievement of our goals.

Colin McNestrie is another longstanding trustee who oversees governance matters, ES liaison, the summer league and the County website. Susan Spence who served as trustee and treasurer for the last two years has now stepped down and we are in the process of handing over to our new treasurer Simon Long. Joe Witherspoon became a trustee in 2022 with responsibility for safeguarding and refereeing. Dave North is secretary to the trustees and has responsibility for meeting agendas and minutes, CIO compliance, and recruitment, induction and updating of volunteers.

The trustees delegate the day-to-day running of the County's squash activities to a committee of, currently, thirteen members (including the five trustees and the secretary). The additional seven committee members (and their roles) are Adam Coates (publicity), Ryan Doran (racketball and presentation evening), Guy Eniona and Dave Brocklehurst (fundraising), David Jackson and Karen Heron (diversity and inclusion) and Mike Paul (coaching and racketball). Liam Gutcher (coaching and juniors) also gives valuable support. I would also like to pay tribute to Sarah Jones, our former safeguarding officer, who passed away in April and is sadly missed.

### COMPETITIONS

It has been a very busy year of competitions, with all back in full swing. Here are the highlights:

#### i) County Closed championships

A full range of County Closed championships were held during the season, with strong entries in every tournament. Full details may be found on the Northumbria Squash website.

The season started with the 2022 Junior County Closed held at Northern in early October, the winners in each category being Kieran Mahoney (BU19), Katie Barker (GU19), Ben Tudor (BU17), Mia Smith (GU17), Duncan Rutherford (BU15), Ava Naisbitt (GU15), Mateo Ridley (BU13), Rebecca Little (GU13), James Southern (BU11), and Emma Little GU11).

Later in October, the 2022 Masters County Closed was held at the Northumberland Club. The winners were David Jackson (O35), Peter McCleod (O45), Glenn Ward (O55), Andrew Wilkinson (O65), Karen Heron (Ladies O40), Chris Wiggins (racketball), and Chris Wiggins / Ryan Doran (doubles).

In January, Tynemouth hosted the combined 2023 Senior and Masters County Closed, the winners being Michael Mattimore (Men's Senior), Hannah Cliff (Women's Senior), Peter McCleod (O45), Jon Evans (O55), Andrew Wilkinson (O65), Tom Cornell (racketball), and Alex Robertson / Cai Younger (doubles).

Congratulations to all the winners and thanks to the organisers and everyone who took part.

## ii) County Open championships

The Northumbria Open was held in March at the Northumberland Club. This included Men's and Women's \$1,000 PSA events and also graded events, with a strong line-up throughout. The eventual Men's PSA winner was the 9/16 seed Ameeshenraj Chandaran of Malaysia (WR #413) who caused upset after upset by knocking out reigning champion and top seed Owain Taylor (WR #107) in the first round and eventually 2<sup>nd</sup> seed Elijah Thomas (WR #179) in the final! The Women's PSA title went for a second time as expected to top seed Asia Harris of England (WR #106), with Jamie Chalcraft of Newcastle University victorious in a strong A graded event.

At the time of writing, the ES-sanctioned Newcastle Junior Silver Open is about to be held across three venues (Newcastle University, Northern and the Northumberland Club) on 1/2 July with an entry of around 120 boys and girls in the usual age groups from U11 to U19 (except GU17).

Another ES-sanctioned event, the Northumberland Club Masters Open, will be held on 7-9 July.

## iii) County leagues and cups

53 men's teams and 9 ladies' teams from a total of 17 affiliated clubs competed in the 2022/23 Winter Leagues, all played in a good spirit and completed on time without too many disputes or headaches for the league secretary!

The Northumberland Club were Men's League champions for the first time in a decade with runners-up Westoe lifting the Men's Northumbria Cup. Newcastle University picked up both the Ladies' League title and Northumbria Cup for the first time. Northern swept the board for the other trophies, their 2nds and Juniors collecting the Men's League Cups A and B respectively, and Ladies 2nds beating 3rds to the Ladies League Cup!

In the men's league, in addition to the normal 'two-up, two-down' automatic promotion and relegation between the six divisions, end-of-season playoffs were introduced allowing the 3rd-placed team in each division to challenge the 3rd-bottom team in the division above for an extra promotion place. Although none of the challengers succeeded, one or two came very close, and it was generally considered to have been a successful innovation.

The Summer League is in full swing with 15 teams playing each week in a single division until mid-September, followed by the final playoffs.

Planning is already underway for next season's Winter Leagues starting in late September, with potential changes on the administration side! Club contacts are requested to notify the league secretary (currently still me) of any changes to the number of teams they will be fielding for the new season.

## iv) Inter County Competitions (ICCs)

The Junior, Senior and Masters ICCs are county team events run by ES, usually in two weekend stages over the season.

Under the organisation of Liam Gutcher and Richard Vitty, we fielded a full line-up of boys' and girls' teams in the Junior ICC at all age groups – U11, U13, U15, U17 and GU19 – with eight teams going on to compete in the finals in Coventry and Warwick in March. Overall this was a great showing from our Juniors as all but one team placed in the top 10 in the country in their respective age categories.

In the Senior ICC, the Women's team qualified from the Northern group for the promotion group in Wolverhampton, finishing third and narrowly missing out on promotion to the Premier division. Squad – Josie Barker, Rebecca Symmons, Harriet Wight, Tegan Younger, Emma Turnbull, Lesley Vitty, Mia Smith and Amanda King.

Meanwhile also in Wolverhampton the Men successfully retained their Premier status as one of the top eight counties in the country. Squad - Michael Mattimore, Liam Gutcher, Cai Younger, Dave Barnett, Chris Boyer and Alex Robertson.

In the Masters ICC, our O65 team qualified for the national finals in Peterborough and despite being top seeds in the end had to settle for fourth place nationally, still a great achievement. Squad – Andrew Wilkinson, Adrian Alderton, Tony Pensom, Alan Coates and Jon Steward.

All in all, a very successful season for our County teams at all age groups.

We are also planning to host the Junior ICC Stage 1 North in Northumbria on 11/12 November, at four venues – Newcastle University, Northern, the Northumberland Club and Tynemouth. This would be a major showpiece event for Northumbria, attracting teams of the best junior boys and girls from the Northern counties to compete at the five

age-group levels from U11 to U19 over two days. It also gives our Northumbria juniors (and parents) 'home advantage', with no need to travel long distances to matches for once!

#### v) Individual achievements

Kieran Mahoney picked up the prestigious John Dale Trophy in October as the County's best-performing junior, having just won the U19 County Closed at his home club, Northern. Kieran moved up the ranks at Northern from Juniors 2nds to 1sts, then Seniors 3rds to 2nds, before switching to Northumberland Club 2nds last season.

In the British Junior Championships held in Sheffield in January, our best performers were William Brocklehurst (10th in the BU11) and Annabelle Satow (12th in the GU19). William was also our best performer at the English Junior Open in Surrey the following month, finishing 6th in the BU11 category.

We also had a small representation at the British Junior Open in Birmingham in January, with Magnus Mackay registering our best performance finishing 32nd in the BU11 category despite being unseeded.

Also in January, Adrian Alderton (Hexham) won the Welsh Masters O65 title, then in February at the British National Masters in Birmingham, Bryan Beeson (Northumberland Club) claimed the national O60 title, with Tony Pensom (Consett) winning the O70 plate event.

### **PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION**

A number of initiatives have been running throughout the year aimed at increasing participation and inclusion, some with the support of ES funding obtained by the Association on behalf of participating clubs.

Boldon and Hexham each ran two ES-supported Squash Stars programmes attracting new 5-9 year-olds to the sport, with some success. They will be joined by Sunderland in the new round of programmes which are about to start.

The Northumberland Club held sessions aimed at introducing new junior and adult players (especially women) to squash and racketball, and Northern held further introductory sessions for women. Again ES provided some support for these initiatives.

Tynemouth received funding from British Engines, a North-East based leading engineering group, to allow ten children from disadvantaged communities to join Tynemouth for free. The funding also included all the equipment the juniors would need to get started, such as a racket and protective eyewear.

Earlier programmes held at the Northumberland Club, Northern, Tynemouth, Hexham and Boldon are helping to embed these new players into the respective clubs as they move past the introductory stage into regular club play, internal leagues, etc, and there is a good retention rate. In addition the parents of newly-introduced juniors often decide to take up squash for the first time, or return to it, and again this is boosting participation.

A future initiative could be to encourage casual players at leisure centres to consider joining local clubs, and there is always more that could be done with local schools to introduce squash into the curriculum.

### **COACHING AND REFEREEING**

A coaching forum has been introduced by [Mike Paul](#) and [Liam Gutcher](#) to provide an opportunity for the County's coaches to meet and receive and share best practice. Two workshops were held with invited speakers, one focussing on strength and conditioning, the second with ES national coaches Tania Bailey and Paul Carter.

[Joe Witherspoon](#) has taken over as County refereeing co-ordinator and has already reached WSO (World Squash Officiating) Level 2. Joe is attempting to compile a database of Northumbria referees / potential referees and their current WSO level, and is seeking the help of the local clubs and players to achieve this. The goal is to have at least one Level 1 referee in every club and four active Level 2 referees in the County by 2024, so that we can start to provide referees for the major competitions we hold each year.

### **SAFEGUARDING AND CONDUCT**

[Joe Witherspoon](#) is also our County safeguarding officer to whom any safeguarding issues should be addressed. Joe also chairs the County Conduct Committee which also includes Dave Barnett and myself – this committee meets (fortunately on very rare occasions) to deal with any allegations of misconduct involving any of our players, officials, parents or spectators during ES or County-sanctioned competitions.

## **PUBLICITY**

The [County website](#) and [League Master](#) are good sources of information throughout the season. [Adam Coates](#) continues to provide updates on social media (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) on all squash-related matters involving our players, teams and clubs. He has also introduced an informative newsletter which is issued every 6-8 weeks throughout the season. In addition, significant local squash news is being reported by the Newcastle Chronicle in their Grassroots Sports section.

## **FUNDRAISING**

We are grateful to all our sponsors who help us to cover the costs of the major local competitions which provide top-class squash in the area for all to enjoy such as the Junior County Closed (DB Glaziers), the Northumbria Open PSA (John Jasper Care, ACP Wealth Management, Holmes & Hunters, The Windmill Property Co. and Duncan HR) and the ES Junior Silver Open (Newcastle University). We are delighted to give these sponsors as much publicity as possible both at the event and through our reporting outlets.

We are always looking for opportunities to raise additional funds for the Association's activities. For example, we currently have no sponsors for the Senior / Masters County Closed (held every January at Tynemouth), the County Leagues, or the ES Junior ICC Stage 1 North event being staged across four venues in November. If anyone would be interested in sponsoring any of these events please contact [Guy Eniona](#), [Dave Brocklehurst](#) or myself.

One brilliant way of supporting us as an individual is through [easyfundraising.com](https://easyfundraising.com) which allows you to nominate your preferred charity (in this case 'Northumbria Squash Rackets Association') and then every time you spend online with recognised brands such as John Lewis, Tesco, M&S, Booking.com, etc, a small donation is made to the charity by that brand. So far we have only four supporters who have raised £3.48 between them, but every little helps!

## **VOLUNTEERING**

Thanks to all those who volunteer their time to help the County squash scene function. We would of course love to have more volunteers, but I appreciate that many of you are already fully committed with work, family, and other activities. However if you feel that you could make a contribution, however small, please get in touch with [Dave North](#) or myself. Thank you.

***John Thompson***

***Chairman – Northumbria Squash***

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***21 June 2023***