

The Spike Back



**VOLLEYBALL
ENGLAND**

Annual Report 2020-2021

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WELCOME

from Adam Walker, Chairman

What a year. No one could have predicted the vast challenges facing the Volleyball Family and society as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. For the first time in Volleyball England's history, we had to – at times – discourage the play of volleyball, beach volleyball and sitting volleyball. We created virtual challenges and workout ideas that members could enjoy from the confines of their own homes to keep the spirit of the game alive, and the community connected. We held virtual meetings with thousands of you and worked with clubs to unpick the Government's complex Covid-19 guidance. It has been a year like no other as we have flexed, adapted, and innovated to meet the changing needs of our members. And we will continue to support members

to overcome obstacles preventing their return to play.

In last year's Annual Report, I spoke about laying the foundations for a strong future and how, after a period of repair and rebuild, we have moved to a state of stability and sustainability. I also touched on the iterative development of volleyball in England, and the need to put key building blocks in place to help it grow. Despite the difficult year, I am delighted that we were able to work with the community to launch our ambitious new strategy, The Game Plan. This new vision will run through until 2030 and will see us work closer with our clubs and members to grow the game.

Within The Game Plan there are three key strands: Volleyball for Life, which is about pathways and creating opportunities for all; Get Keep Grow, to strengthen the English volleyball club structure;

and An Ace Service, which is about improving our member products and service. Despite the significant disruption of the last year, I am pleased we have been able to set out this blueprint for what success looks like and have already started to move ahead with ambitious plans, including preparatory work around next year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

Before we dive into what is a scaled back Annual Report – one that is reflective of the year we have experienced and what has, rather than what has not, happened – I want to pay tribute to the volunteers who have risen to the immeasurable challenges of keeping the game alive this last year, and to everyone who has played their part in keeping our Volleyball Family safe. Now, with restrictions relaxing, it is time for volleyball to return stronger than before.



Sue Storey was interviewed by Sky Sports News about the crisis caused by the lack of access to indoor playing spaces (August 2020)



VIEW FROM THE TOP



Sue Storey, Chief Executive, and Sam Jamieson, Deputy Chief Executive, look back on how Volleyball England responded to the multifaceted challenges of 2020/21 and how projects undertaken during lockdown have put the organisation in a strong position moving forward.

At the start of March 2020, Volleyball England was mentioned across BBC radio stations as part of news bulletins telling listeners that we were encouraging players to replace handshakes with a wave or bow to lessen personal contact. The situation rapidly developed over the next fortnight, eventually leading to lockdown, and our early introduction of

the precautionary measure is something that has characterised our approach to the Covid-19 pandemic: safety first.

Throughout these unprecedented times we have always prioritised the safety of our members – despite sometimes facing criticism for being too cautious. And it has been pleasing to see this approach has been shared by

clubs too, who have followed the meticulous return to play protocols to – where possible – get volleyball, beach volleyball and sitting volleyball activity back up and running. Thank you for your support and cooperation.

When it became apparent that 2020 – and later 2021 – would be a year like no other, we reshaped and innovated to provide services to help

the community to get through this period. When courts lay empty and teammates were left separated, we brought people together through social media campaigns such as #digginginthegarden and #VolleyRoundTheWorld. We organised webinars to navigate clubs, coaches, and referees through the Covid-19 guidance. When volleyball began to return, we lobbied the Government for better access to indoor playing spaces and were joined by so many volleyballers and sport lovers in making that rallying cry. We also launched volleyball and sitting volleyball specific fitness plans, created content to keep you entertained and much, much more. We even made tough cost-saving measures to protect the organisation and the sport.

Looking ahead, progress on several fronts will ensure volleyball emerges out of this period in a strong position. The first is our new 10-year strategy, which you will read much about in this Annual Report. Labelled The Game Plan, it gives us a clear vision and, thanks to the recently published implementation plan, a roadmap of how we will achieve that. The Hub team re-structure to align resource to our three key strategy priorities: Volleyball for Life, Get Keep Grow, and An Ace Service and key themes such as data, insights, and digital transformation; as well as the recruitment of additional personnel, highlights how it is already changing our approach. Our Annual Report has also been revamped to explain how we are making progress against each strategic priority. Another is how we are preparing for

what will be a huge opportunity to showcase beach volleyball, Birmingham 2022. Key working groups have been busy working on supporting the competition, the England beach volleyball performance team, and – to

“Like any good game plan, we have had to be flexible and react to changing circumstances”

make sure we capitalise on this golden opportunity – how we ensure there is a lasting legacy. Volleyball England staff are also working closely with organisers – including former colleague Jonathan Moore, who has joined Birmingham 2022 on secondment. Governance is a key area we have also worked on during this period, reviewing and refreshing our policies to ensure we maintain the highest standards while also changing our governance structure to align it to our new strategy as well.

Like any good game plan, we have had to be flexible and react to changing circumstances, but we are pleased we have been able to also press forward and make progress. We are not out of the woods yet regarding Covid-19 restrictions, and there is much to do to ensure the community re-builds back to pre-pandemic levels, especially with an expected impact on participants because of Brexit. However, working together with members, we know we can achieve remarkable things and are excited about what is to come.

For their support in developing our new strategy and working with us throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we want to say a huge thank you to all our members. And finally, we would also like to place on record our thanks to our Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, partners and supporters for their hard work and support during this difficult year. We could not do what we do without you.



England athlete Jess Grimson pictured at Smithfield, Birmingham - the location of the beach volleyball competition at Birmingham 2022 (July 2020)



Team GB Olympic swimmer Jazz Carlin joined us for the launch of our new junior programme Volleyzs in Birmingham (May 2021)

VOLLEYBALL FOR LIFE

We aim to better understand, articulate, and promote the opportunities that volleyball provides for anyone, at any stage of their life, says Strategic Manager Gillian Harrison.



If you are unfamiliar with our bold new strategy, you may be asking what this key strand means. Volleyball For Life is about pathways – for players, coaches, officials, and volunteers – and keeping people on those pathways and engaged with the sport for as long as possible. This strategic priority is about better understanding how people enter our sport, what keeps them engaged, and what causes them to leave it, drawing insights from those learnings to improve pathways.

Data & insights

Gathering accurate, reliable, and complete data is important for making evidence-based decisions around pathways, and you may have noticed we are asking for your feedback more than before. For example, to coincide with the launch of our new strategy in September

we launched a player survey, which focused on player experiences, satisfaction with products and services, and the challenges and issues facing players. We also continue to regularly listen and act on feedback from England Talent Pathway athletes and their parents. Thank you to the thousands of people who have responded to our requests. We are listening to you and learning what can be improved and will then be, among other things, performing a gap analysis to identify ‘leaky gaps’ and develop more structured pathways.

National teams

International travel restrictions have prevented many of our national team athletes from flying the flag for England abroad. Nevertheless, working with our partners we have established protocols to allow

our elite beach volleyball athletes to play abroad. When restrictions lifted towards the end of 2020, we were delighted to send teams to the U18 and U22 European Championships in Izmir, Turkey. Out of both competitions, it was perhaps the performance of Katie Keefe and Isabelle Tucker in the women’s U18 competition that stood out the most. Keefe-Tucker began with a bang by beating France 2-1 and then dominated hosts Turkey in straight sets. However, Poland stopped them in their tracks in the Round of 16. Overall, England pairs Enrique Bello and Peter Soczewka (U18s), Saskia Freitas Schoffel and Lauren Huggins (U22s), and Javier Bello and Freddie Bialokoz

(U22s) showed good spirit and signs of even better promise in tough conditions.

Moving into 2021, Javier and – after recovering from injury – Joaquin Bello, gained valuable experience on the FIVB World Tour, including three back-to-back competitions in Cancun, Mexico. In May, the Bellos and Freddie Bialokoz & Issa Batrane represented England in the rescheduled Phase 2 of the CEV Continental Cup, a qualification route for the 2020 Olympics. England Women were unfortunately eliminated during Phase 1. Countless challenges had to be overcome before the tournament in Izmir, began, but the players came through them and put on good performances, showing great competitiveness with a 7th place finish. A special thank you to the athletes for following meticulous Covid protocols. Javier and Joaquin Bello returned to the U22s Championships shortly after the Continental Cup, finishing in 9th place.

Thanks to the British Volleyball Federation (BVF), top pairs Javier & Joaquin Bello and Ellie Austin & Anaya Evans secured much-needed funding to aid their development. At the start of July, we host a funding tournament in Bournemouth to provide even more financial support. All of this will give England's chances of medaling at Birmingham 2022 a major boost. In other exciting news,

the BVF secured £635,000 from UK Sport's National Squads Support Fund, which is the first time volleyball has received UK Sport funding since London 2012. This award will provide the BVF with a way forward to allow athletes to compete and train in preparation for Paris 2024. England athletes have also benefited from more than £50,000 from SportsAid and Backing the Best funding while others have received crucial support from TASS this year.

Due to issues connected to the pandemic, England's senior indoor volleyball and Great Britain's sitting volleyball teams have not been able to return to competition. However, I have been delighted to see the GB sitting volleyball athletes return to training in recent times. We look forward to seeing all squads back in action as soon as possible. Thanks to the support of parents and volunteers, our England Talent Pathway has continued to develop our most talented athletes, even if we have had to take training camps online. We hope to see them return to competition soon.

Volley2s

We have launched a new national junior programme for children aged 7-11, Volley2s. Dozens of people have contributed to this fantastic programme which introduces children to an adapted and easy to follow 2v2 version of

the game to begin with, before advancing to more technical volleyball skills. Thanks to Nick Shaffery and Bertrand Olie for leading this project. Almost 200 coaches and teachers have downloaded the free supporting guide. We are now in the project's next stage where we will support coaches and teachers to deliver Volley2s sessions.

DiSE, our Diploma in Sporting Excellence that is taught by Bertrand to junior players looking into higher education after their GCSEs, has adapted to continue to help youngsters reach the next level as scholars and athletes which, in the circumstances, is a great success.

Coaches, officials, volunteers

We have already been able to provide, or work towards creating, new development opportunities that we know the community want to see. After much work, our new level one coaching award is now so close to completion. This award will give coaches blended learning, combining face-to-face with digital elements to make it more accessible. On the officiating front, Nick Heckford, Officials Lead, has done a great job of keeping officials in touch with the game during lockdown through the Let's Talk Rules series.

Progress

We are in the early stages of working towards Volleyball For Life, ramping up data and insight activity to inform decision-making in the next stage. Despite challenges, we have made good progress and hope to build on that to achieve more in the year ahead.



Javier and Joaquin Bello on the FIVB World Tour in Mexico (April 2021)



GET. KEEP. GROW.

Clubs are the absolute backbone of volleyball in England. To help them to achieve their goals, we want to work closely with them, transforming our work to provide even better support, says Strategic Manager Vicki Carr.



A major shift in thinking from our new strategy is that we aim to make the biggest impact on developing volleyball by focusing on better supporting those that deliver the majority of volleyball in England – clubs. It's so important to us that we have dedicated one of our strategic priorities (Get Keep Grow) to helping affiliated clubs, an area that I now oversee as the Strategic Manager.

Club focus

While we have restructured and are working to establish better systems to support

clubs, we know that many are in desperate need of help to rebuild to where they were pre-pandemic.

One of the biggest pieces of work we have already completed has come off the back of our recent Club Health Check Survey. Clubs were asked about urgent support they required right now, especially around venue availability, the need for financial support, and equipment requirements. For those who were struggling in any of those areas, the team were immediately able to reach out to suggest local venues, funders or suppliers that might

be able to assist. This type of work will tie into longer-term projects around establishing consistent support mechanisms for affiliated clubs.

A key part of The Game Plan is that we will consult and gather feedback more often to ensure members are placed at the heart of our insight-based decision-making. As well as helping to provide immediate support to those in need, our 2021 Club Health Check survey also influenced the workshops

that have been organised for our 2021 Club Conference, namely: funding, building back stronger, junior development, engaging communities, and social media.

Covid support

During the long period of downtime, we also seized and created opportunities to support members. From the numerous Covid-19 support webinars to helping clubs secure Return to Play grant funding from Sport

during lockdown. VOLLEYFIT got people up on their feet and keeping physically and mentally active during a time when volleyball was grounded. Thank you to instructors Phil Spalding, Alex Jenkins and Mel Young for making it possible. It began with a session on coordination and finished with power development, racking up more than 9,100 views across the volleyball and sitting volleyball programmes. Members of Volleyball England, whether registered

average rating of 7.5 out of 10.

Memberships

Get Keep Grow is the pillar under which memberships and registrations now sit and for 2020/21 the number of coaches, officials and coaches who took out a membership is, understandably, a lot lower than in previous years. This season we have seen 256 take out a coach membership, 137 a referee membership, and 202 clubs affiliate with Volleyball England. Opportunities have been limited this season and while members have still enjoyed benefits such as dedicated newsletters and access to platforms such as the newly refreshed Officials Academy, we want to place

“VOLLEYFIT got people up on their feet and keeping physically and mentally active during a time when volleyball was grounded.”

on record our thanks for the support those members have shown to Volleyball England and, overall, the sport during this tough period.



England and re-imagining the Annual Awards to ensure the celebrations could continue online, clubs have always been at the forefront of our minds.

It's why, when England plunged into a second lockdown at the end of 2020, we quickly assembled a team to produce a special programme that would keep players fit and engaged with the sport

coaches, officials, national team athletes or members of affiliate clubs, received access to VOLLEYFIT as a new benefit for 2020/2021. Their feedback on this innovative new project was extremely encouraging too. In a snap survey, members described VOLLEYFIT as easy to follow with clear instructions and a good variety of exercises, giving the programme an

Growth

By providing appropriate tools and resources and by sharing knowledge and good practice, we aim to inspire clubs to deliver more volleyball. Our journey in working towards The Game Plan has only just begun and I am excited about what we can achieve through greater support and collaboration.



AN ACE SERVICE

This priority is not just a cool play on words, it is a serious pledge to develop a suite of products and services that most benefit members' needs, says Strategic Manager Rob Payne.

After a significant period of downtime, we know the volleyball community is, much like us, itching to get back to competitions. We have all played our part in keeping each other safe and while we must continue to follow measures to minimise risks, in May we were delighted to finally be able to organise our first competition since lockdown was introduced in 2020. This milestone had been a long time coming, and it was fitting that junior players, who are the future of our sport, were the first to get back on court for competition at the National Volleyball Centre in Kettering. As it was our first event back,

the rescheduled U15s National Championships gave us an opportunity to take stock of our usual event delivery and see where improvements could be made. The most visible change for that event was our live coverage. Not only did we set up live scores and league tables that could be followed throughout the day online, but we also organised a four-court live stream system to capture the action from every match.

Live streams will also be established for our next competition, the Commonwealth Games Funding Tournament in Bournemouth, and we aim for this to be the benchmark for all of our major



competitions moving forward in a move to make it easier to watch top level volleyball in England. Thank you to the army of volunteers who helped to make both events a reality.

Polonia in Europe

Indoor volleyball competitions have been put on hold across England. However, fans were treated to action from Europe's premier competition in 2020 thanks to the hard work and dogged determination of IBB Polonia London. The reigning English Super League

champions can be rightly proud of their second campaign in the CEV Champions League Volley. They put on a superb performance against some of Europe's very best on free-to-watch television and once more made history by becoming the first English volleyball club to win a set in the competition. Afterwards they dropped into the second-tier competition, the CEV Cup, and came close to qualifying for the quarter finals. In extremely challenging circumstances, IBB Polonia made big improvements in Europe this year and made us all so proud. Well done to the club's players, coaches and backroom staff – it's been great fun following your journey.

Beach and sitting volleyball
UKBT, our beach volleyball event provider, should be applauded for plotting a way through the meticulous return to play guidance to organise a series of events during 2020 – even securing new sponsors in the process. They returned with a bang for 2021 too, with a extensive calendar of events that now includes a Junior UKBT series to provide competitive opportunities for our youngster beach volleyball athletes.

Before each discipline could return, a comprehensive return to play evaluation process had to be followed to ensure the sport could safely resume. Of the numerous cases that had to be established and submitted to the Department for Media, Culture and Sport for approval, the one for sitting volleyball was the trickiest because of the set of unique challenges the sport presents. Nevertheless, thanks to the hard work of

staff, a dedicated group of volunteers and key partners as well as the ingenuity of Steve Smith, member of our Sitting Volleyball Working Group and founder of Sitting Bucks VC, a solution was created – an impermeable net system to reduce the risk of Covid-19 droplets being transmitted between players. This piece of sporting innovation and the supporting safety plan has enabled the sitting volleyball community to overcome the sizeable challenges that had prevented it to return to training. We now look forward to the next major milestone of returning to sitting volleyball competitions.

2021/22

The end of the 2019/20 and the entirety of the

“We are listening to your feedback to make sure our competitions are tailored to the wants and needs of everyone involved.”

2020/21 competition calendar for volleyball and sitting volleyball in England were majorly disrupted by the Covid pandemic, so we are looking forward to returning to a full season of activity from September. On that front, thank you to the members who have fed ideas and shared their thoughts through our player, club and National Volleyball League surveys, and also those who attended the innovation debate, The Next Big Idea. We are listening to your feedback to make sure our competitions are tailored to the wants and needs of everyone involved. We will continue to review all of our products and services to ensure they are fit for purpose and hope you will continue to engage with opportunities to provide feedback. For example, we have developed plans to improve the quality of our junior competitions by switching from a cup-style knockout format to a league.

After a severely diminished domestic calendar, we are very much looking forward to September and the start of the 2021/22 season – we have so much volleyball to catch up on!



A prototype sitting volleyball net was tested at the National Volleyball Centre (October 2020)



Great Britain Women's Sitting Volleyball Team returned to training thanks to the new sitting volleyball net (May 2021)

FOUNDATION REPORT

Simone Turner, Chairwoman of the Volleyball England Foundation, reflects on the organisation's accomplishments from the past year.

Philanthropy, in particular sports philanthropy and giving, has been hit hard, dogged by uncertainty of when and how programmes were to be delivered and, in our case, how the Foundation could successfully launch new initiatives. Yet, despite everything, I'm pleased to report the Foundation is making strong and steady progress towards all its goals. This year has been marked by some notable highlights, which I have outlined below. For full details, please refer to our 2021 Annual Report.

New trustees

We welcomed five new trustees to the Board in 2021. Manni Sehmbi, Steve Schindler, Bev Ward, Andy Narayanan, and Joelle Watkins come from diverse backgrounds and bring with them a wealth of knowledge and experience.

Step into My Shoes

The Foundation introduced a board volunteer programme to nurture and develop talent

to become the next sporting leaders. Our current cohort of 12 are receiving monthly training and adding knowledge and capacity to the work of the Foundation.

Ambassadors

Current advocates include Dan Hunter, Carol Gordon, Javier & Joaquin Bello, Bryan Youden.

Return to play

The Foundation secured £9,500 from Sport England's Return to Play fund to provide sitting volleyball clubs with one of the innovative new nets that enable the sport to safely return as well as PPE and cleaning equipment.

Sitting campaign

The first recipients of our sitting volleyball award, which was set up to support the creation of new teams, were Leeds Gorse, Manchester Marvel and Hull Thunder. Each club received a start-up package worth £1,000. We were grateful to receive support from World ParaVolley and Molten, and look forward to

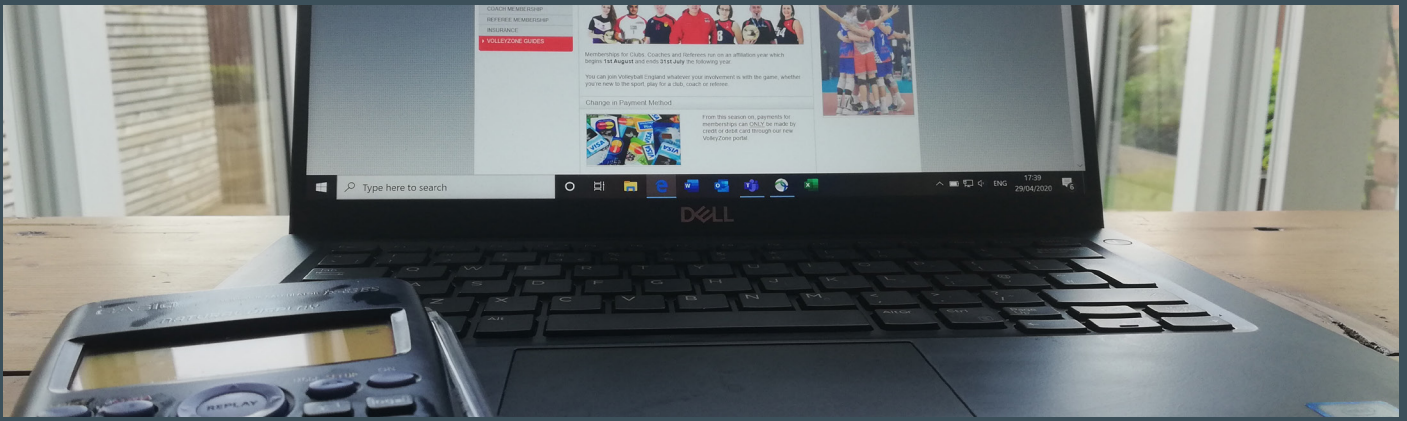
making further awards

Donations

We are grateful for the generous donations we have received during the last 12 months - including the first legacy gift and £1,200 raised through our Christmas auction. We have a number of members who regularly donate and a significant number of individual donations. As a result, last year we received over £800 in donations, thank you for your continued support. In addition, we were successful in receiving funds from two charities, the Bruce Wake Foundation donated £2,500 towards our sitting campaign and Movement for Good donated £1,000, thanks to you nominating us as your preferred charity.

Looking ahead

We look forward to working with the Volleyball Family throughout the rest of 2021 and into 2022 as, together, we work to develop, educate, and promote the health benefits of volleyball.



FINANCE REPORT

An update from Financial Consultant Kevin Fletcher.



I ended last year's finance report by stating that whilst we faced fiscal challenges in 20/21, we had improved our financial stability by changing the ways we work and that I was confident we would meet whatever challenges lay ahead. Little did I know what challenges lay ahead, but the steps that we took in 19/20 have been crucial in maintaining our strong financial position.

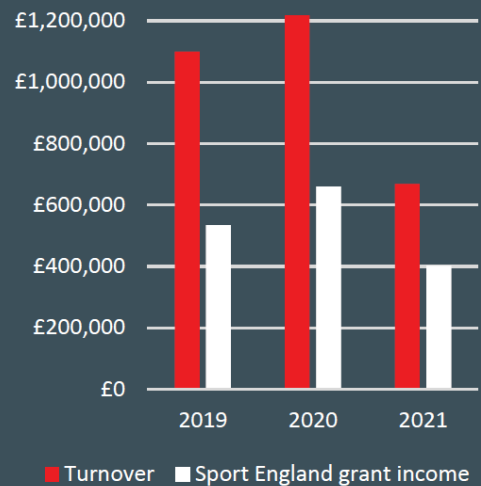
Sport England quickly realised the Covid-19 pandemic would bring financial insecurity and cash flow challenges for Sports Bodies. To assist with this, they released six months of grant income in April 2020 and repeated a six month payment in September, which greatly improved our cash flow. For the financial year 20/21, our expenses were £27,000 lower than our revenue, mainly as a

result of stringent cost controls. Non-Sport England income has been negatively impacted as activity, such as courses and competitions, were put on hold or cancelled. In addition, we have reprofiled £59,000 of Sport England grant income which will be used to support our return to play during 21/22. The strength of our balance sheet will also assist with the implementation of our strategy.

The changes we made last year to our Finance Department (new personnel and finance system) allowed greater visibility of key information in a more timely manner to the senior management team. In addition, our Finance Assistant Adam Freundlich passed his Association of Accounting Technicians

exams and has now embarked on his next qualification.

Although Covid-19 continues to disrupt volleyball, we have tried to protect Volleyball England during this pandemic to enable it to lead the growth and improvement of the sport through 21/22 and beyond.



Where did the money come from?

Sport England Grants 20-21	£ 401,656
Other Government Grants	£ 56,939
Commercial Income	£ 5,249
Talent Income	£ 24,384
Technical Courses	£ 10,181
Children & Young People	£ 3,078
Membership	£ 39,255
Diploma in Sporting Excellence	£ 120,881
Competition & Events	£ 6,285
TOTAL	£ 667,908

Where did the money go?

Operating Costs	£ 172,047
Salaries	£ 412,332
Commercial Cost	£ -
Talent	£ 6,667
Technical Courses	£ 2,687
Children & Young People	£ 13,099
Competition & Events	£ 3,164
Diploma in Sporting Excellence	£ 30,322
TOTAL	£ 640,318

Stockport vs Malory Eagles
in the U15s National
Championships (May 2021)



REGIONAL REPORTS

North East, by Sue Sowden

Before lockdown we were struggling to find volunteers to join the North East Committee. Unfortunately, that is still the case now.

Since restrictions have been lifted, clubs – particularly those based at schools – struggled to return to indoor volleyball, but it has been pleasing to see many organising outdoor sessions. Each month we are seeing more and more clubs get back up and running.

My own club, Newcastle, returned earlier than others because we offer junior volleyball and because we are not school-based – which has allowed us to restart adult sessions as soon as possible. I am biased, but I think Newcastle has been a major success in the region because our membership has skyrocketed.

Since returning, the Northern Counties' beach league is going well and all eyes are on Bridlington for the return of one of the most hotly anticipated beach tournaments on the calendar.

North West, by Phil Chanin

With the pandemic closing volleyball across the region, big shoutouts must be made to clubs and individuals who kept the flame alight.

Frodsham trained under floodlights in the snow. Stockport Volleyball Club ran virtual strength and conditioning sessions. City of Salford ran outdoor sessions. And Adrian and Kaya Stores completed a 'Corona Cycle' to raise money for the Volleyball England Foundation and the NHS.

With volleyball slowly returning, Urmston Grammar and Stockport flew the flag for the North West at the finals of the boys U15s National Championship. Whilst Everton set up summer beach training and competitions at Crosby.

Yorkshire, by Tim Godson

Our biggest achievement has been the success of our juniors. Two training squads were set up and they were due to come together to train under the Yorkshire banner for the Inter Regional

Championships. In the meantime, teams were entered into Volleyball England junior age groups for 19/20 with great success, with teams reaching the last eight for the first time in years. Several of the juniors were successful in being selected to join the England Talent Pathway.

Yorkshire took part in the inaugural Beach Inter Regional Championships in 2019 and is now developing beach training squads. The Yorkshire Series continues to grow and the region hosted UKBT events thanks to Skyball BVC. In sitting volleyball, Sheffield continue to represent Yorkshire.

In total, there are more than 40 volleyball teams competing in the NVL, regional or area leagues.

East Midlands, by Paul Kaerger

As restrictions ease and people are being allowed to play again, something wonderful seems to be happening. I am getting reports from clubs across the regions that the number of juniors turning up to training sessions amongst East Midlands clubs has gone through

the roof. We hope that we can keep this interest going and help create a whole new generation of players.

In terms of adults, people are playing again, whether on grass, beach or indoor, but it is too early to say what the longer-term impact of lockdown has had on players, coaches and volunteers.

At East Midlands, we have some work to do to help our local clubs rebuild and we will be getting in touch with them over the summer to see what help we can provide. This information will help us define our new strategy.

West Midlands

After such a difficult year it has been fantastic to see clubs returning to court, whether that be in a sports hall, on the grass or on sand. Some of those clubs have had their returns bolster by significant grants from Sport England – including Volleyball England’s Club of the Year, Coventry & Warwick Riga, who received £1,600.

As a region, we are working hard with Volleyball England to capitalise on the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham next year.

Eastern, by Frances Balaam

Thanks to our amazing coaches and volunteers, clubs across the region are doing their best to engage with members, from running home workouts to organising outdoor sessions.

There has been a sharp increase in junior participation in the region. The Eastern region will also take part in the upcoming U18 Inter-Regional Beach Volleyball Cup in Cardiff.

To keep the sport going within our region, we hope to increase the number of coaches and referees by running courses when they return. Our biggest challenge is people’s time. We need to find more volunteers to be part of the association to have a bigger

impact on the sport in our area.

South East, John Biddiscombe

Junior volleyball has been thriving in many areas. Clubs across the South East are telling us that existing junior players flocked back when restrictions allowed. Even more encouraging has been the surge in interest from new junior players.

As restrictions on outdoor sport were relaxed, clubs ran outdoor sessions and the beach facilities in the region were popular. Several junior players entered and had success in UKBT events and Worthing beach courts brought UKBT to the town for the first time.

While getting coaches the qualifications necessary to take training sessions is desperately needed to cope with the increased demand, Invicta held an innovative beach coach workshop with Vangelis Koutouleas.

The challenges we face in the coming year are getting existing adult competitions up and running again as well as providing competitive outlets for junior players.

All things considered, there are a lot of positive things happening in the region especially around junior volleyball so a massive thank you to everybody who has worked so hard in difficult circumstances to not only keep the sport going but also grow participation.

South West, by Ron Richards

SWVA has “ticked over” effectively, holding two Executive meetings and the AGM online. The good news is that these have included open sessions with a much larger attendance than normal. These have been informative – looking at coaching drills, competition formats and online tools – and popular. It is likely that we will adopt a mix of face-to-face and online meetings moving forward.

The other good news has been the explosion of demand for junior and adult outdoor sessions coming out of lockdown. Many of our clubs have responded with new programmes and have successfully brought these new players into the game. We hope to see the benefit of this in our local and regional junior competitions next season.

Our regional junior squads trained up to Christmas and it is sad that these players have missed their opportunity to represent the region at the Inter Regional Championships in the last two seasons.

Initial surveys suggest that we should see viable local and regional leagues next season – possibly slightly down on numbers, but hopefully we can build again from there.

As always, a huge vote of thanks to those who give up their time as volunteers to make organised volleyball activity possible.

London, by Gary Beckford

Since lockdown has eased we have found that the community is desperate to get back to playing, even if that means setting up sessions in the park that would have otherwise been indoors.

Like many other regions, London has also experienced a surge in junior volleyball, driven by the continued popularity of the Japanese manga series Haikyu. Competitive opportunities are key to capitalise on that interest and work is underway to explore the possibility of a junior league. In respect of the adult game, plans are progressing for the return of the London League.

One of the challenges going forward is the impact of Brexit and the number of volleyball players that have left the country. We do not yet know where we are at with that.

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Volleyball England is committed to ensuring we comply with Sport England and UK Sport's Code of Governance. The code provides guidance on how to ensure we are open and transparent and that we ensure members and stakeholders can access important information, to improve accountability and stakeholder engagement. For Volleyball England's Annual Governance

Statement, visit: www.volleyballengland.org/about_us/about_us/governance

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