

Inter Regionals 2005 Report

This season's Junior Inter-Regional Championships took place at Loughborough University over the Bank Holiday weekend, 30th April – 2nd May. This event is the culmination of a season of preparation based around the Regional Talent Development Programme (RTDP), under which Region-based training camps take place on the monthly weekends that correspond with National Squads Training. In this manner those talented young volleyball players who have not been selected to attend either Cadet or Juniors camps at National Level still have a tier of representative volleyball to play at, other than the National competitions for their club or school teams.

The 2004-05 programmes saw a fundamental change in emphasis on the girls' side, with a switch in age groups from under 15 and under 17 (which the boys continue to play at) to under 14 and under 16. This process of change was stimulated five years ago by a recognition that whilst the 15 and 17 year old groups functioned well for the boys as the National Junior Squad play internationally at under 19 level, the same is not the case for girls, as international Junior Girls Squads play as under 18s. The girls under 14 tournament was based on each region entering to two teams of 4-a-side on small courts, ensuring more development opportunities for more players: 8 players on court at a time for each region as opposed to 6, and with the smaller courts more rallies were possible. It was a real pleasure to see the younger girls playing technically solid 3-touch volleyball. The ladder of progression through the age groups has therefore now been recognised, and the RTDP fits very well into the concept of being supportive of the developments of a range of junior players, preparing them for entry into the National Squads.

This year saw the introduction of some new concepts to the event. The first noticeable difference was the players parades, which took place on each day. These were occasions promote the spirit of fair play that the tournament endorses, whilst giving the teams a chance to individually be introduced to their peers. At each parade a coach and player stepped forward to shake hands as a gesture of the spirit of the tournament. For the boys parade, England Cadet player Dan Hunter of the South-West under 15s shook the hand of East u15 boys coach Darren Lewis. This pair were to meet again in two memorable matches in the competition, each time the East came out narrowly on top 2-1 in fantastically competitive and skilled encounters. For the girls parade Nara Hasanova of South East u14 girls, and Martin Wain, coach of North region's u17 girls took the hand shake.

The second innovation was the selection of a 'Super 6' for each age group. This meant that 6 players from each age group who had excelled as players were presented with special t-shirts to commemorate their performance. These were selected by event staff, National Squad coaches who were in attendance, and the coaches of the regions.

Each of the four age groups saw some excellent volleyball, with the finals of the under 15 and 17 boys, and under 16 girls going to final set deciders in very tense matches. Presentations were made by Jefferson Williams (Performance Coaching Director) and Carol Gordon (Cadet boys Head Coach) for the boys, and by Craig Handford (EVA Technical Director) and Nick Appleton (England Junior Girls Coach).

Special thanks for the event also go to the team of referees who were supported by a group of 10 members of Loughborough Students Volleyball Club who generously gave up their Bank Holiday weekend. These volunteers were surprisingly easy to entice into helping out... their reason was that most of them had previously played in this competition and loved it so much that they wanted to put something back in. In so doing, they allowed the coaches to concentrate on their coaching, giving the junior players the attention they deserve at such competitions, rather than having to run around moving from coaching to refereeing, back to coaching etc! Particular thanks go to Jon Pennock, Emma Surma and Sarah Palmer who formed the event committee and took specific responsibilities over the weekend.