

English Volleyball Association: Club Links Case Study

*Newcastle (Staffs) Volleyball Club
Madeley High School and feeder Primary Schools, Trentham High School*

This case study is based upon the work of Newcastle (Staffs) Volleyball club who in 2005 celebrated their 25th Anniversary by achieving Clubmark (Volley1). Over the years the club has had a strong association with a number of schools in North Staffordshire and now works in close partnership with Madeley High School (a joint Technology College with the Blackfriars Special School) in North Staffordshire, with the club chairman Colin Roberts also being a Deputy Head teacher at the school, and two other members of staff also serving on the club committee. The club has in 2006 started to develop links with another local school providing weekly evening sessions to pupils at Trentham High School in Stoke-on-Trent.

i. Club Links 'project' focus

The focus of the club link has been between Newcastle (Staffs) Volleyball Club and Madeley High School since 2002, building upon a long-established club with a tradition for developing young players in a number of local schools and strong Key Stage 3 provision of the sport at the school. The 'project' itself has been to provide sustainable Volleyball opportunities for young people in Newcastle-under-Lyme by linking the club to the school.

ii. What were/ are the objectives?

As the relationship between the club and school has developed, the objectives have also evolved. From initially providing out of curriculum opportunities to a group of pupils, a group of highly talented boys emerged, which the club recognised as an opportunity to nurture future players in the sport. Therefore the intensity of involvement in the school increased and in 2005 the under 15 boys team won the National Title.

Throughout 2005 the focus of the school-club link has again shifted to cater for a wider number of children and the club now provides coaching sessions for boys at every age group from under 12 to under 18 (as well as senior teams in the National League) on a weekly basis.

iii. What did you do?

The Club Chairman Colin Roberts is also one of the Deputy Head teachers at the school and through his work the link has been forged over time. Volleyball had been on the school curriculum for a number of years and some informal lunchtime and after-school clubs were run. When members of the senior teams completed coaching qualifications and became available for coaching through being at university and college the opportunity was taken to expand upon this and formally connect the youngsters to the club. The success of these weekly sessions led by the club at the school sports hall led to an increasing sense of identity with the club, and increased interest in Volleyball at the school. Interest in the juniors from the club also increased so that the current situation could develop.

In this manner the development of the school-club link was driven through a relatively small number of key personnel and the fact that there was a 'foot in both camps' was highly beneficial.

iv. What partnerships have been key?

The key partnership has been between the club committee and the school's senior management (Deputy Head Teacher) and Physical Education Department. A relationship of trust and respect has developed during the period of this school-club link so that now that club is well established within the school. A further partnership of importance to the link has been with the company that has become the club's main sponsors, as an initial Sportsmatch contribution helped stimulate the school-club link.

v. How has the work been linked to other programmes/ initiatives?

To help fund the link, the club secured new sponsorship and connected this to the Sportsmatch scheme. In the first year of the link this money helped to fund equipment, coaching fees, trophies

and other costs. By utilising this scheme the club committed to the link for a 12 month period and following this, the link was maintained and developed. The club also bid for an Awards for All grant to support Junior Development and expand the school-club link, however this bid was unsuccessful.

However, the club capitalised upon the English Volleyball Association's ProSport/Sportsmatch scheme by helping to organise a VolleySport training course for around 20 local school teachers, enabling to teach Volleyball with more confidence.

vi. What have been the results?

The results of the link have been fantastic, covering a broad range of achievements for sustainable development. The club's junior section has grown from next to nothing in 2002, to approximately 120 members at present, with individual training sessions for all age and gender groups. Six boys have trained with the England Cadets Squad, a group of 10 boys and girls are part of the Regional Squads of the West Midlands, all National Junior Competitions (u15, u16 and u18) are entered by the club and National Under 15 title won in 2005.

The Volleyball equipment provision at the school has increased and improved in quality through the link, and Volleyball has become very much a part of the culture of the school, with the Volleyball identity implicitly connected to the club.

Club senior squad training sessions have moved to the school through the strength of the school-club link and the junior members of the club provide a large spectator base for the club's National League matches.

vii. What have been the key success factors?

The success of the partnership between school and club has rested upon the openness of both bodies to each other and their recognition of the mutual benefits of such a partnership. Having a senior member of school staff as the Chair of the Club has been the single most important factor in driving this link, but without the support of other key club volunteers who have been prepared to re-arrange their work schedules and social lives to support the work of the club with the school pupils.

viii. What lessons have been learnt?

The main lesson that has been learnt is sustainability. The club has deliberately decided not pursue the possibility of developing further links for fear of stretching itself too thin and not having any quality in the links that it has with schools. What has resulted is a focused school-club link with one secondary school that is now filtering into the feeder primary schools. The school children are familiar with a stable coach who has developed a good coaching relationship with their group, and with the larger whole of the club.