

North West Volleyball Federation

SENIOR VOLLEYBALL

Adult volleyball in the North West is provided by the three Area Associations roughly equivalent to Counties - Lancashire Volleyball Association, Greater Manchester Volleyball Association, and Merseyside Volleyball League. Lancashire has suffered some contraction in recent years, the league now comprises six clubs competing in Area 6-a-side and 4-a-side competitions. Greater Manchester's number has also fallen but the area still supports a men's' division of 7 teams and a women's' division of 8. Merseyside is faring slightly better with 2 men's' divisions of 9 and 8 teams and two women's' divisions of 9 teams. Numbers were up slightly in 2005-6 and it's encouraging to see some new faces coming into the league.

The number of qualified coaches is higher than it has been for some years following courses at I M Marsh (Liverpool) and Alsager College but the refereeing situation continues to be worrying with most national league teams experiencing difficulty in obtaining qualified officials.

SPORTS LINKS

Members of the regional committee attend the North West Governing Bodies Forum and Merseyside County Sports Forum which helps to keep us in touch with wider regional developments on the sports scene. The Cumbria, Lancashire, and Greater Manchester don't have governing body for a at present but some restructuring is taking place to make the county approach more consistent and Cheshire will be the first to follow Merseyside and introduce a governing body forum. Little has come from the regional forum (except information and good contacts in other sports), but a pilot volleyball development programme for Liverpool primary schools was agreed with the Merseyside County Group. Local links are generally more important and the region has good examples of links between clubs and local authorities and developing links with schools, often driven by initiatives from specialist sports colleges (some examples are given below).

JUNIOR VOLLEYBALL

The regional committee in the North West is constituted as a federation of the three Area Associations and takes on the main junior development role for the whole region. We provide competitive outlets for junior regional teams in all age groups and run junior development squads for U15 and U17 boys and U14 and U16 girls. These begin in September/ October at County level where open sessions are held to recruit players to county training squads. Regular training and competition get the players ready for regional selection in March ready to represent the North West in the EVA Inter-Regional Championships in May. This system currently works better for girls than boys as the region's consistently good performance at Inter-regional level shows - North West has won 6 of the last 7 U16/U17 girls inter-regionals and 4 of the last 7 U14s/ U15s. The number of schools playing boys volleyball at competitive level has fallen making it difficult to recruit players for county and regional squads. This is a problem the region must try to address in the 2006-7 season.

COMPETITIONS

Our 2005-6 programme offered 10 competitions for different age groups. Entry was restricted to our 'satellite' county training groups in three of the competitions but the others were open to all and widely advertised. Teams from 11 different schools or clubs in the North West and North East took part in one or more of these junior competitions. One competition is yet to be held. We are planning a large indoor and outdoor multi-age-group junior tournament to be held at Cheshire County Sports Club on June 24th. The tournament has been registered with the EVA and we hope for an entry of around 80 teams in 5 age groups.

Minor competitions were held in school sports facilities which can be provided free but the bigger competitions were held in sports halls and incur higher costs. A significant part of our junior development grant from the EVA goes into supporting this competition structure.

PILOT EVA JUNIOR REFEREES COURSE

The course was held at Whitby High School on February 4th. We organised it in conjunction with Denis Le Breuille - Director of referees' development for the EVA - and ran it alongside our North West U13 Championships, the mini-volley competition providing a basis for the practical refereeing sessions. Twenty-two 14 to 16 year olds took part; all the candidates, four boys and eighteen girls passed the theory exam, with one candidate achieving Distinction (95%+) and eight passing with Merit (90%+). The course was a pilot for a new junior referees award course being developed for the EVA and will be the first part of an EVA Junior Referee Award Scheme which the EVA plan to launch for next academic year.

OTHER JUNIOR DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Several promising new local volleyball initiatives have developed during the 2005-6 season, not driven by NWVF action but supported by it and by members of the NWVF Junior Development Committee.

- A junior volleyball club aimed at Macclesfield and Knutsford schools and linked to Knutsford Volleyball Club has been running since October 2005. It has been very successful maintaining a weekly attendance of around 25, and has organised a local competition and entered teams in regional competitions at U13 and U14 levels.
- A Sports College initiative on Merseyside (Wirral) based on an Awards for All Grant has been extremely successful providing in-curriculum coaching at 7 schools and helping to generate interest among both staff and pupils in joining local clubs. After school clubs are running at 3 of the schools and several players have been recruited into the Merseyside junior county training squads.
- A Liverpool based primary school initiative developed with the help of the County Sports Forum and a Liverpool School Sports organisation failed to get off the ground as it proved impossible to get youngsters to travel to a central venue. A successful junior tournament was run with support from the NWVF but no follow-up has been possible.
- There are currently opportunities for some junior development activity in schools in North Liverpool, Widnes, St Helens and Southport. These areas should be identified as targets for development in our junior development grant bid for 2006/7.

ALAN BELL

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