

## **English Volleyball Association: Club links Case Study**

### *Nunthorpe Volleyball Club*

*Nunthorpe School, Acklam Grange School, Kader Primary, Acklam Whin Primary, The Avenue Primary*

This case study highlights the work, links and development of Nunthorpe Eagles Volleyball Club which is working on the final aspects to achieve Clubmark (Volley 1). The club is supported by Nunthorpe Community School, and has developed very strong links with Kader, The Avenue and Acklam Whin Primary Schools, and Nunthorpe and Acklam Grange Secondary schools. Information is shared with Redcar & Cleveland, and Middlesbrough Sports Development teams. The club moved to Nunthorpe approximately 15 years ago, after finding other venues too expensive. The school negotiated a price that allowed us to develop. The club at this stage was filled with a group of older people that played at a very low level, in terms of skill, knowledge and qualified personnel. We decided that it needed to change if we wanted to develop as players, as a club, and still be in existence in 10 years time. There was already a link with Nunthorpe and Acklam Grange Schools with Martin Wain being a teacher at Acklam, and the staff at Nunthorpe who we had negotiated with. The club wrote a long term development plan in the early 1990's, the aims were varied:

- To develop qualified coaches and referees.
- To win promotion through the local leagues, to have 1 team in the NE Premier league. (At that time we had two teams in the lowest local division). This was extended later with a view to developing National league sides.
- To start junior volleyball in local schools that would link into our club.
- Our development plan allowed us to access junior volleyballs from the North of England Association.

#### **i. Club Links 'project' focus**

The club wrote a long term development plan in the early 1990's, the aims were varied but out of which was born the school-club links focus: to start junior volleyball in local schools, which would link into our club. Our development plan allowed us to access junior volleyballs from the North of England Association.

#### **ii. What were/ are the objectives?**

The main aim of the project was to develop volleyball in the schools. We felt that although we could develop a junior section at the club, volleyball as a sport in the area would never develop. The schools/ club link would also then become so much stronger.

#### **iii. What did you do?**

One of the reasons schools do not have volleyball in their curriculum is because there is a lack of competition at any level. One of the first things we did was to organize and run an outdoor junior tournament. This has become an annual event, one which has been duplicated on a local beach, and we have 200+ juniors competing at each venue, each year. We also helped to run CSLA & teacher coaching courses for staff in our local schools & for local police who wanted to help coach in the schools. Another huge change was that the club arranged other separate training sessions specifically for juniors & gained funding to make the hall into more than a 1 court venue.

#### **iv. What partnerships have been key?**

The club has developed many partnerships throughout the project. The longer we have worked with our partners, the more commitment we have had. Sports Development teams (Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland) listened to our plans initially, but only really paid us lip service, as there was little if any junior volleyball around, and I think they expected us to just disappear as fast as we had started. After 2 years of our plan when they could see the number of participants increasing considerably they began to give us real exposure. We are now a body they recognize, help and promote, and they often ask our coaches to help at events they organize.

Partnerships with the local schools have also been a key factor. Acklam Grange School developed extra-curricular volleyball & began to enter teams in the local leagues, but also helped to develop their players by bringing them to the club. Nunthorpe school, although on a lesser level have followed the same pattern. The most significant factor was that Martin Wain went into some of the local Primary schools on a regular basis and took after school volleyball sessions. This has become our strongest partnership now, with 4 of our Primary schools attending a Friday after school session every week, with many of these pupils attending the Sunday junior training session at the club.

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

The project initially worked very closely with the local police, as Dave McManus being a policeman & interested in promoting a positive police/child relationship, saw our project as an excellent way forward. He helped us train police & staff, and had police working for 2 years in schools in Middlesbrough. Although this has since ceased, due to a large police turnover, and changes in emphasis with the Chief Inspectors, what it did do was to create a huge interest in the sport which continues still, and Dave McManus has become a major part of the club.

We have worked with NEVA and Tees Valley Volleyball associations by helping them to run Gifted and Talented days which have been a huge success.

The project was one of the key factors in enabling Tees Valley to employ the first Community Coach this year, through the English Volleyball Association's volleyball in the community initiative. He is developing the sport throughout the area, feeding children into all the local clubs.

**vi. What have been the results?**

Our club must now be one of the biggest clubs in England as far as membership and participation in National events is concerned. We achieved all of our aims in our first development plan within two years, and now run 6 teams in the local leagues, and our National league mens side is becoming one of the strongest in M3N. We are hoping to run a women's team very soon. All our teams contain many juniors, and our National League team must be the youngest in the League by a long way. The pathway for our juniors is very clear and strong, and the development of juniors through the links takes them from 9 or 10 years old right through to National honours. Andrew Sinclair now playing for England and professionally in Sweden is our most obvious success story, but many of our older juniors have moved away with jobs/ universities etc and continue to play at a high level throughout the country. Many have or hold key volleyball responsibilities in a large number of Universities.

Volleyball is now taught throughout Key Stage 3 and 4 in three local secondary schools, and taught in extra curricular time in local Primary Schools.

All of our juniors of the respective ages have and are involved in the North training squads and 2 boys are training with the England Cadets. All of our sixth formers train and play for their sixth forms with 3 of the girls and 4 of the boys being selected for the GB Colleges teams.

**vii. What have been the key success factors?**

The key success factors are the empowerment of teaching staff in schools, to enable them to see the value of this tremendous sport, linking them with the club, and the participation of so many young juniors in competitive volleyball.

**viii. What lessons have been learnt?**

It is a slow process to begin with when human resources are difficult to find at the times when you need them. Not to lose faith when parts of the project become difficult. Many early seeds that you sow develop in a different way than you initially had planned, but this can be a bonus. Working closely with partners can seem pointless (especially as it's not football) but over time, some of the hardest people to convince turn out to be your best allies.

A project develops over time, and as it develops you will need more people involved. Many of the parents who dropped off their children, started to stay and participate, and have become members of the club, taking coaching courses and roles within the club themselves. This has provided many of the extra personnel that we needed.

Schools are very difficult to influence, and there is a need to get a member of staff to see the value of this sport. It is a hard sport to teach in the beginning compared to football or cross country, and they need to have the right equipment. Using adult balls blown up really hard, or cheap plastic balls will put children off forever. Giving them access to good equipment is essential.