

## **PLAYING DIRECTOR**

I was asked to stand as Playing Director last year, to help out. This meant that there was a new Playing Director and new President of Competitions, and vacancies for Beach and Performance Presidents. All in the one business area.

It became a full and eventful year.

**In Performance** I was grateful to Steve Williams for agreeing to act as President. It was a “quiet” year in many ways, awaiting the advent of the outcome and impact of Whole Sport Plan, but work is now under way in many areas which will hopefully support, enhance and improve our performance programme.

Performance will be looking to the national squads to plan, agree and publish rolling two year activity plans. This should provide greater information for all, and help player – and NS staff – make firmer commitments way ahead of time.

Coach and staff appointment processes are being reviewed and the next cycle of appointments will hopefully see greater transparency, accountability and support for the appointees, who are all unpaid volunteer appointments.

I would also hope that the NS programme would be able to communicate and market more effectively with the volleyball membership as a whole. They are “our” national squads, and we should support them, in many ways. Yes, go to matches and support the teams. But I would also hope that coaches would want to go along to NS sessions, help out, and develop their own learning and understanding of performance volleyball. Good practice and skills development can be gained.

Coaches could also ensure that talented players are advised to NS coaching staff, and update on progress made by players if NS has seen them previously. Communication and dialogue.....

The World Championships Round One European Group A for men and women were held in Sheffield in January, and occupied three months of my time. A great event, hopefully enjoyed by many, and did volleyball a lot of good in many spheres.

TV coverage was good, with over twenty hours broadcast on Sky. Both England men and women played well, in their debuts at this level. The men won to qualify for the second round. The women had the opportunity to gauge where they are compared to some other European nations that we would not normally play against.

The Sports Minister thoroughly enjoyed his Saturday evening with us, and praised the event in the subsequent weeks to DCMS, Sport England and IOC colleagues!

The event also attracted a sell out crowd on the Saturday. Just under one thousand people were in the EIS Sheffield to watch the Scotland – England games. A fantastic atmosphere, enjoyed by the players, spectators and viewers. So thanks to all who came.

And special thanks to those volunteers who worked so hard at the event to make it all happen so well.

In **Beach**, I asked Mark Kontopoulos to act as President. Mark came from working with British Universities volleyball and has good experience and knowledge of beach.

Again a quite time over the winter, but Mark has been working hard making contact with many beach event organisers and enthusiasts to try to put life back into an EVA Beach Circuit.

Much work remains to be done to build this hugely popular and opportune version of the game, but Mark has made good progress and we will hopefully see a co-ordinated ranking points system introduced this season, and more beyond.

Events are being supported, and I know that Mark's hard work has brought at least four or five more event opportunities for beach volleyball. Beach coaching is developing and we must plan to have an influx of new, young players for the future.

Again I have asked Mark to develop a plan for the next two years that we can work towards fulfilling. As ever, anyone wanting to help..... need only ask!

**Competitions** Commission provided the mainstay of the association with the many and varied events. Particular reference should, perhaps, be made of the Inter Regional Championships where a re-vamped format proved very popular.

There was some controversy in the National League and I wont dwell on issues other than to remind colleagues, once again, that rules and processes are in place for a reason. And if we all read and adhered to them then there may be fewer issues. That said, some sensitive lessons learned by many and hopefully improved processes as an outcome.

It is pleasing to note that the efforts of the Competition Commission sees a 10% increase in teams for next season. A very positive message embracing increasing participation, the key theme of the Whole Sport Plan.

And in that WSP vein, I would remind all that participation and enjoyment is key. Not just for players, but coaches, administrators and volunteers who give up their time to help run and develop the sport. Lets thank them, show them support and appreciation, work with them to help us all, and most importantly help them by volunteering to help out!

**Lenny Barry**  
**EVA Playing Director**