

SUFFOLK UNDER14 BADMINTON SQUAD REPORT 2019/20

The 2019/20 Squad comprised 11 girls and 9 boys, age breakdown as follows:-

U14 [born 2007] 5 x girls, 5 x boys

U13 [born 2008] 2 x girls, 3 x boys

U12 [born 2009] 2 x girls, 2 x boys

U11 [born 2010] 1 x girl

meaning that the youngest Squad covers a wider range of ages than the older groups.

The effect of the reduced numbers of junior clubs and schools input has been noticeable for many years now, resulting in fewer players to invite to Squad sessions and an initial decrease in the level of experience of those available overall (especially as recent age group changes meant that players were effectively a year younger – not all clubs can accommodate the very young ones). However, some very strong players have also been among those recruited. As ever, I re-iterate my requests to coaches, parents and teachers to recommend players who they feel would be keen to take up the opportunity to get involved with their County, and thank those who have put names forward.

Training Sessions

The final session of the season was cancelled because of Covid 19, so Singles Ladder winners Kayleigh Williams and Daniel Cook have yet to be presented with the engraved trophies. Of the 11 sessions held, attendances of the 20 original members ranged from 4 to 11, an average of 7.8 per player (2 out of 2 for a new recruit, born 2008). Reasons for non-attendance related to injury / illness / tournament entry / family commitments.

Training sessions include a mix of routines and exercises/footwork, singles ladder games in a variety of formats (from 1 game to 11, no extension, through to best of 3 to 21 with extension) and pairs practice both for Shires/friendly matches and for players entering BE or local doubles events – positioning, movement, communication with partner. Players are given the opportunity whenever possible to play some whole-court singles, as this can be difficult to accommodate in club sessions because of insufficient court time/space. We also work on mixed doubles as again this is not always possible in club or other coaching situations. We work to improve players' knowledge of the laws of badminton with constant reminders, and usually run a quiz on the laws at least once during the season. Feedback from matches etc (what went right as well as what went wrong) helps to reinforce messages about many of the basics – keeping score, hitting spaces and choosing the right shot to do so, the importance of good footwork, applying to the game the lessons learned through coaching/training, keeping cool under pressure and being focussed until the final shot in the rally – so easy to work really hard to get into a good position but not make a winning shot because of a lapse in concentration. We get players to observe games and record whether points were won – or lost – to remind them of the need to cut out unforced errors.

Shires League

We were able to complete all our fixtures – results as follows:-

Lost to Middlesex and Essex 6:14; to Bucks 8:12; to Herts (1) 3:17, Kent 7-13, Norfolk 5-15.

For several years now, Cambs, Beds and Northants have not put out teams in this age group, meaning that we have some strong, and/or distant Counties from which to choose 6 to play. In addition to those listed above, this year's selection included Surrey, Sussex, Lincs, Leics, Notts, Warks and Yorks, all of which the youngest Squad has played against at least once in past seasons since I took the Squad on (also Derbyshire, for a play-off place) – the other choices included counties in the south west, on the south coast, and as far north as Northumberland. Full result details are available on the Shires League website, from which it can be seen that there were several good performances despite the overall match results.

Although we lost more than 50% of the rubbers which went to best of three, in some cases, winning more of these, and other close matches, would have made a significant improvement to the resulting score lines – for example, the Kent result would have become a Suffolk win if we had been able to pick up all 4 of the best of 3 matches.

As well as skills and movement, fitness and stamina play an important part in matches, also retaining focus and keeping a cool head, all of which come with commitment and competitive experience, so it has been pleasing to see a good number of Squad players entering, and frequently performing well in, local and BE tournaments this season.

Team selection is based on a combination of attention to BE and local tournament results, BE gradings/rankings and the results of the Singles Ladder games, while taking the opportunity to give competitive experience to newer Squad members, particularly where players 3-5 are close in ability and can be rotated – not always possible where players 1-4 are considerably ahead of the others, hence the need to arrange as many other matches as possible, not an easy task when trying to avoid clashes with other events.

Other matches and events

Unfortunately I was unable to enter any pairs in the October Leicestershire Schools Invitation Doubles event (U12s – School Year 7 and below) which we have been invited to over many years, as in 2019 the date coincided with the weekend of the Suffolk age group tournaments, in which there was a very good entry from U14 Squad members.

However, Storm Ceira did not prevent our friendly match v Essex from going ahead in Colchester. The result was a 9½ - 8½ win for Essex, and a pleasing aspect of this match was that we won 4 of the 7 rubbers which went to best of 3. We were intending to have a similar level return match, being good experience for the younger players, but this is on hold because of Covid 19. We were able to play a friendly at home just before lockdown, against Norfolk, losing 9 -13 with Suffolk winning 3 of the 6 which went to best of 3. A provisional friendly against Hertfordshire and an away return against Norfolk (both regular summer fixtures in the Under 14 calendar, which took place in summer 2019) are also on hold.

All Squad members (other than 3 younger players, 2 of whom were selected but unable to play because of health-related problems) played in at least one match during the season, most in 2 or more. The younger players U13-U11, all of whom except 1 girl did not play any Shires games, would hopefully have had the chance, and might still be able, to play in further friendlies before the start of “next” season and it is hoped that it will be possible at some date to run the “end-of-season” U11 and U13 competitions for players born in, at school in, or resident in, Suffolk.

And to conclude -

As referred to in my Junior Committee report, there are moves afoot to change the way in which the Squads operate, and at this point in time I am not expecting to be part of any new arrangements, other than to help out in the transition period, and possibly to be involved in the U11/U13 competitions and/or pre-season friendlies, which I am happy to do. There is also the continuing uncertainty around social distancing rules, age group changes and so on, which will be the subject of further information in due course. In the meantime, my thanks go to Darryl, Louise, Glenn and Terry for their commitment and support over very many years, and to the many other coaches who have helped at various times including recently, Ben Williams who in addition to providing coaching at Shires Matches and valuable feedback, also sourced the Squad shirts for the season at the previous year's price, much appreciated, also thank you to Adrian Cook for his practical help, especially at matches.

Thank you for all the family support, especially for getting players to training and attending matches, providing refreshments, and supporting local tournaments as well as those further afield. I have enjoyed working with the younger players, hopefully encouraging them to build a Suffolk team spirit, take up coaching opportunities, enter tournaments and to play and enjoy the game at whatever level – socially, club, County – and higher! It has also been good to see that the younger players can improve rapidly from a lower base, and that as they become the players at the ‘top end’ and are the ones to beat, this can encourage and inspire the less experienced in their turn.

Best wishes to you all for the forthcoming season, whenever and wherever that may be.

Linda Sheppard Under 14 Squad Manager and Coach

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