

To: The Members of Chelmsford Hockey Club

From: David Ireland, Chair of Junior Section

Date: 25 June 2020

Re: 19/20 Season Report for Junior Section

This is my first report as Chair for the Junior Section, and I have some boots to fill following the great contributions Kitch and Kathryn made over the past years. I hope we have continued to drive the Junior Section following their strategic desire for the Junior Section to be the breeding ground that supplies the future lifeblood of the club.

On the Field

We had 233 active junior members this season, so a very healthy membership.

Again many of those 13 and up played for senior teams, although on the boys side we have a severe lack of players at U18 and the top end of the U16 year group. There was a noticeable impact on the clubs' senior sides, particularly compared with last season after a strong year group left for university. It is hard to take short term measures to address this, as the root cause has been apparent in that age group for 4 or 5 years now.

We are however taking several specific steps to try and improve this structurally, starting with specific initiatives at primary school level to encourage boys to come along and enjoy hockey; through plans to extend the "academy" training for the strongest players in Year 7 to higher years to continue to stretch them and ensure the club is the focus of their development; and on to ensuring selection for senior sides is co-ordinated across teams, based on merit, to ensure junior players (whose ability is likely to change most rapidly) play at the right level.

Turning to each age group, notes below drawn largely from the lead coaches / managers of each group.

U16/18 Boys

Trained as a combined group, due to numbers (see above). Plenty of Training, thanks to Jonny Sloman. Boys represented throughout Club during Season.

U16 Girls

A difficult season, but a good one. We had to overcome not having a regular GK and struggled to put two squads out for EHB. But the girls trained regularly and played positive competitive hockey throughout. In a memorable game we beat St Albans while playing without a GK and qualified for regional finals; where the girls performed very creditably.

Separately, we entered an U18/16G youth team in Division 2 of the Essex Indoor League for the first time. The girls progressed significantly, only losing their first game, and finished third. A creditable position when the first two games had had to be conceded as we had no GK.

Finally, particular thanks go to Emily Salter, the U14G GK, who played in many of the outdoor games and as GK for the indoor squad as well.

U14 Boys

A very integrated U14 boys squad with great camaraderie and sense of teamship.

Solid performances throughout the season with highlight being the game against Old Southendians

Great experience for many boys to be able to attend Copperbox and play in an indoor tournament. It was a great day out and the team came runners up in the plate.

Finally, we were very lucky to have Tom Steingold as a junior coach. He was a great example to the younger boys by being both a highly skilled player but a responsible, reliable and mature member of the management team.

U14 Girls

The U14 girls were an absolute pleasure to coach. Lots of fun but hard work along the way and huge improvements across the board! Incredibly proud of all that they achieved!!!

Must have been one of the biggest groups across the junior age groups, so really grateful to have had Ollie, Annabel & Mollie helping!!

U12 Boys

Good participation but a difficult season. The A team was out of its depth playing in the Essex League, but we stuck with it as the standard to aspire to, rather than accept the lower standard in the North League.

U12 Girls

We have had a great season- running 3 teams and players really developing well.

Highlight was winning the In2Hockey tournament convincingly. We had qualified for East Tournament and I was excited to see if we could have gone onto Nationals!

U10 Boys

Was a very tricky start to the season to be able to get the numbers for a team and so tournaments were tough.

As season progressed we picked up some new players and grew in confidence and by the end of the season we were winning all our games and keeping a clean sheet in North League and put in a very respectable performance in the In2hockey tournament at Redbridge which was composed of teams in the league above us. We even beat Old Loughts!

U10 Girls

Essex U10G Champions in the In2Hockey England Hockey tournament.

Beat Canterbury at the Copper Box Indoor tournament!!

Regularly put out 3 teams at tournaments with the whole squad developing a great style of play over the season

U8 (mixed)

Under 8's highlight is the number of participants every week, usually 40+, largely thanks to Kitch but also the army of helpers.

Schools development

The club was again active in arranging coaching into local primary schools to promote hockey and encourage club membership.

Schools supported were:

- Beehive - 6 weeks x 2 classes x 30 kids
- Moulsham - 12 weeks x 4 classes x 30 kids
- Mildmay - 6 weeks x 4 classes x 30 kids
- Bishops - 6 weeks x 2 classes x 30 kids

We fund 50% of the above and the School Sports Partnership pays for the other 50%

After School clubs at Moulsham for 2 terms and Mildmay for one - paid for by parents

Maltese Road coaching (which was going to be paid for by them) took place for 3 weeks only because of lockdown

Boys coaching at St Cedds was set up and Ian Hull ready to start but lockdown put a stop to that. (Generally we focus our school outreach on local state schools. But it is very clear that the strongest junior clubs, particularly for boys, are those with strong links with local hockey-playing schools, which are most commonly private schools. Witness in particular Braintree, Saffron Walden and Bishop's Stortford and Hertford. So this link with St Cedds had an element of "if you can't beat them, join them". Hopefully we'll be able to pick this up again.)

Hockey Heroes

We ran our first two sessions of 8-week long Hockey Heroes sessions. We are pioneers of this new initiative from England Hockey, aimed at providing an accessible transition into hockey for the youngest age groups. We had over 50% transition from the first Hockey Heroes into full club membership. (The second lot of sessions were stopped after 4 weeks due to lockdown but hopefully we can finish these at some point this summer.)

Off the Field

Starting from the end - Coronavirus

It's hard not to start this part of my report at the end, such has been the recent impact of Coronavirus and the consequent country-wide lock-down. I'm noting this with optimism that this report will soon become a historical record of a time passing quickly into the past, and we are planning towards next season full of optimism that hockey life can get back to normal, even if not everything in life does.

The season continued as normal, and reports of a virus spreading in China still seemed like boring old news, not something that was going to affect our day-to-day lives. Through February it began to look like this was indeed going to have an impact. As restrictions tightened, we tried not to overreact and unduly deprive the juniors of play, so we able to continue training up to and including Sunday 15 March.

But that was our lot.

The following Sunday, 22 March, we were due to host 54 7-a-side teams (so with subs well over 400 children) at the finals day of the North Essex League for under 10s and under 12s, with our four A teams in those age groups playing away at the Essex League finals day. It was a huge disappointment, as the cancellation was so late that a lot of the organising effort was done, the kids

were hugely looking forward to it, and we also lost out on what is a very lucrative day for the popular tea hut.

With the continuing lock down, we also had to cancel the scheduled two-day Easter holding camp, Friday evening summer hockey training (which usually runs Fridays 6-9pm through the summer school term) and perhaps most disappointingly the visit of Zevenbergen hockey club for our annual exchange tour.

Spencer Wilcox

I would also like to note the very untimely passing of Spencer Wilcox. Spence was a great support to me personally and even in my short time of being involved with the club his contribution was huge and will be sorely missed. It is warming to be able to report that the entire junior section paid their respects to Spence with an impeccably respected minute's silence during their next training sessions.

Thanks, thanks and more thanks

The Junior Section takes an absolute army of volunteers to keep everything going. They range from club stalwarts to willing new parents who have never set foot on a hockey pitch (or not since their school days anyway – and they form a rich seam of Back-to-Hockey-ers, a path I recently took myself).

Each age group has one or more managers co-ordinating arrangements, an experienced lead coach, and several assistant coaches, usually parents within group. Across the 11 age groups that's over 40 people helping out. Plus the parents running the clubhouse tea and bacon rolls, and the weekly volunteers helping out, the Junior Committee co-ordinating courses, welfare and much more.

On behalf of all the Juniors currently benefitting, and the club whose future the volunteers are helping to build and secure, I thank all of these individuals and find it quite amazing what they all achieve.