

Report on the Junior Section 2021/22 - Chair of Juniors, Sally Dalton

Following a disrupted 2020/21 season, after which many sports have struggled to see their numbers return to normal, it has been fantastic to see strong growth in our junior section. Junior membership has grown 20% with increases continuing to come through in the U8s, and U10 and U12 girls' sections, but also more unusually amongst the U10 and U14 boys' groups. Although not something we ever want to do, we have had to maintain a waiting list for certain groups (U10 and U12 girls) for the first time to ensure we are not overcrowded and that we can continue to offer quality hockey. This is something we hope to resolve next season. Along with increasing numbers, of course, comes the need for more volunteers and I am really pleased we have had so many parents step up to coach and manage, and teenagers who help coach the U8s and umpire matches. The club could simply not operate without these people who give up their time week after week for our children and for the future of our club and sport.

It has also been a real pleasure to see so many of our juniors playing competitive hockey again after the disruption of the previous 2 seasons. With our increased numbers we have managed to field several additional teams in a whole range of leagues across the region. Well done to all the juniors playing in their teams this year – we have seen such improvement over the season. England Hockey trialled a new league structure into which we entered our older age groups and U12 girls' academy team. Congratulations goes to the U16 and U14 girls for winning their leagues. Despite these wins we hope that these leagues will improve next season with more matches and less travel time involved. Congratulations also goes to the U10 boys' academy who made it through to the In2hockey regional finals narrowly missing out on a podium place.

No less than twenty children from the club aged between 12 and 17 were selected to play for Essex this season with a further 10 being selected for England Hockey's Performance Centre (U15-U17). Jess Tuff (U15), Lily Sokhi (U17) and Ben Wheadon (U15) were all selected from their Performance Centre to represent Saxon Tigers (South and East England) at the England Hockey Futures Cup. The tournament sees the best juniors from 6 different regions across England, Scotland and Wales compete against each other in a cup format. Jess's team won the U15 girls final, Ben's U15 boys' team narrowly lost out in the final, 2-3 on shuffles, and Lilly's U17 girls team won their play-off match to come 5th. Congratulations to everyone selected.

In addition to our Sunday activities the junior section has run two successful camps again this year, launched a training kit which creates a great club look and feel on a Sunday, continues to offer Friday night summer hockey and ran a really fun Club day alongside the senior club. As well as being great activities to get involved in, all of these have raised much needed funds for the club. Thank you to everyone who helped to make these go so smoothly as well, of course, to all parents who ran the tea hut over the season which is also an important fundraiser.

Next season will see us make some changes to improve the junior club further. These include changing training times and slots to be able to accommodate more players. We are incorporating a beginner group into the under 8s that will run in a similar format to the popular Hockey Heroes programme. We are hoping to offer booster sessions to children in the U12 group not getting hockey in school and plan to work towards England Hockey's 'Talent Centre' accreditation. We are also keen to run more social events throughout the season as well as reinstate the annual exchange with our Dutch friends at the Zevenbergen club next summer.

A final huge thank you to all volunteers who make junior hockey possible in Chelmsford and to help run one of the biggest hockey clubs in the region. It has been a very successful season and here's looking to an even better one in 2022/23.