

Chairman's Report AGM May 2019

Every year that I have been Chair of Wiltshire Squash has provided its own challenges and the last 12 months have been no different. It's always interested me that voluntary organisations like ourselves are able to achieve so much given the limited amount of time that most of us have to commit to the work required. It is of enormous credit to the committee that we are able to achieve what we do and, although we would all acknowledge that we would like to achieve more, there can be no doubt as to the commitment to squash both in Wiltshire and beyond.

Following on from the last AGM there were, in my view, 2 significant challenges that were facing us in the year ahead. The first of these, and something we had been debating as a committee for several years, involved the accreditation as England Squash (ES) members of all those playing team squash within the county. There were 2 reasons for this, firstly to support ES by way of the membership fees and receive the biggest of rebates available from them based upon their qualifications for this rebate, secondly to ensure that everyone playing in teams were covered by the insurance policy offered as part of the ES membership. There have, sometimes quite rightly, been those who have questioned what ES offer for being a member, there can be no doubt that the insurance is a benefit of significant value at a cost that is unlikely to be matched within the open market.

As often can be the case, despite the odd exception the challenges we anticipated never really materialised. These odd exceptions were dealt with in a courteous and, I feel, a firm but fair manner and thanks especially go to Neil Marshman in initially dealing with the odd objection and being diligent in the application of the rule throughout the season.

The second of the challenges was to consider the ongoing make-up of the committee going forward given that I had only committed 2 years as Chair when I was asked to come back. Again the challenge didn't, in the end, prove as onerous as we initially thought it might be and this is simply down to the quality of the names that were brought forward as recommendations and the willing acceptance of those 2 individuals to consider, and accept, the ongoing challenge that will be faced over the next few years. Subject to the ratification of this meeting I'm firmly of the view that John Jeffery and Nick Hartley, coming into the set up as Chair and Vice Chair, will bring enormous value to the committee and to squash in Wiltshire.

Just before our scheduled committee meeting in September we were thrown a 3rd significant challenge with Dax Mellor given notice that he wished to step down from his role as Junior Development and Co-ordinator. During his time in the position the Junior set up within the county had gone from very little to embracing a wide number of young people in a number of locations and the challenge of replacing him wasn't an appealing one. Neil Marshman and Simon Williams offered to step in with a view to, at the very least, consolidating the position, and although Simon will be the first to accept he hasn't been able to support as he had initially hoped, the fact that Neil and he immediately put their names forward was vital. Since the turn of the year Neil has done a terrific job in continuing with the work that Dax was doing and attached to my report is a brief summary from Neil as to what has been going on recently. By way of this meeting I would like to formally thank Neil for all his efforts with the Juniors, it

has been a sterling effort and one for which we should all be grateful. We have already started to see the fruits of the labours with the entering of a junior side from Marlborough in Div 3 during the 2nd half of the season, and winning that division.

Dax stepped down because he was needing to find time to commit to the increasing demands of the new complex at Broome Manor. You will see a brief update from him as to where that project currently sits and, although things are behind where it was hoped to be at this stage, there are some positive signs and this very exciting development still appears to be achievable. Given the fact that we, as a county, face threats to courts partly through the Leisure Centre connections that we have, the Broome Manor project is very important to us and needs to have our 100% support. I have re-assured Dax that the committee will be available for whatever they feel they need and it is to be hoped that the timescales that Dax refers to do come to fruition. And as far as the juniors are concerned, we owe Dax and his team a significant vote of thanks with regards to how the junior side came on up until him stepping down.

The purpose behind providing the meeting with supplementary reports is to summarise some of the county activity outside of this report and give a chance for these reports to be reviewed before this meeting. Those who have provided the reports will answer any questions you have shortly however I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those who play in their respective teams week in week out. On the whole there are very few problems in that matches are almost always played in a fair spirit recognising that we are playing, yes for the pleasure of winning our respective matches, but on the whole more for the pleasure of getting out every week and the social aspect that this brings. You are all to be complimented on this and encouraged to continue to enjoy everything that you bring to your weekly matches.

Dean has reported separately on the inter county sides. Many of you are aware that the inter county structure changed last year which resulted in us not entering as many sides which, as you will see from the accounts, has saved us some money. ES believe that the new format will encourage greater overall participation in the competition and that it will promote pride in representing your county, I think the jury might still be out, especially taking Dean's comments into account but, to their credit, ES realised that the previous structure wasn't working and that it needed attending to.

Some 4 to 5 years ago the committee put together a County Development Plan which enabled them to give focus to an agreed agenda of issues, some short term, others much more long term. A number of the actions have been completed in that time, some haven't, as a result I have updated the plan in readiness for this meeting, not to be discussed but for the new committee to take forward from now. It's not an all embracing document in that there will no doubt be areas that the committee will wish to add and maybe take out but it does provide a useful roadmap of those matters which are maybe of most importance over the next couple of years. Again, some of them are more short term than others. If as a non-committee member you would like a copy of this please let me know and I'll arrange for you to receive a copy.

Since the last AGM negotiations have been ongoing with the powers that be at the Defence Academy which has resulted in teams being allowed back onto the base over a gradual period. This should see all of their sides back there from September, this is very welcome news. The issues that caused a breakdown in the relationship are a

reminder to us that we need to protect and be respectful of all the facilities we have, both private, military and leisure centre based, and that we need to ensure we bring whatever pressure to bear that we can when we hear of any potential threats. I'm aware that more courts, following on from those at Cricklade that are due to close any time now, maybe under threat of being removed. As a result, both squash and racketball within the county need to be promoted so that all of the courts that we have are being used to their maximum.

The relationship between ES and the counties still causes concern despite efforts to create a meaningful working relationship. CAN, the County Association Network, are continuing their efforts to engage with ES and get ES to delve more deeply into the skills and experience base that the counties have and the recent election of 3 people onto the ES executive with significant county experience should help, however ES, despite their attempts, continue to please and frustrate in equal measure and still don't, in my view, do all they can to assist with participation. And it is participation that Sport England are most concerned with when awarding grants etc. At least the ES meetings have become more focused in engaging with the county delegates rather than being a "talking to" shop. Communication is key, from all sides, which is part of what Dean referred to in his report on the inter counties.

That's almost me done. My thanks go to my fellow committee members for their commitment and support over these second 2 years that I have had as Chair, it has been a pleasure and privilege to serve. I believe that I am leaving my role with the committee in very good hands and in a good place to deal with the issues that face the sport here in Wiltshire over the next few years.

Finally, a special thank you to Clive Morgan, who has acted as Treasurer for, well I'm sure he'll know how long, but it's got to be at least 15 years. Clive tells us every year that it's not an onerous role but his care and attention to the money, as well as his input to the committee over his time of service, has been invaluable. He is standing down now and he does so with all of our thanks for his efforts over the years. Ben Taylor has offered to be his replacement and I'm sure he will also prove to be a valuable addition should you ratify his nomination shortly.

So as I hand over the reins can I, as I hope I always have done, encourage you all to enjoy your squash and your racketball and may you all treasure the game and those who play. We are colleagues and opponents but, most of all, we are friends sharing what is still recognised as one of the most complete sports that is out there, even if those in charge of awarding Olympic recognition don't seem to place as much value on it as we do!

Cheers

Mike Stannard

Chairman