

East Lothian Sports Development Squads – Punching Above Their Weight

1996 saw East Lothian Council take the bold and visionary step of publishing its Sports Development Strategy. The strategy clearly set out how East Lothian Council would develop and promote sport across a number of services. Pivotal to the delivery of the strategy was the establishment of a sports specific development team under the guidance of a principal officer of sports development.

Some key quotations from the strategy relating to the establishment of the Sports Development Team would include :

“What is important is that these individuals (sports development officers) should all be respected widely for their records of achievement and contributions to their sport; and that, as charismatic leaders and coaches, they will motivate others to become involved in coaching, teaching and developing sport.”

“The youth sport strategy connects with the performance enhancement plan in various ways. Firstly, the services of sports-specific development officers will be available to schools in curriculum time and out-of-school hours. They will be expected to assist with representative age-group squads. Secondly, clubs in the core sports will be offered incentives to develop youth sections and appoint coaches for talented youngsters. Thirdly, festivals and day events for core sports will assist with talent spotting.”

The appointment of a Principal Officer of Sports Development and a team of six sports specific development officers put in place the human resource which would catapult East Lothian sport to where this visionary document intended it to be.

A key element of the sports development officers’ role would be in the hands on delivery of their sport and the value that they added to the development of young sports people within East Lothian.

Over the past three years, 2002-2005, East Lothian has had 54 young people represent Scotland at various age groups in our target sports (basketball, disability sport, badminton, rugby, hockey, volleyball and football) and had 10 footballers sign professional contracts. In addition the East Lothian Swim Team continues to perform at the highest level on the national stage, with swimming being one of the original target sports, replaced by basketball/disability sport in 2002.

Notable achievements in recent years include :

BASKETBALL	Winners-National U12 Inter Area Tournament 2005 (Boys) Runners Up-National U12 Inter Area Tournament (Girls) Simon Ramsay (MGS) named in Scotland U19 Wheelchair Basketball Squad in 2005
SWIMMING	22 individual medals at East District Age Group Championships 2005
BADMINTON	Scottish Primary Team Quaich winners 2004 – Longniddry Primary School Scottish Secondary Team Quaich winners 2003 – Knox Academy

	Scottish National Titles 2004 – 3 winners / 1 runner up 2005 – 3 winners / 1 runner up
RUGBY	U15 Pathway Tournament winners 2004 U15 Pathway Tournament winners 2005 U16 Pathway Tournament winners 2005
HOCKEY	3 players named in Scotland U16 Squad over past to years.
VOLLEYBALL	Scottish National League Winners-U18 Girls - 2002 Scottish National League Winners-U18 Boys – 2005
FOOTBALL	National Trophy winners 2002, 2003, 2004 National Trophy Semi Finalists 2005

The Active East Lothian strategy document builds on the work of the Sports Development Strategy and shows how East Lothian's Healthy Living Service will contribute to the improved health and well being of East Lothian residents through the contribution of sport and physical activity.

Sports Development sits firmly within this new service and the strategic document which sets out the service's vision for sport and physical activity moving towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century. While the Sports Development Team continues to work in the areas of School Sport, Club Development and Coach / Teacher Education, the grassroots element of the service, it does not shy away from working in the key areas of District Squads and Elite Player Development. Indeed, the results and performances listed above illustrate clearly the efficacy of providing appropriate player development pathways from an introduction to the target sport through to international representative honours.

The development of district squads in East Lothian has provided players with a stepping stone to elite performance at international level and an incentive to improve individual and team performances within their target sports.

East Lothian is one of the smallest local authorities in Scotland, however, our individual athletes and teams continue to perform at the highest levels in their sports, clearly "punching above their weight". It is no coincidence that East Lothian Council took the visionary step in 1996 to establish a sports specific development team and employ the quality officers that are clearly the directors of their respective sports in East Lothian, with the clear remit of developing participation and performance pathways in their sport. With the recent addition of golf to the sports development team and a regional development officer, employed by Lothian Disability Sport being based at Meadowmill, the future of sport and sporting opportunities in the area continues to be developed, with the team clear in its focus of striving to achieve excellence in all areas of its work. East Lothian Council's commitment to sport and physical activity is clear.