

BERKSHIRE & SOUTH BUCKINGHAMSHIRE ASA

REPORT OF INTERIM WATER POLO MANAGER

As in previous years, to my knowledge, water polo is played competitively by only one club in the County, Reading SC. I understand, nevertheless, that there is a weekly water polo session shown on the website of Wycombe District SC.

I think, therefore, that the best course for my report is to repeat much of the content of the report on water polo submitted to the AGM of Reading SC in October 2024, as below.

2023-2024 Water Polo Business Plan Objectives

- 1) Pools - To secure suitable pool time to train & play matches, for the senior and junior squads, to ensure the continuity of the senior and junior squads; bearing in mind the location of the pool and the geographical split of players.
- 2) Membership - Try to increase senior and maintain/increase junior membership. To continue the junior club and expand the number of sessions for seniors and juniors to 2 sessions per week, to ensure junior membership continues to expand and to allow us to split the younger and older junior players to continue their growth/development. But with the proviso that we continue to ensure both sections break even financially.
- 3) League/Results - Try to regain our league position in Division 1 of the (Summer) London League and to enter a mixed U17 squad into the Hampshire league (Winter season). To try to start to integrate some of the older juniors (17+) into the senior squad sessions and games.
- 4) Junior Polo - To continue to develop and expand the junior Water polo section, to ensure that it continues within Reading Swimming Club. To try to split the junior section into two groups/sessions, for older and younger juniors (mini polo). To develop the juniors with the aim to get some into the Regional U17 Girls development training sessions and/or squad.

Accomplishments to date

1) Pools

We have been training at Eton School pool since 2020 and we moved into their new "Athens" pool April 2022. We have been looking at moving back to Rivermead for water polo, but there were a number of significant reasons:-

- a) We cannot play matches at the Rivermead pool without significant investment of c£3k to purchase shot clocks which are essential for the game. In addition the pool is only 1.8m deep vs 2m at Eton which is typically seen as the minimum required by the London league.

- b) Issues about available time slots for training. We currently train on Thursday between 8:30-10pm for seniors and 7:30-9pm for Juniors. As we have established the club in Eton, a good number of juniors are closer to Eton than Reading.
- c) There is currently no opportunity to increase the amount of pool time at Rivermead. At Eton there is an opportunity to increase the pool time we have available which will be essential to grow the junior section of the club and remain a financially viable self-funding entity.
- d) At Eton lifeguards are provided by the pool and are always on poolside.

Currently we only have two training sessions a week; Seniors on Thursdays (20.30 - 22.00) and Juniors on Sundays (19.30 - 21.00). This is not ideal; we need more pool time for seniors and we need another session for the juniors so that we can split the larger and smaller juniors up, and reduce the numbers in each session (24 is too many to develop their skills bearing in mind the relative inexperience).

The new moveable bottom/all deep pool at Eton, is very good but the costs have increased by 45% since we started using it, but this does include the provision of lifeguards for the sessions.

Ultimately we would like to try to develop the junior section, to do what Basingstoke have done in Hampshire, and develop a centre of excellence for juniors from all over Berkshire/Buckinghamshire in Reading.

2) Membership

The senior membership currently stands at 19 (up 5 from last year). The junior membership currently stands at 30 (up from the 26 last year) but we have had a number leave this year (A-levels / university etc). We are still receiving a steady number of enquiries from potential new starters; people moved to the Reading area mostly. We do have a potential issue with the junior section; a good number of our juniors (approx. half) are 17 years old and hence we will potentially be losing them from the juniors' section. We are trying to encourage some to join the senior section but I suspect a number will leave. With the new Eton pool fees, we had to reduce the number of sessions for the senior members, despite also having to increase their polo section fees. One senior session a week is not really enough, to be able to develop our squad.

Our aim over the next 3-5 years is to have:

- a) A strong Men's team playing to a good level of competition
- b) A development Men's team for older juniors and seniors newer to the game to have the opportunity to play games against other teams
- c) A Junior section 12-18
- d) A Mini's section (c8-12 and new junior starters for first 4-6 weeks)

We have run a recent recruitment campaign to local schools and on the Club website, and we have had a number of new junior members come along.

3) League/Results

The senior London league team are playing in the London league (Division 2). We are trying to get back to division 1 again, but we have a strong league this year. We have a team of older players as well as some newer members and also some of the older juniors have also been playing for us this year. We are currently 3rd in the league with 3 more matches still to play. We are hopeful we will finish 2nd and will be able to challenge for a place in Division 1 if we do.

4) Junior Polo

The junior section is going well and we have 30 juniors (ranging from 11 to 17) training at present. Some of the older members have been training with the seniors this year and some have played in the senior league matches. The juniors are very committed and seem to love the sessions, we have had some great feedback from both parents and juniors.

We played in the Hampshire U17 mixed league this year (with Winchester, Basingstoke, Jersey, Weymouth and Portsmouth) to give our juniors some match practice and they played well. We also held a tournament at Eton for the U17 and also a younger U15 squad. Unfortunately, the London league age limits mean that we cannot enter that league this year; most don't now qualify for U16 and the others are too young.

Two of our boys and 4 of our girls went to regional training (U16 & U18 levels) and one (Airlia Philippidis) made it to the team and represented the South East in the regional tournament (in Liverpool) where the team managed a gold medal.

5) Coaching

We currently have 2 qualified coaches for the seniors/juniors; Head coach Alexis Philippidis (Level 2 qualified) and Assistant coach Paul Hancock (Level 1 qualified). Both have completed their DBS and Safeguarding courses.

Roger Penfold
Interim Water Polo Manager
(with grateful thanks to Lex Philippidis)

10 November 2024