

**SOUTHERN COUNTIES JUNIOR TEAM MANAGER
REPORT
INTER-REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS 2008
BREAN SANDS, SOMERSET**

Once again I was pleased to be the Southern Counties Junior manager at the Inter-Regional held at Brean Sands, Somerset over the weekend of the 6th/8th September 2008.

I knew that this year would be so different to last year when the Juniors won the title. That team has all moved on and one of them, Helen Manley, was playing in the main competition this year. This year's team was a young one with only Matt Silvester from the Hampshire Rose being at the older end of the age range. The other team members were Samantha Thatcher from Southampton City, Callum Lombard from Cobbetts and Michael Priest from Worthing.

Again the teams to watch were Kent, Northern, and East Midlands. However none of the teams were to be underestimated over the weekend. The team was ready to play on the Saturday morning, complete with wet weather gear, as it was not looking good this year. The first game was against the Eastern Region. Eastern were a very young team and I thought that we should really win the first game of the day. They ran out 13-8 winners, but made hard work of it.

The team then hit a very bad run of form, losing the next five games, and knowing that the whole team was up against it, I was a bit concerned. I knew that Kent, Northern and East Midlands would be hard teams to beat. This was the case, but did we get ten points off East Midlands and perhaps on another day would have beaten them. I was disappointed that the Juniors did not beat Chiltern, although having two National Champions in their team, I did not rate them as being one of the stronger teams. This turned out to be the case as they only won three games over the weekend, but beat our Juniors 13-8. Chances were not taken !! However the team was not too down-hearted and went on to win their last game against the Isle of Wight 13-10. The games against the Island would be critical, but we did not know it at the time. It had been a long and hard day.

Sunday was cloudy, but at least it was dry. I was hoping that the draw for Sunday would be kind to us, but it was not the best of draws. The Juniors drew Kent in the first game of the day, and this was a very hard game for them. They went 4-0 up but could not score again against a very good Kent team. The run of games was to be totally different from the day before, with the team then winning the next three games including a 13-3 win over the Island and a brilliant win over Northern 13-5. They really played well and were able to take advantage of the Northern team being very nervous and not playing well. Why Northern were like this I did not really know but it resulted in a rare defeat for them.

I was hoping that this form would carry over to the last game, but it was not to be. The last game was against a London team of older lads. I felt that they could have been beaten over the two games that had to be played. The games resulted in two wins for London, 13-11 and 13-8 on the Sunday. Again chances were not taken and the experience of the London lads showed.

The final results for the weekend were,
5 wins, points for 118, points against 122, -4 overall. 5th place out of eight teams.

For a young team with only one of them having been played at Brean before, they did very well. They could have got a few more wins, but with more experience this would have been the case. They all did their best and I had no problems with any of them. It's very important that they all play as much as they can over the coming year, and like all of us, remember the basics.

I think that within two years the Southern Juniors should be up there fighting for the title, it will take a lot of commitment from all involved. Next year could be very open as many teams will be losing members to the adult ranks.

I will do all I can to help the Juniors across the region on our campaign for more success in the coming year. We must remember to prepare for the National Championships early next spring.

Looking forward to next year already.

Peter Galton
Junior Team Manager 2008.