**Playing and Coaching Report Season 19-20**

The Club as a whole has enjoyed another very successful season which has seen many of the senior teams finishing top or near the top of their divisions and a good number in both Men’s and Ladies sections promoted.

L1 enjoyed a more settled team going in to this season and their excellent start to the season helped them to power their way to finish 2nd and earn promotion to East Premier League. Well done to all the payers and management for their success. This should help retain and attract players to add to the strength of team and the Ladies Section. With L2 also winning their league very impressively, their players should enjoy a greater challenge next season, but there remains a large gap in standard vacated when the club was forced to pull out its 2nd XI in the season before last. The L3 finished 3rd and L4 6th in their respective divisions. Sam Gaylor managed the very difficult task of coordinating transition between teams to keep the Ladies section on the rise and the encouraging availability (especially in the 2nd half of the season) can help the section to consider fielding a 5th team in the future.

M1 Lost a number of strong players over last summer as a result of playing in a lower standard in the National League restructure. They struggled to find sufficient replacements and hovered in the bottom part of the league in the first half of the season but showed super form in the second half of the season to finish a very respectable 4th.

M2 finished 5th in London League Premier division and with the likely dissolution of this league in the near future, M2 will move to East league next season which the club hope will provide M2 to play in a more competitive structure which might better develop aspirational and potential M1 players, but the club is also conscious of its responsibility to its existing M2 players and retaining playing links in the London area when EH restructure regions in the near future.

After transferring from London League last season, a very young M3 team won their league comfortably to earn promotion to Div. 2 S next season. Impressively the M4, M5 and M6 teams were also Champions in their divisions while the other ‘Willows’ teams M7 and M8 were 3rd and 2nd respectively, though Supervets team occasionally struggled to fulfil some fixtures. The success has owed much to the men’s captains led by Elliott Smith who by and large have communicated and coordinated very well to get teams out week to week and also to players who have gone the extra mile to get to games and turn out for the club. Again, special mention should go to Simon Beckley for his outstanding coordination of the ‘Willows’ teams and the introduction of new members through ‘Back2Hockey’ in what is a thriving part of the club.

A feature of the club is the mix of youth and adult players in both sections and the club has done a very good job to provide the range of elite, competitive and recreational opportunities for all players while also helping colt players to develop and enjoy transition in to senior hockey. Though it is never perfectly achieved, the club members, coaches and captains should be proud of the club’s achievements in this aspect.

With the growth of London based clubs and our location at the end of the Central Line, it will be a challenge to draw players from the Metropolitan areas who do not have previous connection with the club. For this reason, recruitment for the top adult teams remains very difficult. The club tends to remain a home for local youth players and some returning members from university. Despite the proximity of London, we may enjoy greater ‘pull’ within the Essex and Herts area. A particular target should be to progress our 2nd teams to higher leagues which can support better strength in depth at ‘performance’ level.

The competing demands on player’s weekend time has seen sporadic availability among some sections of the club and a headache for captains: dealing with surges of good and bad availability. The club can look to encourage a culture where members communicate availability better and draw out greater commitment from players to the club, while appreciating differing individual circumstances.

In the youth section, many thanks to all the coaches and managers led by Chris Gladman in the boys’ side and Jay Fox on the girls’ side. The u16 boys deserve special mention for playing very competitively in the National Indoor tournament in January and also reaching the outdoor National finals with some comprehensive wins over other teams in the region. The u16 boys section fielded three teams in the Mercian league, while the u14 boys also fielded two teams. Congratulations to three players who were selected in England age group squads: Grace O’Malley-Kumar in U18 girls and Nathan Gladman and Harvey Edwards in U16 boys, while several other youth players represented Regional Performance Centre teams. A target will be to increase numbers of girls playing in the colts section who may also bolster the future of the Ladies section.

All senior and colts teams have access to training sessions which are very well staffed with coaches. The Minis section has enjoyed very good numbers on Saturday mornings guided by some very enthusiastic coaches and Justin Fox’s coordination. We have also added midweek sessions for u12s, while John Wright has extended the clubs outreach in to local schools in efforts to promote our club and Jamie Oxley will further strengthen the Saturday Morning Mini coaching provision next season.

Finally, my recognition of all the players, coaches, managers and captains who make the club perform so well on the pitch as well as the support of committee members, parents and club staff.

Mike Williamson