

Swim England South East Region Water Polo - Under 18 Giles Inter Regional Championships 2022

Blackpool Palatine Leisure Centre, 19th and 20th March.

Last weekend the South East Region (SER) took a squad of 12 girls to compete at the u18 Inter-regional Championships. The squad was competing in division 1 after qualifying in the u14 competition in 2018 (there was not an u16 competition for these players due to covid). In the u14 tournament, the squad had finished 5th so we were prepared for some tough games.

Players were selected based on their performance at SER training sessions over the past year and unfortunately a number of key players were missing. Lucy Bullock, Becky Smith, Audrey Tala and Rachel Cutting were all unable to play and although they were greatly missed, this allowed some younger players to gain valuable match experience at the tournament. The following squad competed at Blackpool:

1. Ismey Hawley (GK)
2. Bella Power
3. Gabriella Almeida
4. Ruby Rosser (Captain)
5. Ella Boyle
6. Bria Bone
7. Lillie Standen
8. Maddie Russel
9. Lily Ross
10. Allegra Cuomo
11. Kathryn Gracie-Langrick
12. Lilya Tillin

Before the tournament, the squad benefitted from two training sessions which allowed the coaches to introduce attacking and defensive tactics and provided a chance for the girls to bond as a team. Here are the individual match reports:

Saturday 16:00 vs North West - South East 2 – North West 19

The girls started the match well with a strong defensive effort which prevented North West from scoring on the majority of their attacks and led to a 0-3 score line after the first quarter. However, we struggled to implement the planned tactics in attack and as we got tired, North West took advantage, extending the score line. Nevertheless, the girls did not give up and every player put in the effort when they were in the water. Special mention to Bella who scored both our goals in this game. North West were a tough team to face first and were the eventual winners of the tournament.

Scorers: Bella 2

Exclusions: Ella 2, Lillie 2, Lily 2, Ruby, Maddie

Saturday 18:30 vs North East - South East 4 – North East 21

The players only had a one match break before this match, so were still feeling the effects of the last game. However, this gap did allow us to regroup as a team and change the tactics slightly. Once again, the girls started extremely well. They executed a hard defensive press which prevented the North East from scoring on many occasions and, alongside goals from Ruby, Lillie and Lily, kept us in the game for the first 2 quarters. However, in the second half we struggled to keep up with a fast-paced and well organised North East team. Despite the score line, there were some brilliant moments of team work resulting in some great steals and a debut goal from Maddie off of a driving

play. Even with two difficult losses, the players demonstrated a vast improvement in team work across the day and were hoping to continue this progression into the next day.

Scorers: Lily, Lillie, Ruby, Maddie

Exclusions: Lily 2, Gabby 1

Sunday 8:15 vs London - South East 6 – London 11

We had an early start on Sunday and were down to 11 players as Bria unfortunately had to leave for other commitments. Despite this, the girls were fired up and ready to give London a good game. Our aims were to break down the London attack by playing a strong defensive press and score goals in attack through drives into the pit. For the first 3 quarters we executed our game plan with determination and scored some brilliant goals, including a hatrick from Lillie. The score line was representative of this hard work and we finished the third quarter just one goal behind London (6-7). Unfortunately, we ran out of steam in the fourth quarter and London took advantage of this to win the game. Understandably the players were very disappointed with this result. It was a brilliant effort by the South East girls and every player contributed to what was a very tight game!

Scorers: Lillie 3, Bella, Ruby, Lily

Exclusions: Ismey, Ella, Lillie, Lilya, Lily

Sunday 12:15 vs South West - South East 6 – South West 12

This was the last game of the tournament and it turned out to be a bit of a roller coaster! The South East players were determined to leave everything in the pool and once again had a great start, with our strong press breaking down the South West's attack. After the first quarter the score was 2 all and we were hoping to continue this strong play! Unfortunately, we switched off a bit and South West immediately punished us with 2 goals. To add to this, partway through the second quarter, Ismey, who had made some fantastic saves throughout the tournament, had a bout of sickness and had to leave the pool. Gabby stepped up to play in goal and with the crowd behind her put in a fantastic effort and didn't concede throughout the remainder of the second quarter. The support from the crowd re-energised the South East girls which led to two brilliant goals from Allegra to even the scores again at half time. In the second half, we had some reffing decisions that didn't go our way and ultimately South West went on to win the match. However, the South East girls did not give up and Maddie and Lily both scored goals in the second half.

Scorers: Allegra 2, Bella, Lillie, Lily, Maddie

Exclusions: Lily 3, Gabby, Ella, Lillie, Maddie

Despite four losses, there was vast team development throughout the tournament and some fantastic moments. The team showed great resilience particularly in the last match when players stepped up to unfamiliar positions. The girls were a pleasure to coach and were extremely responsive to feedback. They demonstrated determination and positive attitudes, clearly shown by the strong starts made in every match.

The South East coaches found it very difficult to choose a player for the MVP award as there were a number of strong performances. Lily Ross put in a fantastic effort in centre back throughout the tournament and made some impressive steals. Bella Power and Lillie Standen were our top goal scorers for the weekend and Maddie Russel demonstrated some serious pace to win the ball on numerous occasions. However ultimately, the coaches decided to award the MVP to Ruby Rosser. Ruby not only put in a sterling effort in the pool, with tireless drives and solid defense, but was also a brilliant Captain. She provided feedback and encouragement to players whilst maintaining a positive attitude throughout the tournament and was a well-deserved MVP.

A special mention also goes to Rachel Cutting who travelled all the way up to Blackpool to support despite not being able to get in the pool due to a fractured elbow. Alongside Rachel, we also had a

wealth of support from families and friends who had travelled to Blackpool to watch the girls. This support was invaluable and contributed to the team spirit throughout the weekend.

Also, a massive thank you to Rosie and Kate, our Team Managers. Your help, both with preparing for the tournament and on poolside was very much appreciated and we wouldn't have managed without you! Thanks to Helen as well, for all your help with the behind-the-scenes administration.

Finally, well done to all players involved in the tournament – you should be very proud of your efforts!

Lauren Hand and Bruce Philps
SER u18 Girls squad coaches

Photo left to right: Allegra Cuomo, Kathryn Gracie-Langrick, Lilya Tillin, Bella Power, Ismey Hawley, Ella Boyle, Gabby Almeida, Maddie, Russel, Lily Ross, Bria Bone, Lillie Standen, Ruby Rosser