

SWIM ENGLAND SOUTH EAST REGION GIRLS WATER POLO
2023 UNDER 18 (2006 & YOUNGER) INTER REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS
PALATINE LEISURE CENTRE BLACKPOOL, 4th & 5th FEBRUARY 2023

The South East region girls' coaches were looking forward to another exciting inter-regional tournament with the 2006 squad. For many of the girls, this would be their last opportunity to represent the region, with some starting this journey in 2019. The girls has previously finished in third position in the under 16 competition that was held 18 months ago in Walsall and so were in Division 1. We were optimistic that we had a strong chance in this event and although the results didn't end up going our way, the girls showed that the South East region continues to compete at a high standard.

After a number of training and selection sessions the following squad was chosen to represent the region; -

1. Ismey Hawley (GK)
2. Bella Power
3. Becci Smith
4. Allegra Cuomo
5. Ella Boyle
6. Alexandra Potts
7. Lillie Standen
8. Elsie Graves
9. Lily Ross
10. Rachel Cutting
11. Darcy Hunt
12. Gabby Almeida
13. Kate Humphreys

The format of the competition meant that it would be a very intense weekend for all five teams involved. Each team was to play 4 matches consisting of 4x 8-minute quarters in just one weekend! In addition to this, we would only have a 1 match gap in between our two matches on each day so the girls were prepared for a tough weekend!

These are the individual match reports; -

Saturday 16:00
South East 14, Scotland 9
Quarter scores: 1-3, 7-1, 3-2, 3-3

We had a slow start to this match and the Scottish team caught our girls off guard with their physicality which led to them taking an early lead in the first quarter. After a regrouping during the break, we managed to utilise our speed and fitness which resulted in Bella scoring an unanswered hatrick, within the first minute of the second quarter! We continued this momentum throughout the remainder of the first half and managed to open up a 5-goal lead. We struggled to attack as proficiently in the second half but ultimately our strong second quarter proved to be the difference and we maintained this lead to come away with a solid and deserved first win.

Scorers: Bella 3, Lily 3, Ella 2, Becky 1, Lillie 1, Rachel 1, Darcy 1, Gabby 1, Kate 1
Exclusions: Bella 3, Becky 2, Alex 1, Elsie 1

Saturday 18:30

South East 13, North West 16

Quarter scores: 7-4, 2-6, 2-0, 2-6

We knew this would be a tough match as North West were the winners of the u16 tournament in December 2021. However North West had suffered a surprising defeat to South West earlier in the day so we knew we had a chance at the win.

The girls were very motivated and initially executed the game plan well to build up a 4-0 lead after 3 minutes. Unfortunately, we were hindered by a number of exclusions (8 in the first half alone!) and some questionable decisions from the officials. This led to Lillie being excluded from the rest of the game in the second half and us conceding a large number of goals.

We changed up the tactics and Kate put in a fantastic effort at centre back. She was supported by a drop from the other players which prevented North West from utilising their strong centre forward in the third quarter. This helped us to regain control and we finished the third quarter leading by one goal, albeit with 4 players in a risky position with 2 majors.

Unfortunately in the fourth quarter, we conceded another major and then seemed to run out of steam. We could not maintain the previous level of pressure which resulted in North West pulling away and winning the game.

We all felt that the questionable exclusions in the first half had a significant impact on our overall performance. Nevertheless, it was really encouraging that 7 of the outfield players scored in this match. The girls put in a great effort and the coaching team were proud of the way they dealt with some challenging decisions and changes in tactics.

Scorers: Lily 4, Lillie 3, Kate 2, Rachel 1, Elsie 1, Becky 1, Allegra 1

Exclusions: Lillie 3, Lily 3, Becky 2, Elsie 2, Kate 2

Sunday 10:00

South East 5, North East 13

Quarter scores: 2-4, 1-1, 1-5, 1-3

This was always going to be a tough match against the eventual overall winners of the tournament. We started well and our tight press meant we didn't concede too many goals in the first half. We struggled slightly in attack as North East put us under a lot of pressure.

Unfortunately in the third quarter, North East showed their class and began to pull away from us. All of our players contributed to the game and it was a great opportunity for some of our inexperienced players to get valuable match experience at this level.

We finished with a defeat to North East, who were arguably a more organised and stronger team.

Scorers: Lillie 3, Bella 1, Lily 1

Exclusions: Becky 3, Lily 2, Rachel 1, Darcy 1

Sunday 12:30

South East 11, South West 9

Quarter scores: 5-1, 2-1, 2-2, 5-2

We finished the competition with a win against the South West and put in a very good performance throughout the first three and a half quarters of the game.

We started the game very well and Lillie scored a hattrick in the first quarter, 2 of which were penalties earned by drives from her team mates. We pressed South West hard and managed to steal the ball on a number of occasions, finishing the second half with a 5-goal lead. We kept our game plan going and with 3 minutes to go, had extended our lead to 11-5.

Unfortunately, we struggled with fitness and composure in the last 3 minutes of the game, and despite Ismey making a fantastic penalty save, conceded 4 goals in quick succession.

Luckily, we managed to hold onto the win, however we arguably should have won by a much greater margin.

Scorers: Lillie 6, Lily 2, Bella 2, Elsie 1

Exclusions: Lily 3, Lillie 2, Ismey 1, Becky 1, Allegra 1, Ella 1, Alex 1, Kate 1

After this last game, we were tied for points with North West and South West, so the 2nd-4th positions would be decided by a mini league between the three teams. We had a very tense wait whilst watching the last game, but ended up losing out on a medal due to a combination of goal difference and our defeat to the North West.

Overall, we were very disappointed to miss out on a medal, however all of the girls that represented the South East should be very proud that we were so close to 2nd place and competed well against very strong opposition. Ismey Hawley received the South East MVP award, as nominated by the other teams, for her strong performance in goal. For a lot of the girls, this was their last time representing the South East, and I hope that they enjoyed it and will remember these tournaments well!

The team was well supported by a large number of family members who made the long journey to sunny Blackpool and we hope that everyone enjoyed watching the girls compete.

I would like to thank Helen Smith for her support with Team Manager on the day, and Becci Henderson for her organisation of the weekend, including a wonderful pizza restaurant for dinner! We are also very grateful to John Maddock who once again volunteered his time to be our nominated referee and did an excellent job.

Thank you to Bruce Philps for his enthusiasm in his assistant coach role and to James Ross for his guidance between the games. Thank you also to Katy Ross who has coached the girls at sessions in the lead up to the tournament.

Finally, we should also thank the committee and management of the region who continue to support junior water polo in the South East. Although we don't have large number of girls playing, we seemingly continue to produce very talented individuals and competitive teams.

Lauren Hand
14th February 2023

The squad picture is L-R; - Lauren (HC), Helen (TM), Alex, Elsie, Gabby, Ella, Lily, Darcy, Lillie, Bella, Ismey, Becky, Allegra, Kate, Rachel, Bruce (AC)

The other picture is of Ismey Hawley with her MVP award.

