

Chesterfield Hockey Club

Hockey is on a high after the GB women's team famously won gold at the Rio Olympics in a thrilling penalty shoot-out – watched live by a reported nine million TV viewers.

Now Chesterfield Hockey Club is determined to use the national team's success to inspire the next generation of stars in the sport – as well as encourage more adults to take part.

Nationally, hockey has enjoyed a steady resurgence over the past five years with an extra 30,000 members joining its clubs, including a 22,000 growth (65%) in under-16 members.

England Hockey wants to inspire people to play the game and Chesterfield, based at the St Mary's RC High School artificial pitch, is well-placed to take advantage of any increase in public interest locally.

It has a long history of working with youngsters and its under-10 boys were county champions last season. Currently six juniors represent Derbyshire Under-14s or Under-15s and others are going through country trials.

The club, which has three men's teams playing in the Midlands League, runs training sessions for 6 to 16-year-old boys and girls on Wednesday evenings and Sunday mornings.

There are around 70 to 80 juniors and the club is particularly looking for youngsters aged 7-12 to join. It runs boys and girls teams at under-10, under-12 and junior levels, who play friendly matches against other clubs in Derbyshire and North Notts. This culminates with entry in the annual national In2Hockey tournament, which takes place in each County, with winners then competing regionally. Also for the slightly older juniors, last season we entered an U14 boys team into the England Hockey 7-a side competition, and they performed very well, losing only one game all season. This year most of this U14 team have progressed and will be playing in our U16 boys team in the National Cup Competition.

The girls progress through to play with Staveley Ladies when they are around 13 or 14, while the boys join the Chesterfield men's teams.

Coaching is led by junior hockey co-ordinator and level one coach Paul Speed and level 2 coach John Nash, who leads youth development. Both are registered Hockey Association coaches and helped by other volunteers.

Paul said: "Hockey is a fun sport to play, and both boys and girls are welcome. We are a small, friendly club and invite any children to come and have a go. For older youngsters, both the men's and ladies' clubs cater for all abilities.

"At club level, the sport is a very social game where friends for life are made."

Paul said the national success for the women's team at the Olympics could be a springboard for the sport at a local level .

"Our women's team performed outstandingly in Rio with many great performances and victories," he said.

"The final was a tough test against the number one ranked team in the world – Holland - but they never gave in, and got what they deserved with a gold medal.

"Several of the women's team were still at school when the older players in the team were starting their hockey careers with England, so it's amazing how quickly youngsters can develop their skills and progress their careers.

"Hockey is what I would class as a minority sport with usually low amounts of coverage in the media as a result. We often struggle to get significant numbers of youngsters involved in our club, which is frustrating when we are trying to field teams and are one or two players short.

"The profile of the sport hasn't been this high for a generation. We must seize the moment."

Paul added the Olympic heroes could be an inspiration to youngsters either already playing the sport or thinking of taking part.

"From the women's team, you have to say Kate Richardson Walsh, the captain, is an inspiration, having played at the top level for so long," he said.

"The goalkeeper Maddie Hinch, who is regarded as the number one in the world, showed why with her penalty saves in the Olympic final.

"From the men's team Barrie Middleton, who has around 350 caps for either England or GB, is still an awesome player."

Paul played both football and hockey as a youngster before deciding to concentrate on hockey at the age of 13. He then progressed through the club's teams and eventually played for the first XI aged 16, going on to play for Derbyshire's under-18, under-21 and full men's teams.

He stopped playing for a while when he had a young family, before returning to play again lower down the team levels at Chesterfield a few years later.

For the past three years he has been involved in coaching the juniors and getting them involved in friendly matches, leading on to competitive tournaments.

Paul said: "I have three children who all play hockey, along with other sports. I realised I could try to make a positive difference by getting involved, particularly as we didn't have many adults available to supervise the youngsters in matches.

"We now have matches for various age groups virtually every weekend of the season. There has been a great improvement in what's on offer for our youngsters."

Paul said coaching was mainly done by volunteers from within Chesterfield Hockey Club or Staveley Ladies, for which the junior section was grateful.

John Nash has coached at the club for many years, while club chairman Gary McCormick has been fully supportive of the junior development side.

1st XI captain Christian Battye also helps the junior coaching on Sundays.

The club's junior shirts have been provided by its main sponsor of junior hockey, Simon Davidson, of the Cheese Factor, based in Chesterfield town centre.

Coaching on a Wednesday, for 6 to 16-year-olds, is from 6-7pm. The club's development squad, for 9 to 16-year-olds, then trains from 7pm to 8pm. Sunday coaching is from 10.30am-11.45am.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the club should email info@chesterfieldhockeyclub.co.uk or call Paul Speed on 07879 412746 or call John Nash on 07812 134392.

SEPARATE SECONDARY STORY ALONGSIDE MAIN PIECE

Chesterfield Hockey Club, which was formed in 1899 and was a founder member of the Derbyshire Hockey Association, is based at the St Mary's RC High School, Newbold Road, where there is a state-of-the-art artificial pitch.

It first began to grow its youth section in the early 1980s following a decline in the teaching of minority sports in schools.

Two members of the club decided to run what was then a new mini-hockey scheme, aimed at boys and girls, aged from seven.

The scheme has continued every year since, sometimes attracting more than 50 youngsters, with some players going to progress through the club, county, regional and international ranks. At times the club has provided 75 per cent of the Derbyshire under-18 squad.

Sponsorship and volunteer coaching has helped to keep the costs down, while in the past 15 years newcomers have benefited from using the artificial turf at St Mary's.

Paul said: "The partnership with St Marys High School allows us access to use the astroturf facility. This is a superb pitch, which was resurfaced around 12 months ago.

"Training sessions are a mix of exercises developing the core skills, and also various types of games/matches. The latest England Hockey strategy on coaching is to maximise game-play situations for youngsters.

"It is particularly important for youngsters new to the sport to play in such ideal conditions. Their development is rapid and the skill levels achieved very high compared with what could be achieved on rough, grass pitches."

THIRD PIECE TO GO ALONGSIDE OTHERS

As well as trying to attract youngsters into hockey, Chesterfield is also looking to gain new adult members.

In recent years falling numbers meant the club had to reduce from four men's teams to three, but this season it has restored a fourth team consisting of junior members.

Paul Speed said: "We would encourage any adults who want to give the sport a go to come along and get involved, whether it's for the first time or a return to the sport after a break."

Club training for the men's teams is on Wednesday evenings at St Mary's, from 7pm until 8.30pm