



Newcastle University rising to challenge with local clubs

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Table tennis is playing an integral part in Newcastle University's bid to maintain a UK top-10 ranking in university sport, with the institution becoming a hub for great talent.

Newcastle University Table Tennis continued its rising success in the 2019/20 season, becoming the university's third highest scoring sport in the British Universities & Colleges Sport (BUCS) championships with 165 points.

Captained by former junior national champion Joe Clark, the Men's 1st team secured a place in the National Premiership while the Men's 2nd team were promoted to Tier 1 and crowned Conference Cup champions.

Training at the university is led by five-time county champion and former national junior player Graeme Barella and experienced development coach Bernie Morris. Graeme is currently undergoing his UKCC Level 3 qualification and assisting Table Tennis England with some of the country's most talented juniors. Training sessions are supplemented by top local players, which ensures high quality practice for our talented athletes.

The university invests a lot of time into the local community and the players regularly visit local clubs to share their expertise.

Graeme says: "Last year, we spent an evening with Bishop Auckland TTC in February where our top squad trained with the youngsters at their club, offering advice and guidance on how they manage their training around studies. It was great to show the players that they can continue training to a high standard whilst staying in education.

"I highlighted the opportunities for scholarships at the university – offering personal training sessions, strength and conditioning, access to physiotherapy and sports massage, branded sports kit and financial bursaries of up to £10,000.

"Joe Clark also attended this session and it was clear to see how much of an inspiration he was to the younger

players at Bishop Auckland TTC. Newcastle's club President, Kate Roberts, attended the training session and encouraged the female players about the abundance of opportunities for women to compete at university – Newcastle currently have three women's teams competing in the BUCS leagues, as well as being part of the Local League divisions in Northumberland."

Newcastle University Table Tennis find it a great benefit to attend local clubs to promote the opportunities for continuing table tennis within further education pathways. They encourage young players to get in contact with them to attend one of their training sessions, allowing young players to get a feel for what it is like to play table tennis at university.

Graeme went on to say: "Northumberland County player, Adam Webster, was in the top 16 in England at Junior level. During one of my coaching visits to Cramlington TTC, I met Adam and talked about his aspirations in table tennis and what he wanted to do when he is no longer a junior. We invited him to our training sessions which allowed him to become familiarised with the facilities we can offer, meet the current players and discuss how the training and competitions are worked around studies.

"Adam started his degree in Civil Engineering at Newcastle in September, unfortunately unable to play due to the pandemic, but I'm sure the experience of meeting his future team mates before joining university would have reduced his anxiety and provided an easier transition into a new environment."

Graeme and the team at Newcastle University can't wait to get back to playing, and continuing with their local club visits to inspire youngsters around the region.

Graeme says: "We have been in contact with others and we're hoping to arrange training sessions/challenge matches/meet and greets with Ormesby, Swerve and Grantham once restrictions have been lifted."

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