

Halifax pioneer successful women's league

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Helen and Alan pictured with the rest of the girls at the Christmas session

The Halifax and District Table Tennis Association have become pioneers this season with the introduction of a 5-team ladies league who have been playing regular weekly matches since September and it is the brain-child of founder and keen player Helen Smith.

After 27 years in Belgium working by day and playing squash and tennis the rest of the time Helen arrived back in Halifax in 2011, the place of her birth, to look for new ventures.

One of her first outings was to the Halifax Table Tennis Club where she was immediately hooked and, having played as a youngster with brothers and sisters mostly for fun, she soon found her competitive edge and wanted to improve and win!

Helen was recruited to play in the third division and rose to the challenge since she had played league squash for many years and was one of the top ten lady players in Belgium. But the third division is mainly male dominated and she became a little disillusioned.

She was struggling to win any of my games and wondering whether turning out on a winter's night and having no chance of winning was the best use of her time but she was hooked on the game!

After a conversation with Alan Dickinson regarding a ladies division and with his support, she got the bit between her teeth and started recruiting for female players. Many of her tennis partners were keen to give it a go and with notices in local supermarkets we soon had enough ladies to field five teams by September. A ladies league was formed!

The ladies league is through the first half season and it has been very successful. There is a certain amount of rivalry between the teams, Sapphires, Emeralds, Rubies, Aquamarines and Amethysts but on the whole they are all friendly and supportive to each other.

One of the most amazing things is the improvement all the players have all made. This is partly through playing more regularly but it is also due to the commitment Alan Dickinson has made towards their training. The ladies have had several training sessions to date – the last being their Christmas training last Saturday when 14 ladies turned up to be coached in a fun, friendly but informative manner. They consider themselves so lucky to have Alan as their coach as he understands every one of their foibles and is able to keep them focused on what they need to do to improve.

Two of the lady players travel from Barnsley to play league games and there are also a couple of complete beginners.

The aim of the ladies league is to build on this impressive start and possibly increase the number of teams to seven or eight next season and Helen would like to appeal to all would be lady table tennis players to come on board. (It has been proven that table tennis keeps the mind active and stems the onset of dementia!). Helens other role is as a Social Convenor at Queens Sports Club, Halifax. She has now initiated table tennis as a competitive sport at the club and currently they have 20 plus players on a singles ladder and at least seven doubles partners on the doubles ladder.

Table tennis is alive and well and if anyone is interested in playing or would like any further information please contact Helen Smith on graysmithhc@gmail.com

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