



## **JUNIOR DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2023**

The last twelve months have been another very busy year in Junior Development with the committee working extremely hard to ensure the continued success and growth of junior tennis in Ulster.

With a full return to tournament play after two seasons interruption due to Covid, the numbers of players taking part in tournaments has again increased, which is a very encouraging situation after such a long layoff.

Matchplays continued in Ulster, with our own Regional and Provincial matchplays in the Spring at Under 14 and 18 level. This provides a vital opportunity for players to earn ranking points to qualify them for selection for the Ulster Interprovincial teams in these age groups, as well as valuable tournament experience at that time of the year. There were over 70 children taking part in the regional qualifiers over the two regions, with 16 players participating in each of the Provincial events. Thanks again must go to all those who assisted in supervising these events and to the clubs who provided courts and facilities to run them during the Spring – Enniskillen, Omagh, Cavehill, Windsor, Belfast Boat Club, and Portadown. In 2024, we re-structured the regional events to have four regions instead of so, to provide further opportunities for participation across the province, and this is likely to continue going forward.

We were fortunate that Will Boyd continued in his role as Ulster Competitions Co-ordinator, and his work has seen an increase in the number of junior events taking place throughout the year, providing more opportunities for players to compete. This is particularly the case for weekend tournaments which are easier for players and parents to commit to. Will has liaised closely with clubs and Tennis Ireland regarding the running of Ulster tournaments and has put in a huge amount of work to assist tournaments with their organisation. We thank him for his work and look forward to further developments to come during this season.

The 2023 junior tournament calendar saw a return to a full series of events, and as usual the committee worked hard to support these. The Ulster calendar was full during the main tournament weeks of the season. The introduction of Tennis Ireland Tour level events has proved highly successful in encouraging tournament entries from a wider range of players, in particular Tour 200 and Tour 100 events for players who are newer to the tournament scene. Numbers playing tournaments across the various levels has continued to rise.

We are also pleased that in 2024 there will be more international tournaments in Ulster than ever before, with two Tennis Europe events being added at Belfast Boat Club in addition to the ITF Under 18 event which continues to run at Windsor. These events provide vital opportunities for our own players to experience international competition within their own province.

The Junior Committee provides help and advice prior to each tournament, including assistance with draws. We ensure that the tournaments are run in accordance with Tennis Ireland and Ulster Tennis rules to be fair to all players and tournaments. The committee also try to visit all Tennis Ireland tournaments in Ulster. The UTP rankings continue for all Ulster tournaments and certain Irish events, and ITF, ETA and LTA tournaments. To promote Ulster events as much as possible the committee limits the tournaments outside of Ulster which are eligible for UTP ranking points. The UTP rankings form the basis of the Ulster Interprovincial team selections, and we also require players to play a minimum of three Ulster events in order to qualify for the Interprovincial teams.

To support tournament officials, Tennis Ireland are implementing a programme of courses for tournament referees and court supervisors, to increase the level of expertise among officials within Ulster events. These courses are very important, and we ask all tournament officials to take part in these when they are organised within the province.

This year, the Junior Interprovincials were split into two separate events, with the Under 18s taking place in Ulster at CIYMS Tennis Club in August, and the Under 14s in September in Castlebar Tennis Club. Both events were well-organised, and we thank both clubs and branches for organising the two championships so efficiently.

Our team selection was again based on the top four positions in the UTP rankings plus one wild card selection, aiming to reward tournament performances over the whole season. Both Under 14 and 18 teams performed very well against strong opposition, with the Under 18s finishing runners-up behind a strong Leinster team. Our Under 14 was still young and will have learned a lot from this year's experience and will no doubt feature in the next year or two.

This year marked the last Interprovincials for some of the team, with Jonathan Mooney, Jason McMurray, Caoimhe McDonnell and Emily Rose all finishing their junior interprovincial careers this year. We wish them well for the future and in their transition into senior tennis. Congratulations to team captains Michael Blease and Adam Boyle for their hard work with the Under 18 team, and Carlos Miranda and Michael Blease for looking after the Under 14s.

At National level, Jonathan Mooney started 2023 winning the National Junior Indoor Championships at Under 18. At the Irish Open Championships at Fitzwilliam in August, Ulster had two Irish champions as Aryia Pringle Quinn won the Under 12 Mixed Doubles title with Sam Stafford, and Reese McCann took the Under 16 Boys Doubles, playing with James Lammas. Many congratulations to all on their success.

Ulster is also fortunate to have two players ranked number one in Ireland, as both Sam Irwin and Aryia Pringle Quinn are currently in top position in the Under 12 age groups in the Irish National rankings. They were also recognised by Tennis Ireland, as they were invited to train with the Irish Davis Cup team in Limerick prior to the Davis Cup tie against Austria this March. Congratulations to them and we look forward to another successful season for both. Ulster players Charlie McVeigh, James McMillan, Ross Aitken, Reese McCann, Jack McMahan and Isabella Connor are also presently ranked in the top 10 in Ireland in their age groups, and will no doubt aim to improve their rankings further over the coming season.

This year we welcomed two new members to the committee, with Gordon Watt and Glenn Maitland adding the benefit of their experience, and we thank them for their enthusiasm and new ideas. The committee has recently introduced further training opportunities, with a new performance squad for top Under 12 and 13 children, in addition to the existing squad activities. This has received very positive feedback from parents and players. The committee aims to add to the range of events within the programme, including additional training camps and friendly matches with other provinces. We are also aiming to expand the overall experience for squad players and Ulster coaches, by bringing renowned external coaches to Ulster to give the benefit of their knowledge. There is one such event already organised to take place in the next month with expert coach Simon Wheatley coming to Belfast, with similar initiatives to follow.

Many thanks must again go to Ulster Performance Director Carlos Miranda for his hard work with the performance squads and programme over the last year.

I would like to thank all my committee members who give their time willingly and voluntarily and would encourage all parents and children to remember the large amount of volunteer work these few people do for Junior Tennis. Thanks to Stephen Garvin, Will Boyd, Carlos Miranda, Gordon Watt, Glenn Maitland and Greg

O'Rawe for all their hard work on the committee. Also, thanks must go to those who have assisted at Provincial matchplays and other events, without whom these events would simply not be possible – Eileen Carlin, Jenny Lyall and Willie Noteman.

As usual, please contact the Junior Development committee for any help or advice regarding junior issues, matchplays, tournaments, or if you as parents need any advice.

Good luck to all players and parents for the 2024 season.

Rosamund Thompson

**Convenor Junior Development**