



JUNIOR DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2025

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.

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 for selection for Ulster Interprovincial teams in these age groups, as well as valuable tournament experience at that time of the year. There were more than 70 children taking part in the regional qualifiers over the four regions, with 16 players participating in each of the Provincial events. Thanks to all those who assisted in supervising these events and to the clubs who provided their facilities - Cavehill, David Lloyd, Downshire, Enniskillen, Portadown and Windsor. Re-structuring the events to have four regions instead of two has proved successful in providing further opportunities for competition across the province, and this will continue going forward.

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 Tour 100, 200 and 500 tournaments which are easier for players and parents to commit to. Will has worked 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 continued developments to come during this season.

The 2025 junior tournament calendar saw a busy 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 remained high.

We are also pleased that there are more international tournaments in Ulster than ever before, with a Tennis Europe event now established at Belfast Boat Club at Easter, in addition to the ITF Under 18 event which continues to run successfully 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 Tennis Ulster 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 have implemented 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 have increased the standard of refereeing and supervision at tournaments across Ulster.

This year, the Junior Interprovincials were again split into two separate events, with the Under 18s taking place in Castlebar Tennis Club in August, and the Under 14s in September at Belfast Tennis Club. Both events were very 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 14s finishing as close runners-up behind a strong Leinster team. Our Under 18s will have learned a lot from this year's experience and will no doubt feature strongly in the next year or two.

This year marked the last Interprovincials for some of the team, with Chris Cusick, Paige Hawthorne, Tegan Long, Reese McCann and Patrick Young all finishing their junior interprovincial careers. We wish them well for the future and in their transition into senior tennis. Thanks to team captains Peter Bothwell and Jordan McKeown for their hard work with the Under 18 team, and Peter and Gordon Watt for looking after the Under 14s.

At the Irish Open Championships at Fitzwilliam in August, there was success as Charlie McVeigh completed a hat-trick of titles at Under 12 level, a great achievement. There were many other excellent performances from Ulster players across the events. Many congratulations to all on their success.

Ulster is also fortunate to have three players currently ranked number one in Ireland, as Saki Mishima, Sam Irwin and Aryia Pringle Quinn are currently in top position in their age groups. Congratulations to them and we look forward to another successful season for each of them. Ulster players Patrick Sinclair, Gabriel Fairfowl, Charlie McVeigh, Phoebe Liew, Ruby Norris, James McMillan and Rory Stewart are also very highly ranked in Ireland, and will no doubt aim to improve their rankings even further this season.

The Ulster Squad programme has continued to go from strength to strength this year, with more than seventy players actively involved across all age groups. We are very fortunate to have Gordon Watt and Peter Bothwell leading the programme; their dedication and commitment to every player is exceptional. Their support extends far beyond training sessions, with both travelling regularly to tournaments throughout Ireland to support and encourage our players, something deeply appreciated by both players and parents. The programme has become the envy of the other Provinces, and the collective hard work is reflected in outstanding tournament performances. At the National Indoor Championships in January 2026, five Ulster players reached the finals, with three emerging as champions, a fantastic achievement. Thanks again to Gordon and Peter.

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 Peter Bothwell, Will Boyd, Glenn Maitland, Jordan McKeown, Willie Noteman, Greg O'Rawe and Gordon Watt 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 and Jenny Lyall.

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 2026 season.

Rosamund Thompson

Convenor Tennis Ulster Junior Development