

## March

LIVERPOOL lifted the Division One title in the National Women's Waterpolo League despite losing to runners-up Manchester in the final clash of the season.

All divisions came together for a spectacular end to the season that was set to decide the winners across all four divisions as well as who would finish at the bottom of the tables and who was destined for the play-offs. Some unexpected results sent the form book plummeting to the bottom of Manchester's diving pit as teams threw everything into their final games.

Liverpool bagged a relatively easy 11-1 victory over Penguin A to assure themselves of victory even before their final game against Manchester. To add to Liverpool's celebrations, Rosie Morris was voted top goalkeeper in the division and Fiona McCann was top player after scoring 44 goals throughout the season – an average of nearly five per game.

All three Liverpool teams had very low totals for major fouls, their C team winning the fair play award in Division One and the B team winning the same in Division Three.

Tisbury struggled in the top division, losing all nine games during the season. They trade places with newly-crowned Division Two champions Otter A, whose 14 wins from 14 games made them runaway winners. Runners-up Solihull elected not to play off against Harrogate and remain in Division Two.

At the bottom of Division Two, Hucknall looked the most likely to be relegated but pulled off a surprise 11-7 win over eventual third place finishers Haywards Heath. A draw with Coventry the following day saw the East Midlands side finish above Walsall and Coventry and remain safe in the division. Manchester's C team topped Division Three. The team of juniors convincingly won their final two games. Liverpool C

won the right to play Hucknall for a place in Division Two. Sheffield B finished just one point down on Liverpool and could easily have challenged for a place in the higher division had they not had points deducted in the first round. Otter B move up to Division Three and Carlisle made it through to the play-offs after finishing first and second respectively in Division Four.

### Play-offs

Walsall hosted the play-offs on January 31. Hucknall attempted to hold off Liverpool B to retain their place in Division Two. First strike went to Liverpool but the more experienced Hucknall side controlled the game, stretching out to a 9-2 lead after the third quarter. Liverpool pulled back to 9-5 by full-time but Hucknall claimed the victory.

Invicta faced Carlisle in order to stay in Division Three. A scrappy first three quarters saw the two teams tightly matched in a scrappy game. Invicta eventually came out on top with a 7-6 scoreline.

### Record number

A record number of teams will play in the NWPL next season. Carlisle, Exeter City and Worthing have all been accepted into Division Four, which will have 11 teams in the league and 37 teams in total across the divisions. New teams have until November to apply for a place in the 2010 league.

### Women wow Tavira

The British women's national side enjoyed success at the Tavira International Water Polo Tournament in Tavira, Portugal, finishing second after winning three of their four matches.

The encouraging results included an impressive 8-4 victory over Serbia and a win over home side Portugal with a score

of 15-3 – one of the team's best-ever victories. They then beat France, one of the top eight sides in Europe, with a tight 8-7 scoreline.

Britain and France then met in the tournament decider on Sunday but our girls missed opportunities to eventually go down 7-4. Chloe Wilcox and Rachel Drabble featured among the tournament's top scorers with six and five goals respectively.

### Mark Molloy

Tributes have been paid to Preston coach, Mark Molloy, 44, who tragically died in a car crash on New Year's Eve.

He became head coach last year after initially joining the club 30 years ago, having been a successful swimmer and polo player, and helped achieve an historic victory against arch-rivals Lancaster in the North Lancashire League for the first time in 10 years.

Club chairman Peter Mason said: 'He was a volunteer whose enthusiasm, motivation and dedication to the sport of water polo was second to none. He had an infectious personality and was always willing to give his time to develop younger players. He will be greatly missed by all at the club. At this time of sorrow, the thoughts of all members of Preston Swimming Club are with Mark's family.'

### Development

Funding issues have been a key debate in the sport but the talent and development programmes will continue to go ahead regardless.

The sport has benefited from the Sport England Club and Coach Programme with Tim Dunsbee having been appointed full time to assist with mentoring coaches in the Manchester area. The post should ensure the continued development of the sport in the area. Similar posts in Liverpool and Lancaster are anticipated shortly.

The Academy goes ahead as planned this year, and an alternative venue for 2010 is being sought as Millfield is set for major renovations. Prospective team managers and people wishing to take the polo-specific sections of the level two coaching course should contact sue.

[langston@swimming.org](mailto:langston@swimming.org).

Players born in 1991 and 1992 should look out for dates for the resurrected inter-regional competition. This is expected to be in July. Dates will be confirmed when possible.