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SPORT

SWIMMING

Records fall at school gala

Records tumbled as young swimmers from the district took part in a school swimming gala.

The St Albans District Primary School Swimming Championships gala, held at St Albans School, is for pupils in Years 5 & 6.

Almost 100 pupils took part in the event, which is also used for selection of the district team to compete in the County Championships at Watford next month.

Harpenden Academy's Emilia Dunwoodie was the stand out swimmer at the meet, achieving three records in her four events and picking up the Championship Best Performance cup.



■ Emilia Dunwoodie was the stand-out swimmer at the meet

Dunwoodie broke a long standing record in the 50m Freestyle for Year 5 girls by over a second.

James Atwell from Harpenden's Grove School broke two records on his way to victories in three events.

Kirsty Fuge from St Albans High School for Girls also set a new best.

The year 6 girls group was particularly competitive with Lucy Coia-Bell, Freya Dibley and Sarah McGrath all winning a mixture of events.

Abbey days for quartet

Four swimmers from Abbey C.E.V.A. Primary School in St Albans have become county champions – and now face a nervous wait to see if they have qualified for the national finals.

Jemima Samols, Iorwen Ellis, Hannah Barker and Amandine Geurts came second in the Eastern Region small schools freestyle relay final, at the preliminary round of the English Schools' Swimming Association (ESSA) Primary Team Championships held in Watford.

The team, who also came third in the mixed stroke relay final, competed against 20 other small primary schools from Hertfordshire as well as teams from Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

It remains to be seen if their results will get them a place in the national finals to be held in Sheffield in June.

All four swim regularly, with Samols, Ellis and Guerts part of the City of St Albans Swimming Club, while Barker competes for Harpenden Swimming Club.

Headteacher Emma Fenn said: "I am absolutely delighted for the girls, as they are all committed club swimmers and train up to five times a week."

Saints promotion hopes remain alive after tactical masterstroke and thrilling fightback

St Albans Hockey Club men's first team kept their promotion hopes alive with a thrilling come-from-behind win at City of Peterborough.

Ian Scanlon grabbed two as Saints scored from three late penalty corners for a 3-2 success.

South African international Lance Louw, who has been running free hockey sessions at St Albans senior and junior schools as well as coaching the St Albans HC juniors and academy, got the third.

The win lifts Saints into second, and the final promotion

spot, of the East League Premier A Division, ahead of their opponents on goal difference.

It was Peterborough's first home defeat for 18 months and came because of a bold move by head coach Andy Halliday who took the decision to withdraw goalkeeper Iain Fraser for an extra attacker.

That player was Scanlon and it was his low thunderbolt which began the comeback before a high drag flick stole the points with the final touch of the game.

League leaders Wapping arrive at Oaklands this Saturday.



■ South African international Lance Louw scored for Saints

Academy leading the way in fencing



■ Visit www.teampdfa.com for further information about the club

■ A PDF Academy session in full swing in St Albans. Inset coach Paul Davis

Pictures: KEVIN LINES

FENCING

Mark Hemmings
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A St Albans fencing school, which teaches 500 children a week, is helping the sport to blossom across the county.

The *Herts Ad* was invited to a session at Sandringham School and spoke with ex-GB international fencer Paul Davis about his academy.

The 27-year-old former University of Hertfordshire student told how the formation of his club, which also runs sessions in Harpenden and Hatfield, came about.

He had taken up the sport while attending Verulam School and returned there to begin with.

He said: "Through uni I managed

to pick up my coaching qualifications.

"Through the love of the sport I wanted to do something with the skills I'd learnt and what I'd invested into it as a competitor.

"I came back and re-established the club at Verulam School in 2009.

"From the response we had at the after school club, we then booked a hall for six weeks and ran a community class and had eight people turn up.

"From there it snowballed and we set up another night.

"Word of mouth with the schools got out and I started teaching as a one-man band at Queenswood.

"I took on a few more coaches and over time we are now up to 50 classes a week coaching over 500 children.

"We have had fencers selected for Great Britain and England; they have won national titles.

"It's fantastic. There's nothing

more rewarding than engaging with children, helping create these memories."

The academy also encourages members to develop within the sport.

One example is Verulam School student Luke Barbour who has developed from a complete novice fencer, to reaching regional standard and aims for national recognition.

He also coaches at the academy.

"Paul started running fencing sessions in games and I moved on and started training twice a week, now I'm doing four sessions a week training and coaching," said the 16-year-old.

"Training led me to coaching in September 2014 and I started running the 3-7-year-olds sessions, they use plastic swords and masks rather than the full metal stuff.

"It's just fun games based activities for them to get them interested."

TENNIS

Davis Cup set for service

The success of Team GB and Andy Murray in winning the Davis Cup last year has led the Lawn Tennis Association to launch a legacy programme – and St Albans and District will be part of it.

Batchwood Tennis Academy has successfully applied to have eight of its coaches accepted on the scheme, which aims to reach 10,000 five-to-eight-year-old children county-wide.

At Batchwood this will involve the Academy coaches heading into eight different venues across the district.

Details are still being finalised for the programme which hopes to start in April but Batchwood's head coach, Jon Meredith, is excited at the opportunities this will bring.

He said: "I've got to sit down and target which schools and areas to target. But it's about getting more people involved and playing tennis. The wider the pyramid, the higher it can go.

"Since I've been here, the process of going to local schools has produced over 40 national players."

Leon Smith, Great Britain Davis Cup captain, said: "It has been quite some journey and hopefully the victory can inspire loads more young kids into tennis and also those already in tennis to aim high and work hard."

If schools wish to be considered as a venue, contact Jon Meredith on 07748 777 080.

LACROSSE

National bow for schools

Two schools in the district have returned from the biggest lacrosse tournament in the country with dreams of what might have been.

St Albans High School for Girls and St George's in Harpenden were two of over 200 teams that took part in the Rathbones National Schools Lacrosse Championship (RNSLC).

And both made the last 16 in their respective competitions before losing to the future winners.

St Albans lost out to Berkhamsted in the U19A Championship while Wycombe Abbey put an end to St George's run in the U19A Division One Cup.

Earlier both teams have battled through a number of group games to reach the knockout stage.

The four-day tournament, which saw over 3,500 girls take part, was held at Surrey Sports Park in Guildford and formed the start of a £125,000 legacy programme to raise the profile of the sport ahead of the 2017 FIL Rathbones Women's Lacrosse World Cup.

Mark Coups, CEO of English Lacrosse, said: "This legacy programme is hugely important for us. One of our key aims is to increase participation in lacrosse across England, bringing the game to new groups and new regions."