

## **Match Reports – Inter Services Team Championships 2024 21-22 Mar 24 – Wolverhampton Squash and Rackets Club**

### **Introduction**

A great couple of days of squash was witnessed in Wolverhampton as the three Services battled it out for squash glory after a last-minute switch of venue from Portsmouth. The Army was victorious in 3 of the 4 team categories, emulating the same achievement in the previous two years. The Army Squash family also enjoyed a superb mid-event social gathering at the nearby Siculo Italian restaurant fostering team building and morale while enjoying themselves off court. The Team Captains have their own stories to share, adding to the excitement of this memorable event.

### **Mens Report (Smart, Jones, Boys, Thomas, May)**

The men's senior competition this year was fiercely contested. The Army team recognised the Royal Air Force (RAF) as their primary rivals, given their exceptionally strong lineup. Additionally, we were aware that the Royal Navy might be slightly disadvantaged due to the absence of their top-ranked player, who was deployed on an operational tour.

The RAF were up vs the Navy first. The RAF came up trumps with a 5-0 win which meant the Army's first match would be vs the Navy on afternoon #1.

The Army's first match of the day was at number 3. The men's captain, Dean Boys, expertly dispatched his tricky opponent 3-1. Next up was number 4 - with Mark Thomas stepping up a number, he had a fantastic match, a battle for the ages and won 3-2! Stand out performance of the match.

Third on was Adam Smart, the Army No.1 and top seed who made light work of his opponent. Once he simplified his game it was plain sailing after the first game which was hotly contested.

Last on was Paul Jones, he was playing a tricky opponent, but Paul's steady hand was just too much he proved to be a comfortable 3-0 victor.

Army won all 4 matches which set up a fantastic final vs the RAF on Day 2.

An early start and Arthur May stepped up and into court after 3 1/2 hours in a car! Arthur was not his usual self and seemed to take a while to get into the game. The first two games went the way of the RAF with Arthur digging up every ounce of energy. The 3rd game saw a fight back from Arthur - but it was too late in the game, and it ended 8-11 and a 3-0 win for the RAF.

Dean Boys ten stepped up second to play an old foe. The previous match went the way of the RAF, so Dean was eager to make amends. The first two games were played at a ferocious pace seeing the tie levelled at 1-1. The 3rd game was a close fought battle with the RAF taking it 11-9. The fourth game was too much for Dean as he succumbed to the speed and pace of the RAF opponent. RAF 2-0.

3rd up was Adam; he was playing the best squash anyone has seen him play. He was also facing a player he had recently lost 3-0 too. Adam played out of his skin and was winning 2-1. Looking comfortable and moving well, his RAF opponent came from nowhere to win the next 2 games and the match was effectively settled. 3-0 RAF.

Mark Thomas was up again, playing confidently and always up for a marathon, Mark put in some monstrous rallies and wore his opponent down. Great stand out performance again winning 3-1.

Finally, Paul Jones was up against a fit and eager RAF number 2. Both players knew each other well and it was a fantastic match and battle. Paul was again up by 2-1 before the RAF came back to win 3-2.

The final result 4-1 to the RAF. Some really close matches and we knew the match would be tight, it could have swung either way but unfortunately it went the way of the RAF.

Final note: Congratulations to Army team player Andy Taylor for getting married!

### **Womens Report (Higgins, Hitch, Lamb, Graham, McKinley)**

The Army Women's team for the 23/24 UKAF Inter-Services competition featured a blend of experienced players and promising talents. The roster included veteran Capt Michelle Higgins, Capt Jen Hitch and Lt Col Lucy Lamb, mixed with the new player 2Lt Emma Graham and up-and-coming Cpl Stacy Mckinley.

Following a surprise defeat by the RN over the RAF team, the Army started day 1 against the RAF, with coaching tips from Paul Carter and mutual support from all team members, the Army team started out strong. Although competitive at all seeds, showcasing the growth in women's squash across the services, the Army academy programme had provided the Army players with more time on court and exposure to squash across a range of different player styles.

This was evident with confident performances across the board resulting in a clean sweep for the Army.

Day 2 had the Army team facing the RN team in the final, both teams only comprising of 4 players due to unavailability. 2Lt Graham gave us the leg up playing out her skin in 3<sup>rd</sup> seed and winning 3-1 in the first match. Next up with was a nail-biting affair with no.1 seed Capt Higgins losing the next match in a fast and furious game.

All eyes then switched to Cpl McKinley as she battled out a 5-setter against her opponent, but the hard work she has put into her game was showcased with better lengths and deadly drops, finally pulling her through to victory to take the team 2-1 up over the Navy. Last up was Capt Jen Hitch, this was the final opportunity for the RN to make a comeback, but she outclassed her opponent with a seamless performance, snagging 3-0 and with that, the Army secured the UKAF Inter-Services title for another season.

### **U25 Report (Watson, Matthews, McLaughlin, Moreton, Bell)**

The highlight for the U25 team was the opportunity to connect with both familiar and new teammates and players, not only within Army squash but also across the Royal Navy and RAF. We deeply valued the wisdom, encouragement, and anecdotes shared by the seasoned players in the men's, women's and master's teams. Your presence on the balcony, cheering us on, added an extra layer of motivation and camaraderie.

As most of the team were representing the army u25s at the inter-services for the first time, this support made a huge difference on the first day in the matches against the Navy, where many of the coaches and older players made the time to watch the matches and offer advice in between games. This encouraged everyone to step up to the occasion and helped our 4-0 victory against the Navy, which had the team in great spirits heading to a fantastic meal with

everyone from Army squash, which made us all feel like an important part of Army squash and Army sport.

This confidence and positivity helped us to win 4-1 against the RAF on the finals day, resulting in the Army u25s lifting the trophy for the 3rd consecutive year. We then all appreciated the great venue, sportsmanship and atmosphere during the awards ceremony and finally headed home tired but uplifted after a tough two days of competitive squash.

### **Masters Report (Green, Ryan, McCarter, Stoby, Radcliffe)**

#### **Day 1:**

In an exhilarating display of skill, grit, and determination the Army Masters Squash team emerged victorious with a resounding 5-0 win over the RAF. From the very first serve, the players showcased their exceptional technique and strategic prowess, dominating the court with their movement and precise shots. The team's impressive coordination and seamless communication between games allowed them to outmanoeuvre their opponents at every turn, leaving the RAF struggling to keep up.

Their unwavering focus and relentless effort throughout the matches ensured a well-deserved triumph, setting the stage for an exciting showdown with the Royal Navy on day 2. The game of the day on the Masters Court belonged to Major Elaine Radcliffe winning the first match of the day 3-0 and setting the team off with a great start.

#### **Day 2:**

The second day of the tournament proved to be nothing short of a thrilling battle. Facing off against a formidable opponent and reigning IS Masters Team Champions the Royal Navy, our team demonstrated exceptional resilience and resolve. Every point was fiercely contested, with both sides leaving no stone unturned in their pursuit of victory. The matches were filled with lung busting rallies and breath-taking shots, showcasing the sheer talent and determination of both teams.

In a nail-biting encounter the Army team emerged triumphant with a narrow 3-2 victory over the Navy. The matches were incredibly close, 3 of the 5 matches going all the way to 3-2 in games, with each player pushing themselves to the limit and leaving everything on the court. The game of the day was left to the number 2 seeds with the match poised at 2-2, the Royal Navy player took a 2-0 lead and the tie looked all but over, however, SSgt Paul Ryan of the AAC, managed to win in a tight game that included match points for his opponent. Paul then took the match to 2-2 and proceeded to dig deep and win the match 3-2. The intensity and sportsmanship displayed by both teams were truly commendable and appreciation must be given to the training and support from the Army team coach Paul Carter.

Overall, the Army Masters squash team showcased their exceptional Squash, teamwork, and unwavering spirit over the course of these two matches. Their dominant 5-0 win over the RAF on the first day set the tone for their subsequent triumph over the Royal Navy on the second day. With their remarkable performances, our players have managed to regain the UKAF Masters team trophy, proving ourselves as true champions.

### **Look Forward**

Army Squash now turns its attention to the Inter Units Championships scheduled for May. At the same time, we are diligently putting plans in place to prepare the Army team's elite players for the Inter Services Individual Championships in October. Additionally, several players are also looking forward to OSVs to Gibraltar for the Army Masters team and Miami for the Army senior men's and development teams later in the year.