

WELSH SQUASH AND RACKETBALL 2016

The Welsh Squash and Racketball Awards 2016 took place on 1st July at the Angel Hotel, and what a great night it was. Supported by Sport Wales, Squash Wales consistently punches well above its weight in all aspects of the sport, and so a night to celebrate the successes of the 2015 and 2016 season was well and truly worthy.

Squash Wales aim to unite a proud sporting Nation, through the endeavour to get every child hooked on sport for life and create a nation of Champions. This can only be done through increased partnerships with Local Authorities, the support of parents and volunteers, and the players themselves, so it was great to honour many individuals and teams, and their contributions during the evening.



Taking place at the same time as Wales' Euro 2016 quarter-final against Belgium, the celebration was destined to be one of anticipation, excitement, joy and pure Welsh pride. After a short introduction by compere Sam Lloyd, the night kicked off by highlighting the fantastic work that is being done with the Under 11s and Under 13s, the key point of entry into the WSRB player pathway. The night highlighted work that provides great opportunities for young Welsh players to show-case their talent at a competitive level, with the aim to develop future Welsh champions.



The South Wales League is the 'backbone' of club squash in Wales, and so it was only fitting to congratulate the winners and runners-up of each division. It was a great opportunity to say well done to those who were successful, but also to thank the league manager Mike Howe, as well as the 176 volunteer captains – once again highlighting the impact these individuals can have!

As well as players and captains, an integral aspect of the sport are those who referee such a high-tempo, competitive sport. Wales provide around 6 courses a year for clubs and counties to send individuals to attain refereeing qualifications. The courses last for just one evening, however for those who are aspiring to develop further, workshops, mentoring and information packs are also available. Squash Wales is very proud of the refereeing initiatives that are available, and therefore showcased such opportunities during the night's proceedings.

The success stories continued to be celebrated as teams were acknowledged for their achievements at county and international levels. It was great to see so many over-achievers for such a small nation, especially at the European Championships and Masters representation. The final aspect of the night, and arguably the most exciting, was the announcement of the night's awards winners. First up was Young Coach of the Year - nominees were Nia Davies,

Tej Saran, Emily Powell and Alfie Wheeler. It was no surprise that the judges found it impossible to pick out an outright winner as all do such a fantastic job, and so it was a unanimous decision to provide all 4 coaches with the award.

The next award recognised the huge importance of those who are relied upon so heavily within WSRB – the volunteers: Jane Kirk from Newtown, Byron Lloyd Lewis organiser of the South Glamorgan League, Rachel Smith from Llanfylln, and Jim Tunley from Wrexham Brymbo. Once again these individuals were awarded for their remarkable enthusiasm and contributions towards the sport in Wales; without them, WSRB would not have experienced so much success in recent years.



Club of the Year was the next award to be presented, with representatives from Llanelli, Meads, Wrexham, Llantrisant and Newtown being welcomed to the stage. The love and passion for squash in Wales have been shown through the work so many clubs carry out; thus it is important that we acknowledge how they contribute so greatly to the development of the sport. However, the winner of this year's award – Mead has shown exceptional contribution not only at the senior and coaching levels of the pathway, but also through the juniors that come through the system. It is this all-round achievement that gave them the edge over others and why they were chosen as Club of the Year 2016.

The award for Coach of the Year, was presented to David Evans, who has worked, played and trained at the highest level, and now uses this experience to develop aspiring players. It is his enthusiasm to 'give-back' to the sport which enables him to excel as a coach, therefore granting him the award for 2016.



The final and most prestigious award was for the Special Award for Service to Squash, given to Geoff Thomas.

The night came to a close with a disco, and celebrations continued as Wales won their quarter-final! There was definitely plenty to shout about with the night ending on a massive high – all in all, a very successful night!