

## OCTOPUSH

# A splash hit!



Xarifa stars in action.

**IT may not be a mainstream sport, but octopush, or underwater hockey as it is also known, is certainly causing a splash in Tameside.**

Xarifa Underwater Hockey Club's under 16 team, based at Dukinfield Baths, returned from this summer's Junior National Championships held in Loughborough as champions – and are looking to build on the success by taking the sport and club further into people's thoughts.

"It's a difficult sport to get across to people, as it's not often seen." Said Xarifa club secretary Phil Lawrence.

"But once the kids come along, they enjoy it. It's becoming more popular all the time."

There are over 200 octopush teams nationwide, and another 25 specifically for juniors at under-16 and under-13 level. Talks are even taking place at the British Octopush Association of developing an under-10s bracket, due to the high numbers of younger swimmers taking an interest in the sport.

"Swimming clubs and leisure centres

are realising they need a variety to just swimming," said Lawrence, also the Sport Development Officer at the BOA (British Octopush Association).

"As the kids get older, they very often find other interests. Underwater hockey is one way of keeping kids involved in swimming – and fitter"

The sport itself is played on the pool floor. Much like the ice based game, underwater hockey is played with a puck and sticks, but that's where the similarity ends.

Underwater hockey is very much its own game, relying on good aerobic fitness, and a lot of teamwork. At 1.2kg, the puck is much heavier than in ice hockey, and the sticks a lot smaller, about the size of spatula.

Diving masks, snorkels and swim fins are all worn by players to assist with the underwater swimming, and mouth guards are worn as a precaution due to the weight of the puck. Gloves are also permitted on the playing hand, to prevent cuts and scrapes from the pool floor.

"We don't really have to sell the sport to the youngsters, but it's always nice to have more people coming along and taking an interest. You don't even have to be a great swimmer," said Lawrence.

Having formed in 2005, Xarifa has seen a great deal of success as a fledgling octopush club, both as a group and individually. The triumphant return as national champions was a catalyst for two members to be called up to the national squad.

Emily Hett was the first to be recognised and called up to the Under-19 Ladies squad for an International tournament in Rennes, France, in July. They eventually came second to a very good Spanish team – and at 14, Emily was one of the youngest participants at the tournament.

Sam Moss was also in Rennes representing the Under-19 Men's team, who came a disappointing fourth.

But despite missing out on the squad for this year's World Championships in Slovenia, both will be hoping for a recall sooner rather than later.

If you would like to go along to one of the training sessions held at Dukinfield Swimming Pool, contact [uw@btinternet.com](mailto:uw@btinternet.com) or [uw@btinternet.com](mailto:uw@btinternet.com).

Sessions are held every Friday between 6.30pm and 7.30pm.

by Jamie Holt