

Squash at the Henley Youth Festival

The Henley Youth Festival (HYF) is held every March and is a celebration of the visual & performing arts and sports for schools in the Henley-on-Thames area. One of its key aims is to provide children with experiences across a wide range of activities that they may not otherwise encounter. This year's theme was "Motion" so it was particularly apt that the Henley Junior Squash Club was involved in running a series of workshops and a fun tournament to introduce local primary school children to the concepts and skills of squash.

Wendy Maitland, the former Scottish National Champion and World Number 25, ran the workshops and the associated tournament. She visited six local primary schools over a hectic three day period, taking sessions for over 120 children! The sessions included basic ball skills, hand-eye coordination, footwork, fitness and fun games, and made extensive use of a squash wall (generously loaned by the Royal Berkshire Squash Rackets Association). A fun tournament was then held between the schools on the squash courts at the Henley Leisure Centre. This not only allowed the children to put the skills they had learnt into use in competitive games but also allowed them to show great camaraderie.





The workshops and tournament proved a great hit with the children and Antonia Rolph, the HYF Workshop Coordinator, was full of praise for Wendy describing her as “a dynamic and inspiring coach who has encouraged and motivated the children”. Antonia was particularly struck by Wendy’s ability to promote graciousness in victory and encouragement among the children, even in those who were finding it more difficult.

The HYF is an important part of the Henley Junior Squash Club’s strategy of attracting local children into squash. The club’s chair, Richard Little, said that “the workshops reach children who may not have yet found the sport and allow them to have a totally new experience. Each year we gain new members via the HYF who then become involved in our weekend turn up & play sessions and our weekday after-school coaching sessions. I’d like to thank Wendy for doing such a wonderful job of promoting squash in the local schools, and England Squash & Racketball and the HYF for supporting Wendy’s involvement in the festival”.