

# English optimism for the future

There was no trophy to match Emily Whitlock's 2013 girls' under-19 triumph, but England high performance coaches Lee Drew and Fiona Geaves still left the 2014 Tecnifibre British Junior Open with plenty to enthuse about, writes *Simon Redfern*.

With the mixed European U19 and U17 team crowns to defend later this year and the World Junior Boys' Team Championship on offer in August, both coaches found enough to encourage them from both the boys' and girls' performances in Sheffield for those title tilts.

This year it was the boys who progressed furthest in the shape of the unseeded George Parker and 5/8 seed Patrick Rooney, who respectively reached the semi-finals of the U19 and U17 events.

Parker (Leicestershire) succumbed 3/1 to the eventual champion, Jordan's Ahmad Alsaraj, while Merseysider Rooney lost in straight games to Ng Eain Yow, the second seed from Malaysia.

Parker had beaten Essex's world junior bronze medallist, Richie Fallows, 3/1 in the quarter-finals and

Rooney also had to defeat an England team-mate to reach the last four, beating Yorkshire's James Peach 3/0.

Drew said of the boys' results: "There were some very promising performances, with George and Patrick both reaching their respective semi-finals. The many matches that I

witnessed generally showed some very good squash from the boys and some very strong performances against very good foreign opposition."

As for the girls, Geaves was able to celebrate five quarter-finalists – three at U19 level (Lily Taylor, Nada Elkalaawy and Anna Kimberley), one at U17 (Georgina Kennedy) and one at U15 (Elise Lazarus).

She commented: "The girls competed superbly this



George Parker is ecstatic after beating English rival Richie Fallows in the boys' under-19 quarter-finals at the Tecnifibre British Junior Open

year in all age groups, highlighting the fact we are beginning to compete strongly on the worldwide stage.

"From the U13 girls all the way through to the U19 girls we are clearly seeing progression and development as we begin to challenge for the ultimate event of a

junior's career, the Junior World Open."

As a result, Geaves is confident of further European success this year and a strong performance in the World Junior Girls' Individual Championship in August.

She reasoned: "Looking at how our players performed against the strongest nations in the world at the BJO, I feel we are in an excellent position to defend the European

titles we won last year.

"In Europe, England are the team to beat, so the pressure tends to be on our players to perform, but looking at the performances at the BJO, we have strength in depth of overall finishing positions over other European nations, so this puts us in a strong position leading into the Five Nations U15 and U13, European U17s and European U19s individual and team.

"With our top U17 and U19 girls all performing and finishing well, this is an excellent stepping stone and experience as to what is to come in August. "

Drew is similarly optimistic, saying: "I think we are looking strong for the European Championships. The boys' U19 individual event promises to be incredibly competitive, with a number of Englishmen sure to fancy their chances.

"The 2014 World Junior Championships in Namibia should also be captivating viewing and I think England will be highly competitive in the team event. They will be a thorn in the side of any opposition they come up against."

## EGYPT'S DRYSDALE REGRET

Egypt once again dominated the Tecnifibre British Junior Open in Sheffield in January, winning five of the eight titles, but the trophy they desire more than any other eluded them for the first time since 2005.

The Drysdale Cup, awarded to the winner of the boys' under-19 championship, surprisingly went to joint fifth seed Ahmad Alsaraj, who thus became the first Jordanian on the BJO honours board.

Indeed, there was not even an Egyptian in the final, joint third seed Diego Elias having dismantled their world junior champion and top seed, Karim El Hammamy, 3/0 in the semi-finals.

The Peruvian was then expected to walk off with the Cup, having previously lifted the U.S. Junior Open title without dropping a game, but it was not to be, Alsaraj triumphing 3/1.

Egypt were left with the consolation of winning the three other boys' events, with the youngest two being all-Egyptian affairs.

Top seed Mohamed El Shamy edged out joint third seed Moustafa Assal 3/2 in the U13 final to retain his title and Youssef Ibrahim showed why he was the U15 favourite by overpowering 3/4 seed Moustafa Montaser 3/0 in their final.

The U17 final saw top seed Youssef Soliman defeat Malaysian second seed Ng Eain Yow 3/1.

Meanwhile, the girls' events illustrated that the future is bright for Malaysian squash, with joint third seed Aifa Azman winning the U13 title and top seed Siv

Subramanian the U15 trophy.

Azman upset top-seeded Egyptian Jana Shiha 3/2, claiming a thrilling decider 16-14 after saving six match balls, before Subramanian twice came from behind to pip another Egyptian, joint third seed Hania El

Hammamy, and atone for her loss in last year's final.

The two other girls' finals went Egypt's way, though, U17 top seed Habiba Mohamed overwhelming team-mate Hana Basem, seeded 3/4, 3/0 to claim her fourth consecutive BJO title and second seed Yathreb Adel upsetting U19 favourite Mariam Metwally 3/1 to land her fifth BJO crown in a row.



Jordan's Ahmad Alsaraj with the Drysdale Cup