

Southern Area Squads Report May 2023 to April 2024

Southern Area Squad membership and National Teams shortlisting remained quite challenging in the run up to the 2023 event, with a number of players unavailable due to other commitments, in addition to a few injuries – one the day before travel – and recent weight group changes. There had also not been sufficient time to organise and run a closed Area trials, as had been the plan in 2023.

The full details (date, venue, format) of the 2022 National Teams were published rather late, allowing only limited opportunity to finalise selections, and book travel and accommodation. The format remained unchanged from the previous year, with male and female minor/pre-cadet, cadet/junior and senior teams. Players were selected on the basis of national ranking, EDS/junior/senior national squad membership and performance at appropriate recent events.

The 2023 National Teams took place in Walsall on 1st July. The minor/cadet boys were drawn in a challenging pool with NHC, Wales and Midlands. Strong opening wins against the Midlands (5-2) and Wales (6-1) was followed by a 6-1 defeat to a high-quality NHC team. This set up a difficult semi-final against London, which was just out of reach in the end despite close fights, resulting in a very deserved bronze. In what was an extremely close-fought pool, the slightly depleted cadet/junior boys were unlucky not to progress from their pool of four with NHC, Wales and North West. Each nail-biting match finished 4-3, with a win against Wales but the narrowest of losses to NHC and North West. The result didn't really reflect how well the team fought. The senior men had a tough start, losing 4-1 to London, but then turned things around with great wins against the Midlands (5-0) and Y&H (4-1), setting up a tough semi-final against Scotland, who had won all four of their pool fights. The match was one of the highlights of the day, with the men's team putting in amazing performances to pull off an outstanding 4-1 win. It was a refight against a largely unstoppable London in the final, but the resulting silver medal was an excellent result, and the best finish for the men's team for a number of years.

The minor/pre-cadet girls' team were drawn in a pool of four with Scotland, North West and West. A good start with a comprehensive 4-1 win over the West was followed by a great performance to beat the North West 5-0. A tight match against Scotland finished with a 3-2 loss, resulting in a second-place finish in the pool. This set up an exciting semi-final against London, with the coming through 4-1 winners, earning then a final against an extremely strong NHC, and ultimately a very good silver medal. The cadet/junior women's team had the worst possible luck. Drawn in an awful pool with London and Scotland, they narrowly lost the opener to London 3-2, but rallied to be a strong Scottish side by the same 3-2 margin. With Scotland beating London, every team had one team win and five individual wins, and the girls were desperately unlucky to lose out by five points because of a waza-ari win. It was to be a tough day for the senior women too, with a strong opening 4-1 win against North West, but back-to-back losses against Scotland and NHC saw them eliminated at the pool stage. Many thanks to James Lewis, Danny Williams, Fiona Chan and Nicky Sexton for helping look after the teams.

The Southern Area continues to be well-represented on the England and GB squads, with over 35 current members of the England and/or GB squads representing Southern Area clubs. Weekly ETDC sessions are hosted at Core Judo Club. The ETDC programme was restructured in March 2024, with additional weekly England Judo training opportunities offered at Camberley, Kin Ryu and Tonbridge. JM continues to support EDS sessions (the REDS and ETD programmes were consolidated into the England Development Squad (EDS) in September 2023), with approximately monthly central training weekends at Walsall.

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