

Southern Area Squads Report May 2025 to April 2026

Southern Area Squad membership and National Teams shortlisting was very challenging in the run up to the 2025 event, with a number of players unavailable due to other commitments, in addition to a few injuries and recent weight group changes. It proved not to be feasible to field a senior women's team, despite the Area being very strong on paper, in part due to a clashing event.

The format of the 2025 National Team Championships 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 2025 National Teams took place in Walsall on 5th July. The minor/pre-cadet boys were drawn in a pool with NW, Midlands, West and Y&H. A slow start saw a narrow 4-3 defeat to NW, but the team pushed through to win all the remaining matches: 4-3 against Midlands and Y&H, and 5-2 against the West, placing them runners up to Y&H in the pool on countback. The semi-final against the other pool winners (and eventual gold medallists) Scotland proved too much, but gave the boys a well-earned bronze. The cadet/junior boys were drawn in a tough pool of four, with eventual finalists NHC and Scotland, and the West. The NHC and Scotland teams were very strong, defeating the boys 5-2 and 6-1 respectively, but the team rallied to a close-fought victory over the West. This was not, however, enough to progress beyond the pool stages. On the back of last year's gold, the men had a favourable draw and won their opening matches against Y&H and NW, both by a 3-2 margin, but frustratingly losing a player to injury, which compounded a last-minute replacement that had been necessary. Unusually, the final match against Wales finished in a 2-2 draw, which was enough to push the team into the runner-up spot, despite losing no matches. This set up a semi-final against London, who proved too much for the depleted team, and a 4-1 loss gave the men thoroughly creditable bronze-medal finish.

It was a difficult pool of four with NW, Wales and Midlands for the depleted minor/pre-cadet girls' team, who sadly failed to win a match – despite some great individual contents – and did not progress beyond the pool stages. It was unfortunately to be the same fate for the cadet/junior girls, with about the toughest draw possible in a pool of three with London and Scotland. Despite an extremely close match with Scotland that was lost 3-2, a second loss against London (4-1) saw the girls eliminated (and London and Scotland would go on to contest the final). Many thanks to Natalie Alston, James Lewis, 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 30 current members of the England and/or GB squads representing Southern Area clubs. JM continues to support EDS sessions, with approximately monthly central training weekends at Walsall.

A Southern Area Closed event, which was planned to act as a recognition event to help select the Southern Area squad, took place in Woking on 16th November. Despite it being made clear on the entry outlines that the results would help inform squad selection – with the squad being the basis of National Teams' selections – the entry was disappointingly low across all age groups. While some results may be useful for 2026 selection, the absence of a significant proportion of higher-ranked players meant that the primary purpose of the event was not really achieved. The nature of the National Teams and the necessity to field the strongest teams possible really precludes the use of placings at the Southern Area Closed as a mechanism of selection. Hopefully we can identify a more effective means of re-establishing squad membership going forwards, or else offer open Area training sessions instead.

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