



**INTER REGIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS  
BUSINESS ARTICULATION**

## A celebration of junior volleyball: The Inter-Regional Championships

**When?** The second May Bank Holiday weekend every year

**Where?** The National Volleyball Centre, Kettering

**What's so good about it?**

The IRC is a true volleyball festival; a riot of noise and colour. Every inch of floorspace at the National Volleyball Centre in Kettering is utilised to squeeze in four full-sized courts plus spectator seating. In 2017, the Championships featured an incredible 108 matches (best of three sets), played across three days. If the noise and energy in the hall is amazing, the standard of play is just as good – with the event bringing together the very best junior volleyballing talent from across the country.



The event features around 400 athletes and coaches and we estimate that about the same number of parents and spectators are also typically in attendance across the three days, making this VE's most well attended event. Only the National Cup Finals weekend even comes close to registering an equivalent level of attendance (with just over 500 across two days in 2017).

The incredible interest in the IRC is also evidenced on VE's digital platforms. Results and updates from the competition garnered over 1000 unique page views in 2017 while social media engagement levels were also well in excess of VE's typical benchmarks.

The IRC has not become the most well-attended single event in the VE indoor calendar overnight. It has been running for around 30 years and remains the only opportunity for inter-regional competition during the indoor season. As VE's only non-club competition, it represents a unique opportunity for local rivalries to be played out and for players to experience playing alongside players and coaches from outside of their usual club and country environment.

The IRC is also an integral part of the youth talent identification programme. Most of, if not all, the players currently in the England training pathway will be competing. The competition also provides an

opportunity for coaches to spot any emerging talents who haven't yet made it to an England training camp.



Virtually any player who has ever donned an England vest will have taken part in the IRC at some point. The 2016 event, for example, featured the Bello twins, Javier and Joaquin, who would go on to take gold in the beach volleyball competition at the Youth Commonwealth Games just a year later. For anyone wanting to see England's future volleyball stars, there can be no better opportunity than the IRC.

This competition is where most of the nine VE regions focus their annual junior development efforts, gearing everything up towards the end-of-May competition weekend. A strong performance in any one of the competition's age/gender divisions will typically be the leading objective for any region when they outline their junior training plan for the season.

In the 2017 championships, all nine regions took part across five competitions (U14 'A' and 'B' girls, U16 girls, U15 boys and U17 boys). Northern Ireland and Wales have also taken part on occasion and are regularly invited to participate. Last year, the North-West dominated the girls' events, winning the U16 competition and the U14 'A' competition, with the West Midlands winning the U14 'B'. London were the major players in the boys' events, winning the U15 competition and sharing the U17 spoils with the South-West.

For the first time, VE is now actively looking for commercial partners who may want to be part of the ongoing success of the IRC. With public funding for national governing bodies being reduced, we are keen to secure the investment we need to sustain this event – and others like it in our competition calendar.

We are firm in our belief that volleyball – and the friendly competition which it engenders - is an ideal way of improving levels of activity, health and well-being, especially among young people. We are keen to find partners who share that belief and who would like to work with us to ensure that junior volleyball in this country receives the attention and investment that it deserves.

#### **How might a commercial partnership work?**

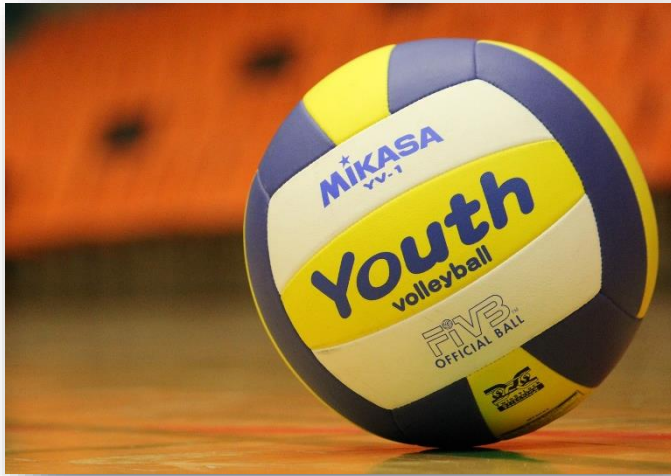
Squeezing four courts into one hall – even one as large as the National Volleyball Centre – means that no room remains for courtside advertising boards. However, traditional brand advertising could still be deployed in other areas of the venue, such as the balcony viewing area, sports hall entrance, changing room areas and other break-out rooms.

In addition, any commercial partner could expect significant coverage on the VE website and across VE's social media platforms. Sadly, the four-court structure means that live streaming the event (and securing extra branding profile opportunities this way) is not feasible.



Nevertheless, there are numerous other ways in which a partner's brand could be profiled in connection with the IRC, including:

- Competition naming rights and prize-giving;
- Extensive co-branded content (print and video), focusing on the benefits of both junior volleyball and our partner's products and services, published on the VE website throughout the year;
- Branded product give-aways at the competition - e.g. warm-up T-shirts for all players to wear throughout the competition or free samples to be distributed to spectators;
- Opportunities for on-site merchandise sales or service promotions;
- Engagement with regional training sessions throughout the season, subject to agreement with the relevant regional associations.
- Senior VE personnel (coaches, executives, England players etc) being made available for joint publicity opportunities at our partner's request.



This is by no means an exhaustive list; merely an indication of the kind of collaborative activity which VE would happily consider undertaking. We are keen that the event (and, by extension, the entire regional junior development programme) stays in the consciousness of our core volleyball market for the whole year, not just a few days at the end of May.

### **Who might this appeal to?**

Traditionally, the appeal of such an event would be felt most keenly among manufacturers and retailers of sports clothing and equipment. However, with the recent explosion of sports-related academic qualifications, the IRC could also be a handy shop window for academic institutions keen to showcase their range of higher and further education options.

With hundreds of young athletes taking part in what can be a gruelling weekend schedule, there are obvious synergies with this event for healthy eating, lifestyle brands and healthcare providers – as well as leisure centres and personal fitness brands.

As with all sports, technology plays an increasingly important role in volleyball, potentially making the IRC attractive to wearable technology brands and software suppliers. The large number of family members in attendance may also appeal to local tourist authorities and accommodation providers. And while there may be fewer coaches than spectators and players, they too represent a handily captive audience at the IRC for organisations involved with coach development, mentoring and other support services.

Finally, the IRC may also prove attractive to any corporate organisation wanting to promote activity and/or diversity as part of its corporate responsibility programme. While a minority sport in England, volleyball is nevertheless the second most commonly played team sport in the world. Its popularity elsewhere in Europe means that the English game currently features an incredibly rich, ethnically diverse player base. Volleyball isn't just diverse though; it's also inclusive – with sitting volleyball providing an incredibly rare opportunity for able-bodied and disabled athletes to play alongside each other in mixed gender competition.

### **What else do I need to be aware of?**

Even at a time when changes are being made to our competitive calendar, VE remains firmly committed to the IRC. It is arguably the single most important event in the junior calendar. Its importance to the regions, particularly those who do not have an established youth Academy in their area, cannot be under-estimated.

For the 2018 competition, the age groups are being changed slightly with the girls' competition being switched to U15 and U17. This brings it in line with the boys' competition and removes the problem of the older competitors being in an exam year.

### **What happens next?**

With no existing partnership programme in place for this event, we are open to any suggestions of commercial support, especially if that creates a template which can be repeated in future years. To start the discussion, do please get in touch with Stewart Dunne at Volleyball England on 01509 227724 or email [s.dunne@volleyballengland.org](mailto:s.dunne@volleyballengland.org)