

The winners of the 2021 YONEX Volunteer of the Year Awards were announced virtually during the Badminton England National Volunteer Conference on Saturday 11th September 2021. The 2021 awards were used to recognise volunteers' contributions and ongoing commitment to badminton, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. The awards were targeted towards those who used new and innovative methods to keep their clubs and players engaged in badminton during the lockdown periods.

Congratulations to all nominees and runners up, as well as the two winners, Badminton England are so proud of every single individual who makes badminton happen and our annual Volunteer of the Year Awards are intended to applaud those who have gone over and above in their voluntary role.

2021 Volunteer of the Year (sponsored by YONEX): Claire Lapworth

Alongside her job in a school for children with disabilities, Claire Lapworth single-handedly runs Ryton Junior Badminton Club out of Thorp Academy in Ryton, County Durham. She is the Club Secretary and Level 2 Head Coach, delivering the weekly coaching sessions. The club has grown significantly over the last two years and is thriving, with a current membership of over 20 junior members.

During lockdown, Claire did a great job of keeping the junior players at the club engaged through filming and sharing a variety of fun, online challenges on the club's Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages then also sharing videos from club members to recognise and showcase their badminton achievements at home.

Claire adapted her activities and sessions by providing a great example of how to run a 'virtual club' – it was so successful, that it was featured on Badminton England's Return to Play toolkit, providing other clubs and coaches with an example and demonstrating how badminton clubs could keep their players engaged when normal club and coaching sessions are unable to run.

Claire received a bundle of badminton equipment from Tyne & Wear Sport which she distributed in her local area, either by dropping it off at players' houses or arranging collection times from her garden, to encourage and enable juniors and their families to carry on playing whilst the club was unable to run. Claire also organised a competition for her club members where the player or family who took part in the most challenges and contributed to the club's social media could win a full beach badminton set.

In July 2020, Claire was nominated for, and received, the Tyne & Wear Sport #PassOnYourPassion Award for the great work she did during lockdown to keep the players at Ryton Junior Badminton Club engaged and active.

As the club's usual venue (Thorp Academy) was not accepting any external bookings when play was able to resume in 2020, Claire liaised with Tyneside Badminton Centre in Newcastle Upon Tyne and organised some 'return to badminton' sessions for her junior club members during the October school half term, enabling them to get back on court and socialise with their friends.

By sharing these challenges, sorting and distributing equipment and encouraging players and their families to get involved and stay active, Claire's work has enabled people of all ages in Ryton to continue playing badminton during the lockdown period.

The majority of players within the club have engaged with the lockdown activities (20+ club members) and a number of their family members have also taken part, some playing badminton in their gardens for the first time.

As well as providing new ideas to help families to stay active together, it has also created a great sense of community spirit across the town with challenges being shared by various players and parents on social media channels and widening the level of engagement.



2021 Geoff Rofe Young Volunteer of the Year (sponsored by YONEX): William Snell

From an early stage, William was keen to get involved in assisting at the North Wiltshire Badminton Project sessions for primary aged children and to learn more about grassroots coaching. He absorbed himself, not only by training hard, but by closely watching the professional coaches, asking tonnes of questions and shadowing the Head Coach with her work at the Foundation and Mini Futures sessions.

As the NWBP Foundation, Mini Futures and Junior Club sessions expanded into other towns, William was the first to offer his assistance and, by the end of 2019, he was assisting with the delivery of three one-hour weekly Foundation sessions and two 1.5 hour weekly Mini Futures sessions.

Throughout 2019, William gave his time voluntarily on Saturday mornings as well as Tuesday, Thursday and Friday evenings to shadow and assist the Level 2 coaches which is a regular voluntary nine hours a week on top of his own tri-weekly training and, during league season, also spending most Saturday afternoons representing the North Wiltshire Badminton Project in the local junior league and competing in Bronze junior circuit tournaments.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, William took a Racket Pack net and equipment home and continued to engage his younger siblings then, as soon as restrictions were relaxed, William was an inaugural member of the team of coaches and assistants who helped to entice and engage the younger members back with “Air Badminton”. Once indoor play was allowed again, William resumed his place shadowing coaches in most of the Foundation, Mini and Junior club sessions and he also volunteered on the first day of a two-day camp which ran during the 2020 October half term.

By volunteering so frequently at the North Wiltshire Badminton Project, William has been able to quickly pick up the core fundamental elements of playing badminton which has hastened his own education. He has also demonstrated a marked increase in confidence since helping at the Project and has met and made many friends.

In the future, William intends to complete his Foundation Award and Level 2 coaching qualification to allow him to improve further and develop as a qualified coach.



Melanie Vickery (North Wiltshire Badminton Project Head Coach): “As well as being an astute, helpful, passionate and reliable assistant with a quickly developing knowledge in both playing and coaching badminton, William is an extremely popular member of our voluntary junior coach force. He has an outgoing and friendly personality, is hugely passionate about his sport, knows how vital it is for the youngsters to pick up the basic, fundamental core elements of badminton related movement and technique correctly and safely but in a fun way and has an amazingly patient, encouraging, caring and supportive manner for such a young man, clearly taking pleasure in working with the little ones and sharing their elation whenever they achieve results. Will is always a highly sought-after Junior team captain when the younger members undertake group challenges.”