



RESEARCH ON BADMINTON AT STREETGAMES / US GIRLS PROJECTS September 2012

AIM OF THE REPORT

The aim of this report is to gather information about badminton from a range of StreetGames and Us Girls projects throughout England in order to identify what is working well, identify key learning points and key challenges for projects. The findings in this report have been based on the responses from ten phone interviews - six Us Girls projects and four StreetGames projects.

The following areas of information were collected:

1. Why the projects decided to deliver badminton.
2. The advantages of badminton as a sport
3. The promotion of the sessions and engaging new young people
4. The venues for the sessions
5. The profile of the young people at the sessions
6. The best days and times for badminton sessions
7. The number of participants at the sessions and retention levels
8. The format and structure of the sessions
9. The profile, style and role of the coach
10. The competitive structure
11. Links with Badminton England
12. Future aspirations for the sessions

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The majority of the projects involved in this research found that badminton was one of the most popular sports for the older (16 years +) young people at their sessions. Badminton has a significant number of advantages as a sport for both the projects and the participants. One of badminton's greatest strengths is its flexibility which enables it to be used by the projects in a number of ways, such as part of a multi-sport session, a casual playing session or a structured coaching session. Projects also found that it is a sociable sport, helping to build and form friendships, an important component of attracting and retaining participants. This was reinforced by the nature of the sport that means that it is possible for players (both male and female) of all levels to play badminton at the same session and for beginners to improve quite quickly after several weeks of playing – important for keeping friends playing together at the same session. Badminton is also seen very positively by both young Asian and young Muslim people as there is a culture of playing badminton in their communities and sessions. This was seen by projects as an effective way of engaging young Muslim women in sport especially if it is held in a women only environment.

Projects were positive about the support from Badminton England and were keen to link more closely into the *No strings* initiative and to develop the *Cardio Badminton* pilot that had

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been run in the North East region. Projects were also keen that these initiatives should meet the needs of their participants such as the right times, low cost and no need for childcare.

It is clear that badminton is a potentially powerful sport for projects that are working with this older age group of young people. Projects should consider using badminton as a way of encouraging young people to their projects not just to play badminton but also to have a go at playing other sports. Badminton is likely to attract the young people who are not footballers or dancers including those who would consider themselves not to be sporty at all. If projects use badminton in the right way then success is likely to be guaranteed for both the project and the participants.

MAIN FINDINGS

- 1. WHY THE PROJECTS DECIDED TO DELIVER BADMINTON. *Badminton is popular with young people and a flexible sport for projects to deliver.*** Badminton was popular with their participants, especially the 'older' group of young people i.e. 16+ as it was an easy and fun sport for them to play. Some projects had set up regular badminton sessions as a result of such a popular response from taster events and multi-sport sessions.

"I hadn't planned it (badminton session), it had been in response to the women." Project manager, June 2012

Projects also found that badminton was a flexible sport to deliver – it could be delivered in 15 to 20 minute slots or up to one hour slots, it could be casual, drop-in or structured coaching courses.

- 2. THE ADVANTAGES OF BADMINTON AS A SPORT. *Badminton was seen positively by both projects and players.*** All the projects felt that it had so many advantages - both for them as a project and for their participants:

ADVANTAGES OF BADMINTON FOR PROJECTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Popular sport• Good for running mixed, male-only or female-only sessions.• Easy to build up session numbers as participants can bring friends with them• Good to integrate into multisport sessions/ taster days/ festivals as they can play it informally and have short or long sessions• Nature of the sport helps to build rapport between the group and increase their confidence• Can run sessions for fun/ coaching/serious competition• Can motivate players to go other fitness sessions run by the project as they can see the impact of their fitness on their playing ability at badminton sessions e.g. quicker at running around the court• Easy to introduce hidden coaching into the sessions• Good retention figures

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ADVANTAGES OF BADMINTON FOR PROJECTS

- Can involve everyone in the sessions
- Good for attracting Asian/ Muslim young people, especially young women
- Easy to play in non-sporting venues such as school halls/ community centres/ church halls
- “Easier to pick up and play than sports such as netball”
- Very flexible sport – can use it in different situations
- Good in a college situation as can be used as a social tool for mixing students
- Easy to sell to beginners as they don’t need technical skill’ to play badminton

Only two projects felt that badminton as a sport had any disadvantages. One project felt that badminton was seen as too ‘traditional’ by their target group of young women aged 16-24 years and that they would prefer street dance and cheerleading although the project confirmed that it would run badminton again if requested. One project also commented that badminton was not always challenging enough for sporty people but it can be assumed that the reason for this was that the session was mixed ability. Many projects reported that their coaches often divided their participants into different ability groups within the same session especially if there were beginners and more experienced players at a session or they targeted specific sessions at different ability groups, mainly beginner or intermediate sessions.

BENEFIT TO THE PARTICIPANT

- “It’s fun and they love playing badminton”
- Good for beginners, especially for non-sporty young people
- Easy to play
- Can be informal or formal
- Social sport – can chat whilst they play
- Can play at their own level – little or lots of effort
- Can see progress quite quickly and become more confident
- Good for playing with your friends or partner
- Don’t need to join a club – can play casually at a leisure centre/ no strings etc.
- “Young women can play it without getting hot and sweaty and spoiling their make-up” (quote from project working with students on college health and beauty courses)

3. THE PROMOTION OF THE SESSIONS AND ENGAGING NEW YOUNG PEOPLE. *The best forms of recruitment were word of mouth via friends or college tutors.* Projects had a variety of means to promote and engage new young people in badminton sessions. Projects found that badminton was one of the most popular sports at taster events and multisport sessions and they often set up new sessions in response to feedback from participants. Projects working with college students also found that the best way to promote sessions was through the form tutors and this was particularly successful if the tutors went along to the sessions with the students especially at lunchtime sessions. Badminton was very popular with female students on non-sport related college courses such as health and beauty. All the projects agreed that posters

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and leaflets were not very effective in attracting young people but that it was a combination of social media and word of mouth. Indeed, many of the projects said that existing participants had brought their friends and in some cases family members to the sessions and that this was the most effective form of recruitment which also contributed to good retention rates.

“Find the young person with a big network of friends, you need numbers, you need a core group and then it will build up and attract the rest.” Project manager, 2012

4. **THE VENUES FOR THE SESSIONS. *Badminton can be played in both sporting and non-sporting venues although local leisure centres are often the best venue for the ‘older’ young people.*** One of the advantages of running badminton sessions is that projects have the option of using a variety of facilities. However, the majority of projects that were running badminton for the ‘older’ (16 years +) young people were using leisure centre or college sports halls. These facilities were often located in the heart of their local community and were able to offer a fuller package to the participants especially female participants during the daytime. Some leisure centres offered the women reduced rates at the gym beforehand and often had a café where they would meet up after the session for a drink and a chat. For some projects, leisure centres or schools and colleges were able to provide a women-only setting which was essential for projects working with young Muslim women. However, one project working within a college setting had experienced significant difficulties finding the right venue as its campus was spread throughout the city and it was difficult to find a suitable sports hall near to the students they were targeting.
5. **THE PROFILE OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE AT THE SESSIONS. *Badminton successfully attracts many of the projects’ target groups.*** Badminton was effective at attracting a wide-range of young people aged 16 years + – both male and female - especially young Asian women and young Muslim women, NEETs, single unwaged mums and college students. It was very effective at attracting non-sporty young women even though many of them may have had poor/ low fitness levels and minimal playing skills.
6. **THE BEST DAYS AND TIMES FOR BADMINTON SESSIONS. *The best times depended on the target group but were mainly weekday during the daytime or after school/ work.*** Badminton sessions tended to be set up either during the daytime during the week or early evening during the week. The weekday morning sessions usually ran between 10am – 12pm to avoid the school run for young mums, lunchtime sessions for college students, between 5pm – 6pm for college students or 6pm - 8pm during the weekday for young people at work or at college. Some projects had found it difficult to attract students to sessions after college at 4pm or 5pm – they “forgot their kit, forgot about the session, couldn’t be bothered”. However, in some projects the 6pm - 8pm session often worked well for attracting young women who wanted to come along with their mums, sisters or friends who might be working.

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7. THE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS AT THE SESSIONS AND RETENTION LEVELS.

The number of participants grew at most projects as the weeks went by and they tended to stay at the session. Most projects reported that badminton sessions had between 12 to 20 participants with a core number of regular attendees. Most projects did state however that these sessions had started off with small numbers but had grown over the weeks as a result of word of mouth and participants bringing friends with them. Projects confirmed the importance of having a good coach for the sessions who was able to make it fun, pitch it at the right level and establish a rapport with everyone. The social aspect of the session was particularly strong as the nature of the sport and the format of the session lent itself to having a chat whilst you play, being able to play with your friends and also make new friends. Another factor for the good retention rates was that participants were able to improve their playing skills quite quickly which in turn increased both their confidence and sense of achievement and consequently contributed to their enjoyment of the sport. Some projects also used texting and social media, such as Facebook, to remind their participants to come along to the sessions and they had found that this was very effective.

Some projects had also been using badminton as a way to retain young women at their multi-sports sessions. They had found that badminton was one of the most popular sports to run as it helped to keep the young women coming back the following week. One project reported that badminton acted as a magnet to encourage the young women to play other sports that they didn't enjoy so much. However, one project had encountered difficulties as a result of the popularity of its badminton sessions when it changed to a different sport as this had caused many of the young women to stop coming to the session as they only wanted to play badminton. The project planned to offer badminton to its participants again.

However, all the projects running badminton sessions throughout the year had found that retention was very difficult during holiday times especially at Christmas time and during the summer holidays. This was particularly noticeable for women with children as a result of the school holidays and lack of childcare. Projects said that at some sessions they had to start all over again.

8. THE FORMAT AND STRUCTURE OF THE SESSIONS. **Badminton sessions were run very flexibly.**

Badminton sessions usually lasted an hour and the price ranged from free of charge to £1 and at one project it cost £2 for a 2-hour session including access to a gym for the first hour. Badminton specific sessions were either on-going drop-in sessions or courses lasting a set number of weeks. The format of the sessions varied but typically included a warm-up, some skills (informal coaching) and playing games. The emphasis was on fun and playing at their own level and pace. At some sessions, the coach divided the players into playing ability especially if there was a mix of beginners and intermediate players. Sessions were often very informal with some 1-2-1 coaching or structured group coaching at the beginning and then the players would be left to get on with their games. One project ran a very structured coaching session as the young

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people had been entered as a team into the London Youth Games. The young people had enjoyed the formal coaching as they could see their own progression, they had a goal and it also encouraged the older young people to become qualified badminton coaches.

Some projects integrated badminton into their multisport sessions as they found that it was both popular and flexible. One project provided a 20-minute badminton slot during their weekly multi sports session - it was a fun activity that they could play with their friends at their own pace and gradually see their playing ability improve. Another project provided badminton as an on-going option during their multi-sports session so that women could dip in and out of it as they pleased, play by themselves or ask for some coaching from the qualified coach. This also supported the format of their 2-hour multisport session as it meant that there was always an activity for women to play if they arrived late or didn't like one of the other sports on offer.

One project had been working closely with Badminton England to run pilot sessions for *Cardio badminton*. The aim of the session was to improve fitness using badminton in a fun and accessible way. The session was delivered to an existing group of women and it included both cardio badminton and some badminton coaching skills. The session was delivered by an existing coach and the feedback from the participants was that it was 'brilliant' and lots of fun although the project coordinator felt that next time it might be better to run cardio badminton separately to a badminton coaching session.

- 9. THE PROFILE, STYLE AND ROLE OF THE COACH. *Coaches needed to be passionate about badminton and able to establish a good rapport with the young people.*** One project described their coach as having "great rapport with the young people, chats to them, is interested in them, very good". The projects all agreed that the coaches needed to be able to adapt the sessions to all abilities, to make it fun and to get everyone involved. It was clear that the coach needed to play different roles at different stages of the session – able to run a session flexibly - giving structure if wanted or making it informal and casual, working in a group situation or supporting on a 1-2-1 basis. At two projects, the coaches did give the young people information about local badminton clubs but in most cases the participants wanted a more casual, informal exit route.

Most projects used badminton coaches who they had worked with in the past or who were recommended to them – one project had recruited a coach from the Badminton England website. All the projects felt that the style of the coaches suited their projects and indeed, some projects had been keen to develop more qualified badminton coaches to support their sessions. One project had sent their own staff and volunteers on the coaching qualification course in the past but they had found it difficult to pass the award. Projects that had sent their volunteers on these courses more recently had not experienced this problem and indeed, a number of projects confirmed that they wanted

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to send a number of their staff and volunteers on the badminton leaders or coach award course in the future.

10. THE COMPETITIVE STRUCTURE. *Projects offered informal, fun competition opportunities.* Project views about levels of competition were mixed. Some projects felt that their young people only wanted to play badminton for fun whereas some projects felt that some of their young people liked a level of competition. The level of competition in the majority of projects was very low and informal – friendly and informal with no mention of badminton ladders/ round robins etc. The main form of competition was one-off badminton tournaments. Projects reported that these had been very successful and had been a focus for their badminton sessions. One project had combined their first badminton tournament with the StreetGames neighbourhood festival programme and had benefited from some extra funding and goodies which the women had loved.

“They loved it, liked the competition. The final was quite tense, good for that group”, quote from project manager, June 2012.

The project had held other tournaments since then and were looking forward to their next tournament on 30th August 2012 when there would be a raffle for three tickets to the Paralympics (part of StreetGames [Give and Go](#) programme).

11. THE ROLE OF BADMINTON ENGLAND. Some projects had worked closely with Badminton England and some projects had had little/ no contact. The projects that had worked closely with Badminton England had benefited from the partnership working. One project had worked closely with the Regional Development Officer to pilot *Cardio badminton* at one of the sessions and was using the learning from this pilot to develop this new approach. Other projects had used the Badminton England website to find qualified coaches and one project had used their resources (pop-up target for shuttlecocks) to support their International Women’s Day sports event where badminton had been the most popular sport. The four StreetGames projects involved in the badminton pilots had benefited from additional support from Badminton England such as coaches, facilities and equipment.

Projects did identify the support that they would like from Badminton England in the future. This included help in promoting badminton to their target group of young people, funding to increase the number of sessions and access to the *No strings* initiative. The majority of projects were aware of the *No strings* initiative and were keen to use it as a form of exit route for their young people. One project was keen for the *No strings* session to be set up so that the participants didn’t have to worry about childcare as many of the *No strings* sessions were after school and in the evenings with few opportunities for their young children to also be involved in activities at the same time.

12. FUTURE ASPIRATIONS FOR THE SESSIONS. The majority of projects planned to improve or develop their badminton sessions in a number of ways. This ranged from having a stronger focus on fun at the sessions to having more structured coaching within

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the session to developing exit routes. A number of projects confirmed that they wanted to link their badminton sessions to the *No strings* initiative at their local leisure centre and that they also wanted to support their players to play badminton at their leisure centre on a casual basis. Some projects needed to ensure that there would be a women-only environment for some sessions and many were keen to negotiate a discount for their players. One project was planning to try some new approaches to solve the summer holiday retention issue – running *Back to Netball* sessions outdoors during the holidays to keep them involved and also organising regular family holiday sports sessions on the local park so that their regular badminton players could come along and get involved in activities with their children during the summer. The cardio badminton session proved to be very popular at the pilot project and when mentioned to another project they were keen to use it especially as a way to engage young women after the summer holidays.

It was however, noticeable that none of the projects had any aspirations to set up a formal badminton club or to develop formal links with a local badminton club. The *No strings/casual* badminton approach was seen as being the best exit route for their young people. It could be argued that projects did not see the social, fun nature of badminton being played at their sessions as being compatible with a traditional club setting although this is an area which Badminton England may wish to explore further in the future.

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