

# Scottish Hockey look to competitive gaming to boost numbers

Barry Cawte used to be involved in running an indoor tennis centre which was struggling. Across the road was a gaming outlet and there were queues to get in.

The penny dropped and enterprising Cawte encouraged the owner to host a gaming event at the tennis centre. It was successful as some of the young people picked up a racket.

Around 12 years later, one of the participants on that memorable day received a wild card for a competition at Wimbledon and that, he claims, is the catalyst for a new Scottish Hockey project with Esports Scotland, an event company dedicated to creating a competitive gaming experience for all.

Cawte is now chief executive officer for Scottish Hockey who are tapping into the booming competitive gaming experience market to encourage more youngsters into the sport and boost their membership which currently stands at around 14,500.

They hosted a test event which saw young people from non-traditional hockey backgrounds in Wishaw, Lanarkshire, take part in games of hockey and playing video games at Glasgow's National Hockey Centre.

Next year, Scottish Hockey aim deliver similar experiences and the organisation plans to create a £20,000 multi-role Esports hub to boost their profile and that of their base at Glasgow's National Hockey Centre.

The organisation claim statistics indicate 91 per cent of UK under-15-year-olds and 60 per cent of British adults play some form of video game regularly.

Cawte said: "We are trying to do something innovative to reach a more diverse audience for the sport and I'm delighted with the success of the test event and to see so many youngsters enjoying hockey alongside gaming shows we have a model."

He added: "The ambition is to get more people playing our sport and I see the massive potential for us to use it as a Trojan Horse, if you will, to bring people, who would normally not play hockey, to our beautiful venue here at Glasgow's National Hockey Centre.

"Seeing the reaction of the children when they walked up the stairs and saw the stadium, they were blown away by it, and that is the reaction I want, I want them to come here and go: 'Wow, I did not know this existed, hockey was not on my radar'.

"Knowing that it was gaming that brought them here, that is the opportunity for us to say if we can bring these kids here we can bring far more as we know that 91 per cent of children are gaming regularly."

The youngsters also played games of hockey on the pitch used for international competitions and Cawte added: "I have just come in from outside, smiles on their faces, enjoying themselves running around, getting involved and picking up hockey sticks."

PICTURE: Barry Cawte joins in the competitive gaming experience at Glasgow's National Hockey Centre. Picture by

***Nigel Duncan***