

WATER POLO: Talented teenager's international dreams could be dashed by budget cuts

Morgan fears as funding dries up

By Lisa Smith

A BIRMINGHAM youngster has been making such big waves in his beloved sport of water polo that he was selected to represent Great Britain.

But Morgan Hirsch, 16, from Moseley, and his team-mates have been left to flounder as far as funding goes because the budget available to send young British players to compete in major events has all but dried up.

Hirsch, who competes for Boldmere Water Polo Club in Sutton Coldfield, was thrilled to be selected to join the Great Britain side which went out to Turkey recently to compete in a European tournament in Istanbul.

For many of the youngsters it was their first taste of travelling abroad for a competition against some of the best water polo players in the world.

But GB head coach Phil Powell, from Solihull, admits opportunities like that may be limited in the future as the sport is receiving no more funding.

Powell said: "Morgan was the captain in Istanbul and the team did incredibly well considering it was their first ever taste of European competition.

"They beat Ukraine and just lost

out to Turkey by a couple of goals. It was a great experience for them and, while the Olympics 2012 is perhaps just a little too soon for these 15 and 16-year-olds, the experience will have done them no harm."

Powell explained that the future of the sport was in jeopardy through lack of funding, with players having to pay for their own kit, training and future flights to competitions.

"We had funding from British Swimming for the trip to Turkey but that has stopped now and, while the lads have the chance to go to Romania in February, that may not be possible unless we can get some money from somewhere soon," he said.

Water polo has grown as a sport in recent years. Teams are made up of seven players – six outfield – and six substitutes and the only criteria people need to get involved is to be tall and a good swimmer.

Powell added: "We also have a couple of other Midlanders in the GB team – Warley members Graham Harrington and Roger Kennedy – as this area is a hotbed for competitors.

"Unfortunately, water polo does not attract the publicity of other sports but we are hopeful that the success the team is now having will change things when it comes to funding in the future."



Thrilled: Moseley's Morgan Hirsch is making a big impression in water polo.

Picture: Steve Harlow