

OPENING WEEKEND PROGRAMME

DYNAMIK

MEN'S
SUPER
LEAGUE



18TH OCTOBER 2025
SIR DAVID WALLACE LOUGHBOROUGH



WELCOME TO OPENING WEEKEND

For those volleyball aficionados among us, Super League Opening Weekend is akin to being a child on Christmas morning.

After weeks of anticipation – the summer transfers, the training sessions, the team discussions, the social media posts and so much more – the wait is finally over.

Under one roof, we will finally get to see where all 16 teams are at for the 2025-26 campaign, after those extensive preparations, in what is always a feast of exciting volleyball across the weekend.

In some respects, the format of the weekend will be very similar to what has unfolded since it was introduced ahead of the 2023-24 season, with the men's matches being played on Saturday, followed by the women's on Sunday.

In others, however, the event continues to evolve and, we hope, making it more enjoyable for not just those participating, but also those watching in the stands and also from the comfort of their armchairs at home.

The single, biggest change for 2025 is the venue. After 16 years at the National Volleyball Centre in Kettering, Loughborough University is now our new home for our major indoor events.

The first event to take place on university grounds since the partnership was finalised was the U18 Super Series earlier this month. The top-class facilities the site boasts were well received by players, coaches, officials and supporters alike – and we'd like to thank the Loughborough staff for making us feel so welcome, so quickly.

The other major change is from 10 to eight teams each day as a result of the reduction in the number of Super League teams for 25-26. From an OW point of view, this allows a greater focus to be placed on each of the weekend's eight matches.

Those watching from home will also see some major changes in the way matches are live streamed... keep your eyes peeled on the Volleyball England YouTube Channel.

In person, there will be the chance to buy some Super League merch from our pop-up VolleyStore, partners MAAREE, kitround and Shoorah will be present and there will be the chance to have a go at sitting volleyball in our sitting showcase.

Finally, we'd like to send our heartfelt thanks to DYNAMIK (men) and MAAREE (women) for the continued backing of the Super League format, as well as our other partners, who embrace where we are trying to go in terms of professionalising the top-flight league.

Have a great time watching Opening Weekend.

Charlie Ford

Charlie Ford, Volleyball England's Chief Executive Officer



ENJOY THE GAME RESPECT THE GAME

We want everyone to have a great time, but
please remember to support
positively and behave respectfully.
Let's all uphold the values of the
Volleyball England Code of Conduct





DYNAMIK
**MEN'S
SUPER
LEAGUE**



OPENING WEEKEND

FIXTURES



SATURDAY 18TH OCTOBER

LEEDS GORSE		11:30		ESSEX REBELS
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MALORY EAGLES		13:30		NEWCASTLE KNIGHTS
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LONDON GIANTS		15:30		UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM
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DURHAM PALATINATES		17:30		RICHMOND DOCKLANDS
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OFFICIALS

GAME 1



KATARINA CEPINOVA

FIRST REFEREE

IGNACIO DIEZ

SECOND REFEREE

GAME 2



WILLIAM PERUGINI

FIRST REFEREE

PETER PARSONS

SECOND REFEREE

GAME 3



JOSEPH GORE

FIRST REFEREE

SARAH HANRAHAN

SECOND REFEREE

GAME 4



DOMINIK BIEGAJLO

FIRST REFEREE

GIANNI SUTTON

SECOND REFEREE



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SUPER
LEAGUE**



ESSEX REBELS

HEAD COACH: Alex Chinery
STATISTICIAN: Josh Holdsworth

- 1 **Nathan Hall**
Setter
- 5 **Oscar Curzon-hall**
Outside
- 6 **Jacob Lloyd-Williams**
Middle
- 9 **Sam Sherwin**
Middle
- 11 **Hassan Farhat**
Outside
- 10 **Asher Miller**
Opposite
- 12 **Simeon Taylor**
Middle
- 15 **Jacob Kern**
Universal
- 17 **Thomas Shatimehin**
Outside
- 27 **Raphael Viens**
Middle
- 33 **Davin Altheide**
Opposite
- 49 **Euan Fraser**
Captain
- 3 **Benjamin Butler**
Libero
- 7 **Harry Aplin**
Libero

LEEDS GORSE

HEAD COACH: Pete Makowski
ASSISTANT COACH: Dave Speers
ASSISTANT COACH: Elaine Brown
STATISTICIAN: Scott Cosgrove
BENCH PERSONNEL: Joseph Menzies-White

- 1 **Emmanuel Oretoye**
Outside
- 5 **Zak Gasson-Hudson**
Setter
- 6 **Miguel Dayco**
Setter
- 9 **Finn Chalkley Beales**
Middle
- 11 **Ben Sorley**
Opposite
- 10 **Josh Cosgrove**
Setter
- 12 **Michael Lee**
Libero
- 15 **Nelson Murangwa**
Opposite
- 17 **George Wainwright**
Middle
- 27 **Simon Lawrence**
Middle
- 33 **Maksymilian Makowski**
Libero
- 49 **Hayden Lawson**
Outside
- 3 **Powell Osayawah**
Universal
- 7 **Mykyta Zadubniak**
Outside

ESSEX REBELS

It was oh-so nearly the perfect season for the Rebels in what proved to be Alex Porter's last at the helm before he called time on his stint of more than a decade as Head Coach.

The team won the BUCS title, reverse swept Malory Eagles to win the National Cup and topped the regular season DYNAMIK Super League table.

The only thing that was missing was the overall top flight title at Final 4 as they were beaten in a five-set thriller by London Giants at Crystal Palace.

Since Porter's post-season decision to step down, Essex have moved quickly to secure the services of Daryl Tay, who is Singaporean by birth but has spent much of the last decade working with the Finnish national teams at various age groups.

His start in his role at the Rebels has been delayed by visa delays, but women's Head Coach Alex Chinery has been filling the gap until Tay's arrival, which is expected to be ahead of Opening Weekend getting underway.

Tay will have to operate without some of the team's key performers from last season, such as setter Cameron Kern, imposing Middle Daven Pascal and Libero Leftéris Ioánnou, but other key players have returned, including Jacob Kern, Euan Fraser and Thomas Shatimehin.

There have also been significant new recruits in the shape of left-handed US Opposite Davin Altheide and Canadian middle Raphael Viens, who boasts professional experience.

"Motivating athletes is not something we have to do a lot of," said Chinery. "The players all want to come in and work hard and this team will reset and go again because there is some fire there."

"There's lots of positives in terms of who we have been able to bring in and bring back as well. Under Daryl, people can expect to see the team to play super-fast, rather than a bit of a high ball team as we were last year, and there are the players on the Outside to do it."

KEY PLAYER Jacob Kern

One of the players of the season last year and instimental in Essex's National Cup and BUCS championship titles.

The Canadian will be without his brother Cam this year, but will still be an extremely valuable offensive player.

Alongside his playing duties, he will be undertaking work experience as part of his physio studies.

ONE TO WATCH Oscar Curzon-Hall

At 6ft 11ins, the English Outside is tipped for more court time this season and has the game, Essex believe, to deliver the goods when called upon.

After developing last year with the Essex Univeristy BUCS team - who claimed gold in the final against UEL - Curzon-Hall will look to grow into an ever-competitive team having been a regular part of the England Talent Pathway.



V



With their Women's side facing Leeds in the National Cup and Super League last year, Essex are well aware of the development and junior set-up Leeds Gorse have at their disposal for Super League fixtures.

They will also be aware of powerhouses such as Nelson Marangwa and Zak Gasson-Hudson, who will be looking to upset last year's regular season champions.

Essex, with a new coach and change in players meanwhile, will be an unknown for Leeds, who haven't faced them since 20th January 2024.

LEEDS GORSE

Leeds were relegated from the top flight at the end of the 2023-24 season after losing their crucial final game of the season to Newcastle Staffs, but their stay in NVL Division 1 lasted just 12 months.

They have returned to the DYNAMIK Super League on the back of an emphatic title win where they lost just two games in 20 and finished 10 points clear of their nearest rivals.

That said, Head Coach Peter Makowski is under no illusions just how difficult it will be to survive at this level, given the league has now gone down from 10 to eight teams.

He expects the team to play a fast tempo game and to take a risk on serve to put pressure on opposing teams.

Outside George Frazer has moved to Denmark to coach and playing for Odense Volleyball, Dan Thompson (Outside) is taking a break from volleyball and Nathan Hampshire (Setter) has switched to Newcastle Knights, where he will play and study.

But that has been balanced by a number of incomers including libero Michael Lee and Middle Fin Chalkley-Beales, both from Newcastle Staffs, and setter Miguel Dayco, who has returned from Stockport, having previously played for Leeds for many years.

Setter Jake Edwards has joined from TAV Houston Volleyball in the USA while he studies at York University, while England's Haydn Lawson has been in discussions over a move from Stockport.

"This season is going to be a great opportunity for us to test ourselves against the best players in the country and see how they cope," said Makowski.

"Our job will definitely be to secure Super League status for the following season. It's a great opportunity for our youth because players on the U18 roster will have to play games for us this season, and I think that will benefit England too."

KEY PLAYER Nelson Muranwga

The Rwandan Opposite was one of Super League's most consistent performers before Leeds' relegation and has stayed with the club for their return.

He is set to play a key role in establishing the team at this higher level, with both his power and leadership crucial this season, having previously played for eight different overseas teams.

ONE TO WATCH Maks Makowski

The talented teenage libero — son of Head Coach Pete Makowski — represented England in January's Five Nations and also played in the NEVZA Youth Beach Championships in Bridlington this summer.

He was also a key figure in Leeds' promotion back to the Super League and remains an essential player for the U18 Leeds Gorse team, who are now defending the National Cup they lifted in April.



After a season without meeting, Leeds face an unfamiliar Essex side, with several Rebels players having moved on since their last encounter.

When the teams last met in 2024, the Rebels secured a dominant 3-0 victory. It followed a December 2023 clash at the Ruth Gorse Academy where Leeds had taken a hard-fought point from the eventual bronze medalists in a thrilling 3-2 defeat.

The Gorse side will be looking to kick their season off with a strong performance against the silver medalists from 24-25.

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MALORY EAGLES

HEAD COACH: Jefferson Williams
ASSISTANT COACH: Carol Gordon
ASSISTANT COACH: Ian Legrand
BENCH PERSONNEL: Andrew Omoshebi
BENCH PERSONNEL: Patricia Co

- 2 Ching Hang Chong
Setter
- 4 Logan Clark
Middle
- 5 Benaya Kouame
Outside
- 6 Joel Martinez
Setter
- 7 Soner Yashar
Setter
- 8 Nathan Fullerton
Opposite
- 1 Tai Yat Chau
Outside
- 16 Olafs Matjusenoks
Middle
- 17 David Butler
Opposite
- 20 Jack Baley
Libero
- 19 Ryan Dickson
Outside
- 16 Samuel Oshita
Outside
- 18 Dylan Cohan
Middle
- 3 Filipi Rodrigues
Libero

NEWCASTLE KNIGHTS

HEAD COACH: Sam Shenton
ASSISTANT COACH: Daniel Livingstone

- 11 Kelechi Bell
Opposite
- 34 Kristo Bianchin Puente
Middle
- 19 Brian Cunningham-Tyre
Libero
- 27 Hayden Fear
Outside
- 17 Mattias Godron
Opposite
- 28 Angus Henricks
Libero
- 25 Cayde Keates
Middle
- 5 James Ledbury
Outside
- 1 Neil Rea
Setter
- 31 Seb Smith
Middle
- 23 Joshua Sturland
Outside
- 20 Cade Trujillo
Setter
- 8 Oliver Tuck
Captain
- 12 Isaac Gibbs
Middle

MALORY EAGLES

Finishing second in the 2025-26 regular season, the Eagles ended the campaign with a bronze medal from Final 4 after beating Newcastle Knights.

But still their wait for top division success goes on, having not won it since 2009-10, even though they have been an ever-present among the elite since then.

Long-serving Head Coach Jefferson Williams will hope this can finally be their year by blending some well-established Malory players with a healthy sprinkling of newcomers including four – Filipi Rodrigues, Ian Chau, Pearson Stiller and Olafs Matjusenoks – from relegated capital rivals IBB Polonia.

Other recruits have arrived from further afield, with Middle Daniel Farrell (USA), Outside-cum-Opposite Sam Oshita (USA/Japan) and Opposite David Butler (USA) all joining the roster.

They will join the likes of Logan Clark, Ben Kouame and Joel Martinez, who all made significant contributions to the Eagles success in Super League and in the National Cup, where they reached the final.

As Williams acknowledges, he has plenty of options to call upon, but knows the challenge will be to fuse those individuals into a coherent team.

“We don’t know what the other teams are going to be like until the games get underway and all we can do is integrate the new players with those we have from last season and get them to buy into our philosophy,” he said.

“I have no doubt that we will be stronger, but I think other teams will be stronger this year as well. I trust our system and I think on our day we can beat any other team in the league.”

KEY PLAYER Nathan Fullerton

The vastly experienced Opposite had the most kills, 286, out of any player in the DYNAMIK Men’s Super League last season and, coupled with 44 blocks, the England man was named Player of the Year.

A staple of the Malory side, the England man brings a wealth of knowledge, a heavy arm and a steely determination to win.

ONE TO WATCH Zach Omoshebi

Returning from enjoying professional stints at seven different clubs, most recently Union Raiffeisen Waldviertel in Austria, the Opposite adds extra firepower to an already potent attack.

Having last played for the Eagles back in 2016-17, he will be vying with fellow Brit Nathan Fullerton for the starting spot, giving Head Coach Jefferson Williams a wealth of attacking options.



V



Malory have won this match-up three times out of four in the last 12 months, with their only defeat to the Knights coming at the 2024 Opening Weekend, which saw the game finish 3-2 to the Knights.

In fact, the Eagles also lost at Opening Weekend in 2023-24, when going down to Stockport, so that is something they will be seeking to rectify this time.

With returners such as Nathan Fullerton, Benaya Kouame and Logan Clark, they’ll at least know somewhat to expect when facing the Newcastle side.

NEWCASTLE KNIGHTS

The Newcastle Knights Men delivered a statement season in 2024-25, reaching the Super League Final 4 and solidifying their place in the top flight.

It was a campaign of growth and resilience for the North East club. "Last year was transformational," said Head Coach Sam Shenton. "We had to rebuild habits and systems. The learning curve was steep, but the group bought in completely."

With last year's progress behind them, the Newcastle Knights Men enter 2025-26 focused on consistency and execution. Shenton's goal is simple: another top-four finish — and the chance to push even higher.

"The league's never been stronger," he said. "That's what we want. To compete at the highest level and keep raising our standard."

The squad features a deep, well-balanced mix of returning experience and high-level newcomers. Neil Rea returns, joined by the additions of Hayden Frear (Outside) and Angus Henricks (libero), whose athleticism and international experience promise to lift the team's ceiling.

Shenton is also excited about the continued development of powerful Opposite Kelechi Bell, whom he believes "is starting to reach a national-team standard and challenge for the starting opposite position in the senior squad."

Training intensity has been a focal point. "We replicate match emotion in practice," Shenton explained. "If things get heated, it happens there, not on matchday. The lads know their boundaries, and that edge is part of who we are."

This season's joint home weekends with the women's team will amplify the Knights' atmosphere one of the loudest and most daunting in the league. "Teams don't like coming up to Newcastle," Shenton said.

Armed with experience, energy, and ambition, the Knights aim to be more than competitive with their eyes set on a Final 4 finish again this year.

KEY PLAYER Kelechi Bell

Talented England Opposite Kelechi Bell will be looking to carry on from where he left off last season as one of the top attacking players in the Super League.

Athletic and powerful, former Manchester Marvels player Bell finished the regular season last year with 211 kills from 61 sets of volleyball, alongside 28 blocks, showcasing his skill and aggression on court.

ONE TO WATCH Hayden Frear

The American Outside is joining Knights this year after a year in Spain playing for Club Voleibol Almerndralejo Extremadura, while his season prior to that was with Mount Olive Trojans back in the States.

In his 2023-24 season, he racked up 255 kills across a 25-game campaign, so will be one to keep an eye on this year in the Knights' offence unit.



V



Last season's Opening Weekend clash between these two sides was dubbed the game of the weekend, going the full distance before Newcastle edged it in a thrilling fifth set. It was the first of four meetings between the teams, with Malory taking victory in the remaining three encounters.

Familiar rivals, with several England internationals on both sides, this match-up always delivers intensity and high-quality volleyball. Expect another fierce contest as Malory look to extend their winning streak over the Knights to four matches.

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VOLLEYBALL ENGLAND CLUB FINDER



LONDON GIANTS

HEAD COACH: Mihail Stoev

ASSISTANT COACH: Abdul Basith

BENCH PERSONNEL: Juan Esteban Uran Montoya

- 1 Daniil Pyvovarenko
Opposite
- 2 Vaidas Audickas
Middle
- 4 Diego Tamburini
Setter
- 5 Hamza Ouyachi
Middle
- 8 James Griffin Fieseler
Captain
- 9 Michael Hsu
Outside
- 10 George Ivanov
Libero
- 11 Khadeem McKoy
Middle
- 12 Andrea Maggio
Opposite
- 16 Alexander Sarandev
Middle
- 17 Jesús Roman Izaguirre Rodríguez
Libero
- 18 Youki Marr
Setter
- 19 Amadou Laye Samb
Libero
- 44 Dorian Poinc
Outside

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

HEAD COACH: Freddie Fairbairn

ASSISTANT COACH: Nima Emkani

BENCH PERSONNEL: Tate Sandvig

BENCH PERSONNEL: Henry Norris

- 5 Cole Turnbull
Setter
- 17 Connell Kane
Middle
- 3 Finley Bullivant
Middle
- 14 George Ruddick
Libero
- 10 Jacob Thomas
Outside
- 13 Joelson Santy
Opposite
- 30 Jack Kane
Outside
- 37 Joshua Chiziwa
Outside
- 11 Kanai Akana
Opposite
- 2 Lisle Costard
Middle
- 9 Oliver Quick
Libero
- 21 Oscar Smith
Outside
- 8 Rob Morgan
Outside
- 1 Szymon Dar
Setter

LONDON GIANTS

The reigning men's champions have signed a number of professional players from overseas to ensure they are competitive in their bid to retain their DYNAMIK Men's Super League title.

But Head Coach Mihail Stoev insists the club are also keen to continue their development programme from juniors right through to the Senior set-up – a 'project' which attracted him to the club in the first place.

Among those moving to South London are Ukrainian Opposite Daniil Pyvovarenko, Moroccan middle Hamza Ouyachi and Senegalese Outside Amadou Laybe Sam Samb - all measuring well in excess of two metres tall.

Giants have recruited a clutch of players from IBB Polonia following their relegation, including former captain Andre Maggio, who can play as a Setter, Outside or Opposite, as well as English players George Ivanov (libero) and Khadeem McKoy (middle).

Pole Dorain Poinc, who joined the club from Essex Blaze for last season's run-in, when the Giants went from relegation-threatened to a Final 4 chasing and securing team, also returns.

"I don't think people will give us special treatment because we won the Super League last year," said Stoev. "They know now how we go about our work and how seriously we are, but with the new format of the league and eight teams everyone will be fighting for every point regardless of who they are playing.

"At this level, everyone can play, everyone can hit and has other soft solutions in certain situations, so we are not preparing for one thing but a few options practising and making sure we can read teams and have all six people react and see the same things."

KEY PLAYER Vaidas Audickas

Another to have made the transition from IBB Polonia, the middle has plenty of Super League experience under his belt and brings energy and positivity that the Giants' management see as vital to the balance of the side.

Lithuanian Audickas has played with Head Coach Mihail Stoev at Polonia, so will know what to expect and can hit the ground running.

ONE TO WATCH Griffin Fieseler

The young US setter, standing two metres tall, joins from Hvidovre VK in Denmark and brings added physicality to the setting position. He will compete with experienced former Polonia player Diego Tamburini to start.

With Middle Noah Lassandro now departed, Giants will be looking to leverage a taller front row this season, aiming to turn their height advantage into a key asset on the court.



V



With significant changes to their squad over the summer, Giants' opening weekend fixture against the University of Nottingham will be a significant test for the defending champions - and a chance to see their new signings in action.

Boasting a blend of experience and knowledge from across Europe and the US, the Giants promise an exciting and dynamic style of play as they aim to defend their 2024-25 title.

With last year's fixtures split, it's a close game to call... and guarantees excitement.

UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM

UON made significant strides forward last season and seemed on the cusp of making Final 4 until they were hit by injury to key man Griffin Walters, whose all-round game had been highly influential throughout the Green and Golds' campaign.

In his absence, the team suffered back-to-back defeats to their rivals for fourth place, the Newcastle Knights – including one in a home Super League Live clash – which all-but put paid to those hopes.

But Head Coach Freddie Fairbairn hopes that shrewd recruitment will mean the loss of influential 2024-25 players will not hit hard.

With Outside Walters and England international Middle Sam Peters – who will play professionally abroad this season – now departed, new talent has been drafted in to supplement the likes of Ollie Quick, Rob Morgan Cole Turnbull and Joelson Santy, who got plenty of court time last season.

Among the new blood are twin brothers Connell (Middle) and Jack (Outside) Kane, who have been recruited from Menlo College in the USA to bring know-how and experience.

"On paper, I think this is one of the strongest squads from one to 14 and that means that makes for a good environment where every day is competitive," said Fairbairn.

"It's going to be fine margins all year. With now only eight teams, there are going to be no 'gimme' games. I think we will get better throughout the year and having less games will help us with reflection and preparation."

Their match with London Giants to kick-off the season at this Opening Weekend promises to be a cracker... and one not to miss.

KEY PLAYER Kana'i Akana

A double NCAA Division 1 winner and cousin of beach volleyball star Taylor Crabb, the big-serving Hawaiian Outside has been a signing that has been two years in the making by Head Coach Freddie Fairbairn, but is tipped to light up the league.

His background in beach will also make him a key player for the Green and Golds at BUCS Beach next June.

ONE TO WATCH Tate Sandvig

The Outside has fought his way through cancer treatment while still playing volleyball in the USA, with his Mount Olive teammates publicly thanking him for being an inspirational figure during that time.

Having moved to the UK to finish his studies, he has been working hard in pre-season to make sure he is ready contribute to the UON push for a top-four finish.



V



Narrowly missing out on the Final 4 last year, the University of Nottingham will be looking to kickstart their campaign with a similar scoreline to the one they inflicted on Giants when the Londoners visited the East Midlands in the early stages of last season.

The 3-1 victory was a key result for the Green and Golds, one they couldn't replicated against the reinforced Giants team when they travelled down to London.

With departures and impressive new signings for both teams, it's tough to call who'll come out on top.

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 **VOLLEYBALL
ENGLAND**

DURHAM PALATINATES

HEAD COACH: Ross Enfield

ASSISTANT COACH: Paul Welsh

- 2 Thomas Petersen
Libero
- 6 Max Horsley
Opposite
- 15 Dexter Thomas
Middle
- 7 Jack Baldwin
Setter
- 8 Joe Kobylarz
Setter
- 10 Benjamin Montplaisir
Outside
- 13 Luther McIlveen
Middle
- 1 Mathew Edwards
Middle
- 18 Joel Petry
Middle
- Sean McQuiggan
Middle
- 11 Tobias Starling
Outside
- 23 Ameya Sapatnekar
Outside, Opposite
- 4 Albert Biryukov-Wang
Libero
- 17 Zac Tzou
Outside

RICHMOND DOCKLANDS

HEAD COACH: Przemek Soczewka

ASSISTANT COACH: Ryan Murphy

ASSISTANT COACH: Vicente Brunetti

ASSISTANT COACH: Andy Hopper

- 2 Peason Stiller
Setter
- 3 Orson Purves
Outside
- 5 Adrian Machowicz
Setter
- 6 Zane Smith-Waul
Middle
- 7 Nico Gajkiewicz
Opposite
- 8 Leon Gouzinis
Middle
- 10 Chi Tak Cheung
Setter
- 11 Abdimalik Shukri
Outside
- 13 Dan Sampson
Setter
- 14 Ugnius Marganavicius
Outside
- 15 Artemii Solodukhov
Outside
- 16 Elias Watts
Middle
- 21 Ivo Dobra
Captain
- 20 Mihai-Razvan Turcu
Libero

DURHAM PALATINATES

Having completed a remarkable Super League and National Cup double in 2023–24, last season proved something of an annus horribilis for Durham, at least by their own high standards, and one they will be eager to forget.

A mid-table finish, where they rarely looked likely to break into the top four yet were never really in danger of relegation, was a fair reflection of their campaign.

Operating without a recognised Head Coach, with Max Gibbins stepping in as Player Coach for the last two seasons, a decisive move has since been made to address that. Ross Enfield has moved across from the women's team, where he was Assistant Coach, to bring his considerable experience to the role.

Enfield has wasted no time in launching an ambitious recruitment drive aimed at returning the Palatinates to the top end of the table.

Eight American scholars have been signed, six of them standing at 6ft 5in or taller, joining returning British players Joe Kobylarz, Jack Baldwin and Max Horsley, along with Albert Biryukov Wang, who arrives from Newcastle Staffs for his first year at the University.

Northern Ireland's Luther McKilveen and dual Luxembourg and British national Thomas Petersen are among those to complete the squad.

"The consistency of the team wasn't quite there last year," said Enfield. "They'd have really high peaks where they could dominate teams, but also spells where the guys just couldn't break out of those bad runs.

"It's very exciting for me to step up into this role after 10 to 12 years as an assistant coach. Paul Welsh will continue to assist me, and I'll also support him with the women's team.

"We're going to be a big blocking team, so for us, transition play will be key, as well as ensuring our defence is solid and that we can pass well."

KEY PLAYER Matt Edwards

Standing at 6ft 9in, the powerful middle blocker joins Durham from the NCAA championship-winning UCLA roster of 2023 and 2024.

A member of the 2023 USA Volleyball Beach Collegiate National Team, he brings proven pedigree and athleticism to the squad, adding strength and presence at the net in both attack and defence.

ONE TO WATCH Sean McQuiggan

After finishing runner-up in last year's NCAA finals with UCLA, Sean McQuiggan arrives with top-level experience and a point to prove. Having previously played alongside Matt Edwards, the pair will look to make an immediate impact.

At 6ft 11in, McQuiggan will be a dominant force at the net, bringing strength in both offence and defence for the Palatinates in Super League and BUCS action.



Durham kick off their new campaign against Richmond Docklands, who narrowly avoided relegation last season, surviving via the play-offs to preserve their Super League status. The Palatinates had the edge in both encounters last year, completing the double over the Londoners with a commanding 3–0 win on the road and a thrilling 3–2 triumph back home.

With both teams undergoing personnel changes over the summer, it's a tough one to call, and both will be desperate to start the season on the right foot after disappointing seasons last time out.

RICHMOND DOCKLANDS

The Londoners had to do it the hard way to preserve their DYNAMIK Super League status in April, surviving thanks to a 3-1 play-off win over NVL Division 1 runners-up Black Country.

With the league contracting from 10 to eight teams, staying in the top flight will only get tougher in 2025-26. But a new season nevertheless brings fresh optimism to the South West London club.

The first task over the summer was to find a successor to long-serving Head Coach Marcel Sivak, who stepped down after six successful years – a spell that included several top-four Super League finishes and a National Cup triumph.

His replacement comes from within the club. Peter Soczewka takes the reins after a successful period leading Richmond's junior setup and coaching England national players on the beach circuit.

Richmond have seen some key departures, with captain and experienced middle Vitor de Oliveira taking a break from the sport, and dynamic outside hitter João Alves also moving on.

However, the club have strengthened their roster with new signings and retained experienced libero Ivo Dobra and the versatile Abdi Shukri.

"It's never an easy time when you change over coaching duties, but hopefully it's going to go well," said Soczewka. "We factored in that transition by starting training earlier this summer.

"We want to integrate one or two of our younger players alongside our senior group because we believe the future of the club over the next five years lies in junior development."

Richmond's ambitions stretch beyond this season. The club is focused on building a deeper, stronger squad over the next three to five years, supported by the continued rise of their thriving junior programme, whose teams regularly make appearances at Volleyball England Cup Finals.

KEY PLAYER Artemiy Solodukhov

The powerful Russian hitter, who represented the University of Cambridge in last year's Student Cup, will be a key figure for Richmond when it comes to finishing points.

Having also featured in BUCS last season, Solodukhov is already familiar with playing at Loughborough University, with the sides having met during the regular campaign.

ONE TO WATCH Lewis Bunton

A talented beach volleyball player, Bunton has represented England at the CEV European Championships across two different age groups. He is part of the promising group of youngsters that Richmond are eager to develop.

A versatile athlete, Lewis excels both as an Outside and a Libero and aims to continue his growth on the court and on the beach during the summer.



Richmond will be looking to rewrite last season's story when they face Durham in the season opener. Last year, Durham claimed both encounters, 3-0 and 3-2, with the final match going all the way to a 15-6 deciding set. Despite those defeats, Richmond showed promise with wins over Nottingham and relegation rivals Essex Blaze, plus took valuable points from Essex Rebels, late in the season.

Bolstered by new arrivals, Richmond are determined to make a strong statement and finally get the better of Durham in what promises to be a fiercely-contested opener.



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