

# no longer loopy for snooker

By RAY YEOMANS

## WHERE have all the young snooker players in Nottinghamshire gone?

The county once boasted top juniors like Anthony Hamilton, Mansfield's Jason Ferguson and Richard Wheelhouse, Gary Wilkinson, Paul Gibson, David Singh, Steve Judd, Lee Spick and Anne-Marie Farren – who all went on to join the pro ranks.

But there have only been eight entries for the Notts Junior Championships at Beeston tomorrow – and six of them are from Newark Cue Club.

Ferguson, who rose through the ranks to become the sport's top administrator, could not believe how bad the situation has become in Notts.

"Only eight entries, you must be joking," exclaimed Ferguson, a former chairman of the WPBSA.

"I cannot believe what you are telling me. It's unbelievable. What's gone wrong?"

"I've been asking the same question for quite a while now," said Notts official Steve Butler.

"That's why we're doing as much as we can to promote the game with monthly tournaments, more teams in the leagues and more publicity. Things are improving. We have attracted a couple of new young lads this season – Jordan Parnham and Sean Croft.

"These lads now play for City Hospital Leisure Centre in the Nazareth House League and they are very keen.

"Stadium Leisure are also planning to have a second team next season, which will hopefully include a young lad called Sean Hopkin, who looks promising."

In the long term, there are plans for more junior competitions, incentives for teams who include U-18s and maybe even a junior academy.

"In general, things have improved greatly over the last couple of years," added Butler.

"The People's Hall were a welcome addition to the NHS last season and Beeston Snooker Hall have joined us this season.



**CREAM OF THE CROP:** Anthony Hamilton in 1991 (above). Left: Anne-Marie Farren at 14. Bottom left: Jason Ferguson

by organising lessons with professional coach Barry Stark.

"I wrote to five or six schools in Beeston, but I never even had a reply," he said.

Stark, who coaches at the Academy in Sheffield, says the advent of pool and apathy is to blame.

"The trouble is that the Pro-Am scene is dead. There are no sponsors," he said.

"And youngsters would rather play pool because it is easier; the pockets are so big.

"The media could do more. The qualifiers for the world championships are on in Sheffield at the moment and there has hardly been a line in the papers.

"And clubs have got to get off their backside and encourage kids to play."

Pegasus pro Michael Holt, who followed Hamilton through the junior ranks in Notts, is at a loss to explain the current dearth of talent in the county.

"These things go in cycles, but I don't know the answer, to be honest," he said.

"There are plenty of kids playing but they are not doing it seriously.

"A few get the bug again when the World Championships is on the telly.

"Maybe when I win the world title it will inspire a few to pick up a cue," he joked.

"Pegasus, Beeston and Stadium are all hopeful of introducing second teams next season which will hopefully give us enough teams to make three divisions."

Beeston Snooker Hall's Dave Gibson – whose son Paul was a professional – paints a black picture of the future.

"The game has had it," he declared.

"I think our place is the only true snooker hall left in the area.

"We do get a few youngsters in here playing, but the game is not as popular as it was.

"Not so long ago we had a big Institutes section, Nazareth House and SuperLeague, as well as local leagues like the Long Eaton and Stapleford."

Gibson tried to spark some interest